

# THE IRIS

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS  
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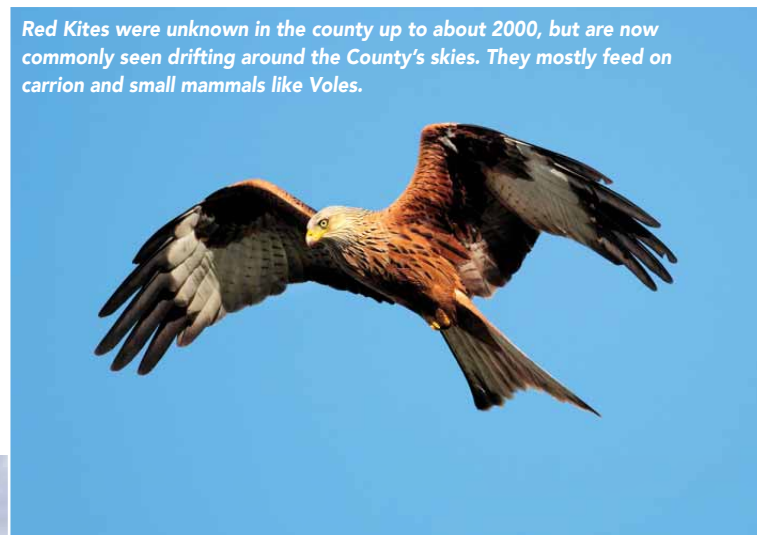
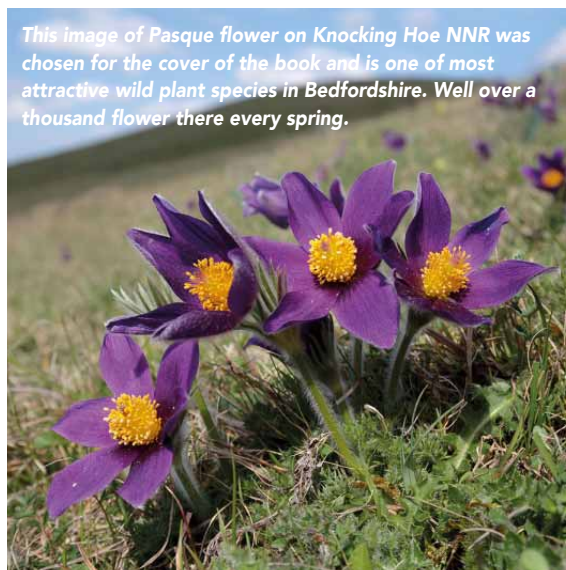


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THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY







## Bedfordshire – our Changing Habitats and Wildlife

### by Richard Revels FRPS

(See article on page 40)





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- Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send hand written copy.
- Digitally captured photographic images to support your article (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied as 8bit jpg files, 216mm (2555 pixels) on the longest edge, at 300 pixels per inch, quality 12, file size approx 5 MB. Please send images via WeTransfer.
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## Nature Group Exhibitions

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme. Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above.

# Editorial

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Welcome to the first new A4 sized edition of The Iris. In September, our Editor, Gerald Griffin ARPS, found it necessary to step down and consequently we have made some changes.

NG eNews will no longer be produced and I have stepped back into my previous role - for those of you new to the Nature Group, I was the Editor of The Iris from 2003 to 2018. The Iris has experienced many changes in its history but this is probably one of the more major ones. The change to an A4 format will allow images to be reproduced larger.

This issue contains recent successful Associate & Fellowship Distinction Panels. I do hope you will enjoy both the images and the stories behind the success. This issue also contains articles from John Bebbington FRPS and Richard Revels FRPS, both of them past Chairs of the Nature Group.

## The Iris - articles required

Please support your group magazine, The Iris. Articles (copy and images) and other items of interest are needed for the Spring issue. Articles can be accounts of trips you have made for wildlife photography in the UK or further afield, reports of wildlife in your locality, image processing, reviews of books with wildlife and/or photographic interest, reviews of new photographic kit, indeed anything of interest to a nature photographer. Please contact me as soon as possible if you have an idea for an article. Ideally I would like to receive text and images by 8th December 2021 but if you need more time please let me know before that date. Please note, images for the new A4 format of The Iris will be required larger. Please read Publication requirements on page 1.

If you have sent an article to our previous Editor and have yet to receive a reply or see your work in The Iris, please contact me at - natureeditor@rps.org

I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a New Year filled with your favourite nature subjects.



Dawn Osborn FRPS

# From the Chair

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## Tony Wharton and Barbara Lawton

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Tony Wharton and Barbara Lawton, both of whom were past Chairs of the Nature Group. The announcements and tributes for each of them were included in recent newsletters and I sincerely hope that they were seen as a fitting tribute to those who knew them.

## Nature Group Exhibition

I am pleased that the Annual Nature Group exhibition will be returning to its normal format with both Print and Digital entries accepted next year.

The 2022 Exhibition will be travelling to Edinburgh and our exhibition secretary Ralph Snook plans to add at least one more venue as we return to normal.

## Distinctions

I would like to congratulate the following Nature Group members for their achievement at the September Natural History Distinctions Assessments, all of which are included in this edition of The Iris

**ARPS:** Alison Mees, Kirsten Asmussen, Nick Bowman and Stephen Rodger

**FRPS:** Richard Kay and Victor Wong

The chair of the Nature Group Distinctions Panel, Mick Durham has recently given a new presentation on gaining a distinction which includes new examples and updated information. He explains the criteria needed for each distinction type and uses a series of examples of individual images and panels to illustrate the quality and presentation standards needed to gain that distinction. The presentation is available from the Nature Group - Event Recordings page of the RPS Website.

## Field Trips and Residentials

Ann Miles has organised an impressive number of zoom events and field trips this year, both of which have been well attended by members.

Residential Weekends have been difficult to organise because of the fluctuating situation with the Covid pandemic, but I am pleased to confirm that we recently held an Autumn Residential at Foxlease in the New Forest. This was attended by 16 members, including event organiser James Foad. I have been advised that it was a successful Weekend which, despite the changeable weather, provided enjoyable photographic opportunities for those who attended.

## The Iris

Our current editor of The Iris, Gerald Griffin, has regrettably decided to step down. On behalf of the Committee and Nature Group members, I would like to thank Gerald for the four years of service he has given to editing The Iris. I would also like to thank Dawn Osborn FRPS for offering to take over at short notice.

As a committee we have recently been discussing the roles of both The Iris and the eNewsletter and have taken this opportunity to make some changes in this area, which are summarised below.

We recognise that The Iris is a document of historical significance for the Nature Group that can be used to gain an insight into the Group's activities and developments in nature photography, going back to the first meeting in 1976. To achieve this, The Iris needs to reflect a cross section of the Group's activities, including

- AGM Minutes and Reports,
- Distinctions,
- Annual Exhibitions
- Articles from members
- Field trips and Residential Meeting reports.

With regards to eNews, there has been an overlap of some of the content with The Iris and this has led to the suggestion that they are competing with each other.

We have also had requests from members to consider upgrading The Iris to an A4 format and we have favourably reviewed magazines from the Landscape, Travel and Digital Groups, along with the associated costs. Our own eNews was already in A4 format and appears to have been highly regarded by members, so we have decided to combine the two into a single A4 publication.

Whilst we recognise that not everyone will be in favour of a change that increases our carbon footprint, many conservation charities, such as the RSPB also print larger format magazines. The larger size makes it more flexible for organising the content and layout of articles. It also allows more space for members images to be shown in what is fundamentally a photographic magazine. Following a request at this years AGM, we have already put a system in place for anyone who prefers to receive electronic copies instead of a printed magazine.



David O'Neill LRPS

# The Challenge of a 'Single Species' Fellowship Panel.

by Richard Kay FRPS

In May 2018 I successfully gained my ARPS in the Natural History genre. Working towards the RPS Distinctions had provided me with a means of obtaining an assessment, by very experienced photographers, of my progress in developing wildlife photography skills. Thus, for me, it was logical to work towards the next level of distinction, the FRPS. What though would be the subject?

In early November 2017, I had been on a tour to Churchill, Canada, to photograph Polar Bears. On the last afternoon of the tour, we decided to use some time photographing a white Arctic Fox on the ice that had begun to form on Hudson Bay. Whilst photographing this arctic fox I saw, in the distance, a small dark animal running across the ice. Our guide told us that this was a very rare Blue Morph Arctic Fox.

On returning home I looked for information on this morph of Arctic Fox. I found just one book on the Arctic Fox, published in 2008, but all the images were of the white morph. No reference was made to there even being a Blue Morph. However, at the end of 2017, I saw, in a photography magazine, a review of a recently published book on Arctic Foxes in Iceland. This was written by a French professional photographer, Philippe Garcia. Most of the images in his book were of the Blue Morph Arctic Fox. I read that on the coast of Iceland nearly 80% of the Arctic Foxes are Blue Morphs, adapted to their environment. The use of the term 'blue' can be misleading as these Arctic Foxes can have dark blue, brown or grey fur coats throughout the year. Arctic Foxes are still hunted in Iceland. However, following the Iceland Government's ratification of the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, legislation was passed in 1994 giving protection to the Arctic Foxes in the Hornstrandir Nature Reserve in North-West Iceland. This is an area of about 220 square miles, where nowadays nobody lives year-round, accessibility and the very harsh winter conditions being major contributing factors.

In February 2018 I joined an Arctic Fox photographic workshop run by Philippe. The workshop was based in a renovated farmhouse at Kviar in the Hornstrandir,

accessible only by boat from Isafjordur. The environment for Arctic Foxes in Iceland is very different from, for example, Canada. There are no Lemmings in Iceland and no winter pack ice. During winter the coastal Arctic Foxes mainly scavenge on their own on the beach. Due to the scarcity of food in winter the territory of the Arctic Foxes usually covers a wide area. One pair of Blue Morph Arctic Foxes had established their territory around Kviar from about 2016. The small number of Arctic Foxes in the vicinity of Kviar and harsh winter weather meant that, on some days, it was not possible to photograph them at all. I returned to Iceland in late June that year to visit, with Philippe, a different location in the Hornstrandir. At that time of year arctic fox cubs begin to venture from their dens and I had my first view of Blue Morph Arctic Fox cubs. At this time of year nesting birds provide them with a better source of food.

After this second visit to Iceland, I began to think that the Arctic Fox, photographed in winter and summer might be a suitable subject for an FRPS panel. As the Blue Morph Arctic Fox had been so rarely photographed any images would be 'distinctive'. I was conscious though of the risk I was taking in producing a panel of just one species.

Between 2018 and March 2020 I made further visits to Iceland in the winter and summer. I also returned to Hudson Bay, Canada, in November 2019 to seek more images of the White Morph Arctic Fox. By early 2020 I had built up quite a large portfolio of images of them, but still felt I needed more variety. I was able to return to Iceland in late June 2020 between the two Covid lockdowns.

In spring 2020 I felt that I needed some advice on whether my images were of the quality required for a FRPS Distinction panel. In hindsight, having taken the risk of concentrating on just one species I think I should have sought some one-to-one advice earlier in order to reassure myself I was going in the right direction. I applied for a place on a Natural History Advisory Day. After a delay due to the pandemic the Advisory Day was





held in November 2020 with the aid of Zoom. We were asked to submit to the advisors our panel as projected images. Advice on the quality of the actual prints was to be given a few days later by a print specialist. My panel consisted of images of both White and Blue Morph Arctic Foxes, although the majority were Blue Morphs photographed in Iceland in the winter and summer. In reviewing another photographer's FRPS panel, and later my panel, the advisors stated that we were brave to put forward a one species panel. It was also stressed to us all that at the FRPS level the images needed to be distinctive. When it came to my turn, I was given positive feedback about the quality of my images. However, I was advised that some of the images were repetitive and that a one species panel carries this risk. I was also advised to introduce more images which displayed varied behaviours of the Arctic Fox – there were too many portraits. Despite this criticism I was encouraged to continue to work on the panel.

Having reviewed my collection of Arctic Fox images I decided that I needed to collect some more images of



behaviour. Unfortunately, the lockdown during the winter of 2020/1 meant it was impossible to travel overseas. However, having later been vaccinated against Covid I was able to return to Iceland this summer. On arrival Philippe informed me that a new bylaw had been introduced limiting how close people could approach Arctic Fox dens in the Hornstrandir.

## Richard Kay FRPS

## Fellowship Panel

Row 1



Row 2





However, this did not restrict me too much from getting the type of behavioural images I was after.

Although I had not been able to obtain more images of White Morph Arctic Foxes due to the Covid Pandemic restrictions on travel, I felt this summer's trip to Iceland had provided me with enough replacement images to enable me to submit a panel for assessment in September this year.

I redrafted my Statement of Intent and changed my panel layout to reflect the fact that there would be more summer Blue Morph Arctic Foxes than I had submitted to the advisors last November.





I was able to watch the FRPS Distinction assessment process on Zoom. The assessors had been sent my panel in the form of projected images. My prints were at RPS House where another assessor was to report on the quality of the prints.

In considering my panel the main issue that the assessors seemed to focus on was whether the panel showed a sufficient range of different behaviours. At the end of the discussion the Chair of the assessment panel stated that the assessors could take into account the difficulty of obtaining images of different behaviours of animals in the Arctic. After the final vote I was elated to hear that I had been successful with my panel.







Natural History - FRPS Assessment - September 15th, 2021.

### **Statement of Intent, The Arctic Fox**

I have been photographing Arctic Foxes in Canada and Iceland since 2018, particularly on Iceland where most Arctic Foxes are Blue Morph, adapted to their environment.

The Blue Morph is globally very rare. It is the White Morph which usually features in Arctic Fox literature and images. Seasonal access to Iceland has also enabled me to photograph Arctic Foxes in both Winter and Summer.

My objective is to increase my knowledge about the Arctic Fox and to share this with others through photography.

The first row images were taken in Winter as Arctic Foxes strive to survive. In March/April mature adults begin to form/reform breeding relationships. The three White Morphs were photographed in Canada, the other seven images were taken in Iceland.

The second row images were all taken in Iceland in June/July when cubs emerge from their dens, parents hunt for food and young foxes explore their environment.





# The Miniature World of Invertebrates

by Victor Wong FRPS

I first began macro photography five years ago and became more involved and fascinated in photography of insects during the two years of Covid lockdown.

I spent at least two days a week looking for interesting invertebrates in my local Country Parks in Hong Kong. I was surprised when I realised that we had a large variety of these little creatures surrounding us. They hid inconspicuously in their own unprotected yet sometimes artistic wonderlands.

Probably due to the hot, humid climate in this locality, these invertebrates were very active and colourful while also exhibiting a diversity of behaviours. In my opinion, the best time to shoot in Hong Kong should be in Spring and Autumn as Summer is too hot (up to 37°C) for most invertebrates to survive.

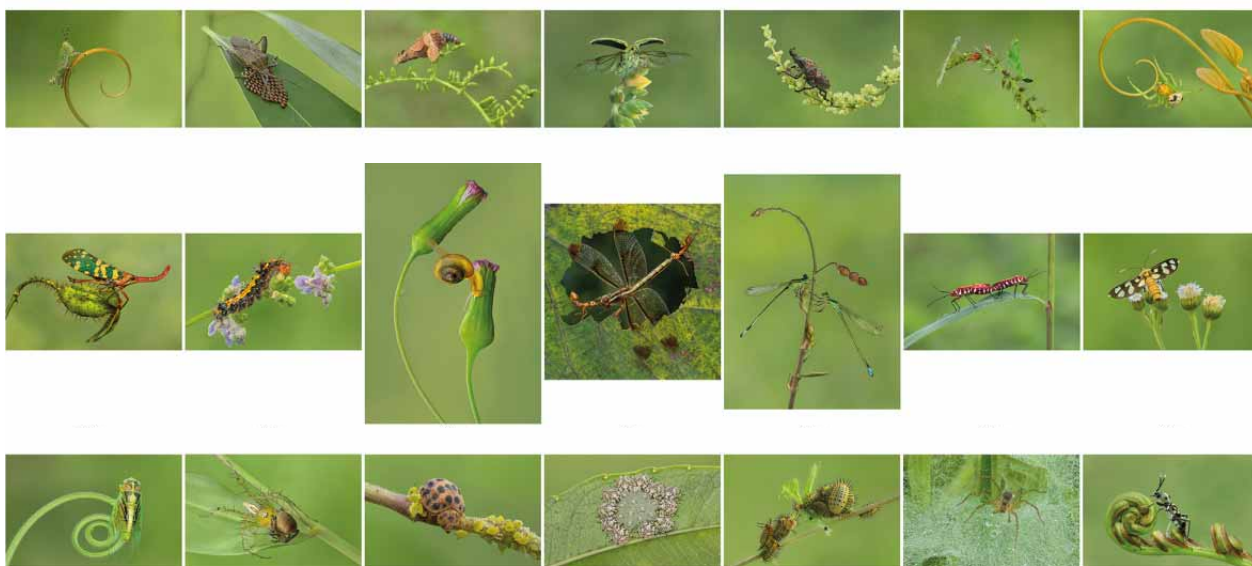
I used a Nikon D850 and 105mm f/2.8 macro lens, sometimes with my Raynox DCR250 super macro close-up lens. Recently, I acquired a Sony A1 with 90mm macro for faster focus stacking (up to 20-30 frames per second). I tried to use natural daylight as much as possible. If the conditions were too dark, I used the Nikon flash SB800 with diffuser for fill flash. Also, whenever possible, a lightweight Gitzo traveller tripod for stability.

Searching for the insects was a tough mission. I had to deliberately avoid areas with insecticides, the use of which was evident in most of the Country Parks. This also meant that most of the time I had to work in intense heat/humidity while surrounded by mosquitoes! As I made more frequent visits to different locations, I soon mapped out a few of my favourite spots to shoot.

Macro photography needs a lot of practice. Since day one of beginning, I feel that my technique has improved every day. Now I can locate at least 5-6 different species during each trip. Looking carefully underneath leaves, branches or even on handrails. Paying attention to small inconspicuous white/black spots on the plants can offer big rewards sometimes. A little flashlight/torch helps a lot to locate interesting subjects.

I started as early as 05.00am when the temperatures were a bit cooler and insect activity was low. I tried to look for backlit subjects which created dramatic and vibrant pictures. Isolated curly perches gave reasonable separation of the subjects against the background and were marvellous. Additionally, a brighter background was always pleasing. If necessary, I would handhold the perches or would clamp the perches with alligator clips to redirect them against a better background.

## Fellowship Panel Presentation Layout







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Failure was a frequently occurring thing. With the gradual rising sun, most insects would move nonstop. Simple tricks like producing a loud sound or blowing air directly at the insects sometimes halted their movements for a couple of seconds. I shot with focus stacking whenever possible. For relatively static subjects, like those mating, I supported my Nikon D850 on a tripod and used in-camera automatic focus stacking (between 15 to 150 frames) and 1 second intervals to conserve my flash power at high-speed sync mode. For other moving subjects, I used high speed continuous handheld manual shooting mode to achieve an end-to-end sharpness. My average flash power was ranging from 1/16 to 1/128 power levels in a trial-and-error fashion. I kept my shutter speed constantly at 1/100 to 1/200 sec, aperture f/4 to f/8 on focus stacking and f/8-f/16 on single shots. ISO ranging from 100 to 1600.

I usually kept shooting very close to my subjects under natural light conditions. Occasionally I used my Sony A1, 100-400mm lens with 10mm autofocus extension tube for dragonflies and damselflies. This camera was quick enough at high-speed continuous shooting mode to focus stack a pre-flight weevil in a second.

In the preparation of my FRPS portfolio, I tried to look for distinctive styles by exploring artistic compositions, special lights, and different behaviours of the invertebrates. Instead of searching for single static subjects, I tended to look for artistic environments including interesting shape perches, colourful flowers, and bright backgrounds. In the later part of my shooting, I concentrated on finding insects in pairs, interesting scenes of parental care for the eggs, groups of young larvae, feeding, mating, camouflage, and evolution with skin shedding. The wonderful interaction of the subjects with the artistic environment was a matter of luck although some insects could move to the desired perches by a slight push. Only subjects in their natural habitat could produce ultimate magnificent compositions with natural lights.

Although I had around 100 images that I considered to be strong I did not feel ready for the FRPS until I had twice attended as an observer in the natural history assessments. I tried to improve my postprocessing technique by attending few online Photoshop workshops and tutorials. I found the talk from Ian Wilson ARPS on image sharpening and noise reduction was insightful.



### Statement of Intent

*Although where I live is a small locale, it is home to a diversity of invertebrates. When the pandemic kicked in early last year, I spent more time with nature on frequent visits to the countryside and I discovered many different insect species.*

*In this panel I showcase the miniature world that these bugs inhabit, their unique appearances and mannerisms including roosting, camouflage, flight, feeding, mating and parental care of eggs and young. I find myself constantly amazed by the artistic scenes that these insects can create and find themselves within.*







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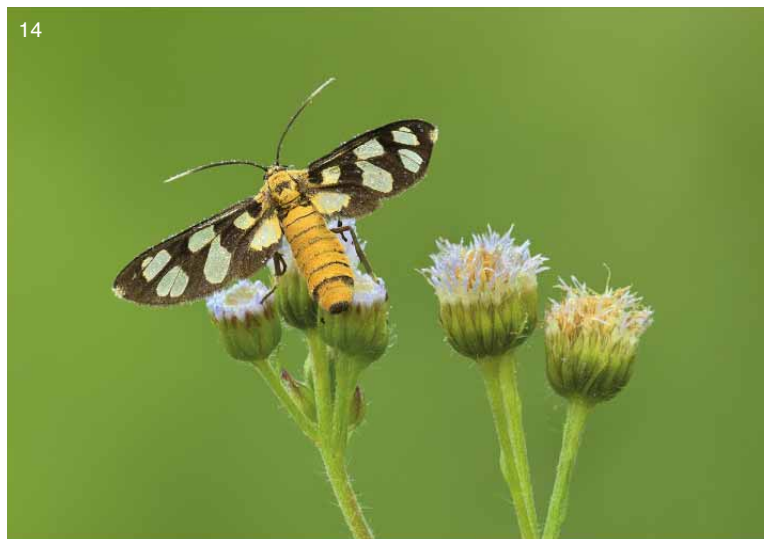


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Making a cohesive presentation layout was the most difficult part. To create symmetry and balance the arrangement of the images whilst maintaining the harmony of the background colour took up most of my time. I tried to put the four curly perches at four corners with all images facing the centre, while all centre images were either circular or facing straight.



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I must thank the RPS in providing a valuable 1 to 1 online advice service, which I would highly recommend. Without this, it is unlikely that I would have achieved my FRPS. I had at least 8 images not up to the required standard in terms of technical issues, subject matter and depth of field. I was happy that I still had enough time to fix or to replace these images before the assessment day.

The road to FRPS was tough but enormously rewarding. I could not believe the moment when Mr. Mick Durham announced the words, "I am delighted to say that Victor Wong has passed his fellowship in natural history .....". I will definitely treasure and cherish that moment.

I wish my successful FRPS portfolio can provide me the stepping stone for developing my own style of work in the future and I wish all members the best of luck in their next distinction assessment as well.



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### Species List

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Rice Grasshopper                       | <i>Oxyachinensis</i>                                  |
| 2 Leaf-footed Beetle & eggs              | <i>Coreus marginatus</i>                              |
| 3 Caddisfly Larvae                       | <i>Trichoptera</i>                                    |
| 4 True Weevil                            | <i>Hypomeces pulviger</i>                             |
| 5 Stage Beetle                           | <i>Lamprima adolphinae</i>                            |
| 6 Praying Mantis Nymph & shed skin       | <i>Mantodea</i>                                       |
| 7 Kidney Garden Spider                   | <i>Araneus mitificus</i>                              |
| 8 Lantern Bug                            | <i>Pyrops candelaria</i>                              |
| 9 Tussock Moth Caterpillar               | <i>Orvasca sp.</i>                                    |
| 10 Asian Trampsnail                      | <i>Bradybaena similaris</i>                           |
| 11 Pied Paddy Skimmer & Weaver Ants      | <i>Neuromthemis tulia &amp; Oecophylla smaragdina</i> |
| 12 Common Bluetail Damselflies           | <i>Ischnura senegalensis</i>                          |
| 13 Indian Cotton Stainer                 | <i>Dysdercus cingulatus</i>                           |
| 14 Wasp Moth                             | <i>Amata germana</i>                                  |
| 15 Grass Cicada                          | <i>Mogannia hebes</i>                                 |
| 16 Lynx Spiders                          | <i>Huechys sanguinea</i>                              |
| 17 Hadda Beetle & Plant Lice             | <i>Hensepilachna vigintioctopunctata</i>              |
| 18 Stink Bug eggs & newly hatched nymphs | <i>Halymorpha halys</i>                               |
| 19 Spotted Tortoise Beetle Larva         | <i>Aspidomorpha miliaris</i>                          |
| 20 Wolf Spider                           | <i>Hippasa holmerae</i>                               |
| 21 Long Horned Silverline                | <i>Spindasis lohita</i>                               |

# An Important Milestone in my Wildlife Photography

by Dr. Kirsten Asmussen ARPS

When I successfully applied for my Licentiate in 2019, there was only one nature photo in my entire panel. Had a fortune teller told me back then that I would be applying for an Associateship in natural history within two years' time - I would have told her to replace her crystal ball. I firmly believed that good nature photography was beyond my capability and would remain there for the indefinite future. Fast forward two years and here I am, writing about how I achieved my Associate distinction in natural history photography.

What happened to change my perspective? Upon reflection, it all started the weekend after I attended an RPS advice day and confirmed the content for my Licentiate panel. It was the first weekend of the Big Butterfly Count and my husband persuaded me to



3. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

take a break from house cleaning to count the different species in our local common. While I brought my camera along for documentary purposes, capturing good images was not the primary aim.

Our original intention was to spend one hour counting butterflies, but in the end, we had spent the entire day. Within moments of spotting my first gatekeeper, I was completely captivated. Spotting butterflies was both a relaxing and exhilarating experience and I found that photographing them helped me to be 'in the moment' in a way that I had never been before. Although my resulting images were complete and total rubbish, I found myself looking for excuses to photograph more butterflies and continued to do so until the summer



1. Eurasian Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*



2. Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)



4. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)



ended. At that point, I needed a new species to count, and birds became the perfect replacement.

As I pursued this new-found passion, I gradually noticed an improvement in my photography skills. I attribute this advancement to what I now refer to as the 'three c's' of wildlife photography – convenience, cost and curiosity – that kept me motivated.

**Convenience.** It didn't take me long to appreciate that wildlife photography was incredibly convenient in comparison to many other genres because interesting subject matter was always just outside of my door. This made it possible to practice photography every day, as it was not necessary to schedule appointments or travel long distances.

**Cost.** Relatively speaking, wildlife photography was less expensive than the other genres I had dabbled in, as it only required a camera and a lens. Hence, less time and money were spent hiring lighting and other expensive equipment, while giving me more time to photograph wildlife. Of course, this situation reversed itself when I decided to upgrade my lens in 2020. However, I anticipate my lens expenditure will retain some value in comparison to many of my previous investments in gear, which I am now having trouble giving away.

**Curiosity.** Perhaps the biggest bonus for me was that wildlife photography fuelled a new and very intense interest in British wildlife. Prior to 2019, I thought interesting species only existed in Africa or North America. However, my first butterfly count made me aware of the many wonderful species that lived within a mile of my home. One of the few silver linings of the COVID pandemic was that my permitted daily walks further increased my access to local animals and gave me more opportunities to observe their behaviour. Prior to the pandemic I did not even know that Whitethroats and Sedge Warblers existed, let alone distinguish differences in their appearance. Now I know that they are two of 13 warbler species breeding in the British Isles during the summer and can identify them on the basis of their song.

This new appreciation for British wildlife inevitably led to a deeper awareness of how climate change and habitat loss have dramatically impacted many species. For example, the number of Whinchats breeding in the UK has dropped by 75% over the past 25 years. This is due to increases in intensive farming practices that have severely restricted the bird's access to various insects.



5. Sedge Warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)



6. Eurasian Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)



7. European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*)



8. Red Deer fawn (*Cervus elaphus*)





9. European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)



13. Eurasian Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



10. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)



11. Common Whitethroat (*Curruca communis*)



12. Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

By contrast, Stonechat populations have grown by 75% during the exact same time period. Scientists speculate that this growth is largely due to warmer winters, which have allowed the Stonechat to expand its territory northward and extend its breeding season.<sup>1</sup>

My curiosity about these disparities eventually led to some desk-based research that I shared with friends through a series of mini-blogs on my Instagram feed. Each entry considered how various life history parameters (for example, diet, fecundity, parental investment, and predator-prey relationships) either helped or hindered the ability of different species to adapt to climate change. Over the summer, I considered compiling these posts into a small book that I could share with relatives who did not use social media. At the same time, I saw that the RPS was offering a new qualification in photobooks and thought that my book might qualify for a submission. Upon further consideration, however, I decided a book was too big of a risk, as I had only made one photobook before and there was insufficient time for trial and error before the assessment deadline. After receiving some helpful advice during a 1-2-1 session, I decided it was better to play it safe and instead submit 15 of my best images as prints.

The resulting panel explores of the behaviour of common animals during the summer months, whilst highlighting the 'primary colours' of the forest and meadow. In the future, I might reconsider the option of submitting a book, as my interest in UK wildlife continues to grow.

I am very pleased to have achieved the Associate distinction in natural history, as it marks an important milestone in my wildlife photography.

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<sup>1</sup>Henderson, I., Calladine, J., Massimino, D., Taylor, J. A., & Gillings, S. (2014). Evidence for contrasting causes of population change in two closely related, sympatric breeding species the Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* and Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* in Britain. *Bird Study*, 61(4), 553-565.

## Statement of Intent

*Green, tan and blue. From my perspective, these are the primary colours of nature, as they are the dominate hues in three principal UK habitats: the woodlands, grasslands and wetlands.*

*The aim of this panel is to explore how these three colours create the perfect backdrop for British animals as they go about their business during the summer months. In some cases, these colours help camouflage them from their predators; in others, they compliment the bold tones used by some species to attract a mate.*

*A key objective was to portray British wildlife its most relaxed and jubilant. This often meant photo-graphing my subjects in the early morning hours, when they were most active and the light was flattering.*

*The end result is a set of portraits of familiar species as they hunt, eat and play under the summer sun.*



14. European Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*)



15. European Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)

## Dr Kirsten Asmussen -

## Associate Presentation Layout



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# A Love of Africa - my journey to Associate

by Alison Mees ARPS

My Dad loved photography and I will always remember as a child going out with him and being fascinated with the camera. At 8 years of age he brought me my first camera, an instamatic. We went everywhere together taking photos, mainly down in Old Leigh, Essex, watching the fishermen bring in the cockles.

My interest in photography grew from there, starting with a manual SLR camera with film, moving onto a better camera body and using transparencies and finally onto digital. I had my own darkroom for a few years in the garden shed!



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I always loved nature and wildlife, just over 30 years ago I took my first safari to Africa. I fell in love with Africa and everything about it. Over the years I returned back to Africa to photograph the wildlife.

I like to capture the wildlife as you see it, in its environment, looking at their behaviour, interactions, and at different times of year.

For 16 years my dream of being in Africa came true, working as a Safari Camp Manager in Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya. Due to the pandemic in March 2020, the camps were closed and I returned back to the UK where I have been since.

When back in the UK I decided to focus on my photography and go through the wildlife photos I had taken in Africa. A couple of years ago I had decided that I wanted to try for a Distinction with the RPS but felt my images were not good enough.

I spoke to a good friend and photographer about going for a Licentiate. I wanted to play it safe and not stretch myself too far. However, the advice I received surprised me and actually gave me confidence. Telling me that my photography was good enough to aim for Associate.

After that I went through the RPS website, read the requirements and also looked at past photographers panels to give me an idea on what RPS were looking for. I had spent time living and working in Africa, and it was the variety, character and interaction of wildlife that I wanted to show.

I spent a couple of months going through a number of photos, putting some to one side for possible use, rejecting others, even going back to the rejections at times and reworking them. I make very few edits, just a few enhancements in Lightroom, I want to show the moment as I captured it.

I wrote a list of possible birds/mammals that I wanted to include in my panel – ensuring there was variety. Also taking into account behaviours, weather and light conditions.

I got to 30 possible images, went through them with my good friend and asked them to be critical of the photos, and they were! It was looking at detail, a branch slightly in the way, or the position of the animal. From this feedback I worked on a panel that I wanted to submit.







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My panel of 15 images were submitted in 3 rows, looking at the different types of wildlife, making sure the photographs balanced, looking inwards and I decided to use the flamingo photo as my centrepiece as I felt it was a strong image.

Once I had a panel that I was fairly happy with, I booked a 1-1 review, which I found extremely helpful and I would recommend everyone to do this. I was advised that a couple of the images were weak or too similar, therefore those were removed and replaced.



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## Alison Mees - Associat



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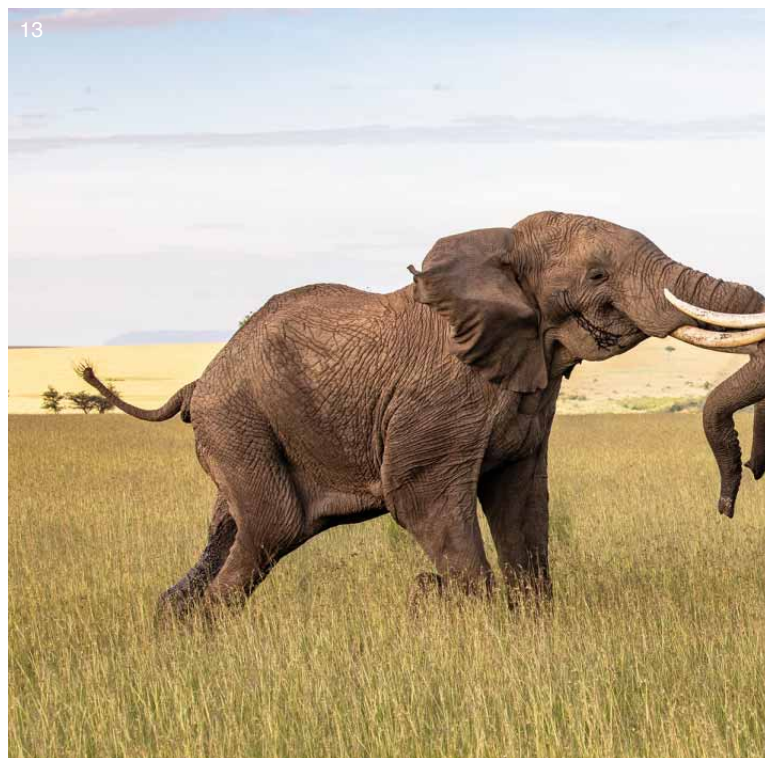
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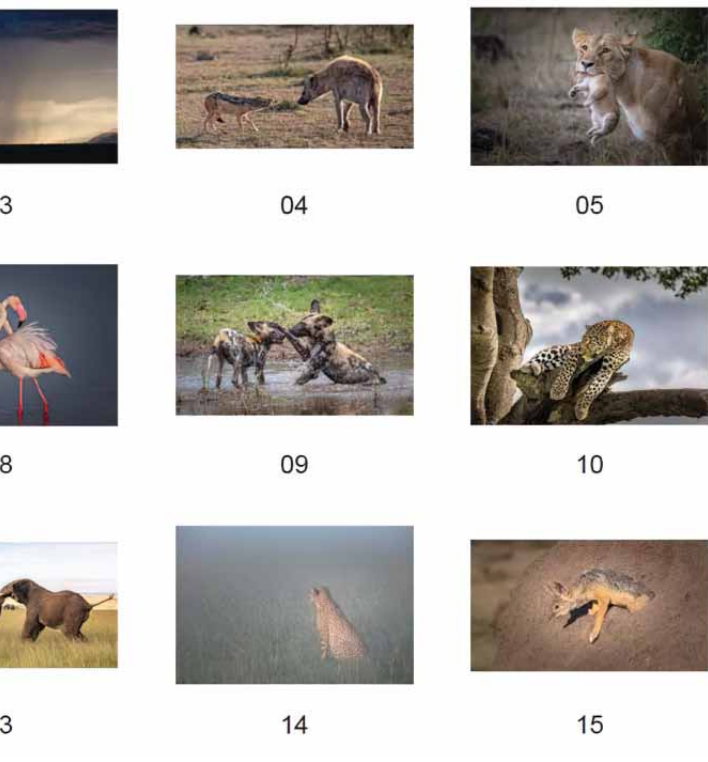


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After making small changes I submitted my work to the RPS for assessment. I was very pleased and proud to receive my Associate, I also know my Dad would have been very proud of me on that day too.

If anyone is thinking of trying for their LRPS or ARPS, go for it. I would recommend asking for advice and booking an RPS '1 to 1' review. Don't be put off by any of the feedback, you can really learn from it and take your photography to the next level.

Presentation Layout



Statement of Intent

Since a child I've had a love and fascination for Africa, especially the wildlife. Over 30 years ago, Africa took me on a journey with my photography. Being in the bush is about spending time watching and understanding the behaviour and character of each animal and how they interact with each other.

Africa is home to around 2340 bird species and more than 1100 species of mammals. In my panel I want to show a selection of what you may come across whilst on a safari. Showing behaviour, character and using different times of day and weather conditions.

With my photography I ensure that the wildlife is not disturbed in their natural environment, all photographs are taken from a vehicle with a telephoto lens.

Africa has great beauty but can be a harsh place to live and survive. I want to share that with you today in my panel.

Species List

1	Cheetah	Acinonyx jubatus
2	Martial Eagle	Polemaetus bellicosus
3	Wildebeest	Connochaetes taurinus
4	Black-backed Jackal & Spotted Hyena	Canis mesomelas & Crocuta crocuta
5	Lion	Panthero leo
6	Lion	Panthero leo
7	Zebra	Equus quagga
8	Greater Flamingo	Phoenicopterus roseus
9	African Wild Dog	Lycaon pictus
10	Leopard	Panathera pardus
11	Masai Giraffe	Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchii
12	Little Bee Eater	Meropus pusillis
13	African Elephant	Loxodonta africana
14	Cheetah	Acinonyx jubatus
15	Black-backed Jackal	Canis mesomelas



# Birds & Mammals of Eastern England

by Nick Bowman ARPS



1 Red Deer Stag - *Cervus elaphus*



2 Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*



3 Red Fox - *Vulpes vulpes*

My photographic hobby kicked-off about 8/9 years ago when I did 10 x 2 hour basic training sessions at the local college. I subsequently joined a small camera club that met fortnightly and gradually developed my skills. However, at that time I was a mad-keen golfer, so photography played second fiddle to my golf.

The following year I joined Ely Photographic Club and my photography benefitted from hearing a variety of Judges critique my work and that of fellow members. The two genres I focussed on at that time were landscapes and architecture, but if I'm honest my work was average. However, slowly but surely, I began to produce some better work and decided to have a go at attaining my LRPS Distinction.

Not long after joining Ely club I took on the role of Chairman (no one else wanted to volunteer) and later Club Secretary, so I got to know lots of people in the photography community. I was introduced to Ian Wilson ARPS from Cambridge Club, who, as most of us are aware, is an expert with processing and printing. I had a few lessons with Ian on how to improve my

## Mammals, Seabirds and Woodla



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processing skills and print my work. Both Ian and Ann Miles FRPS provided me with the encouragement and guidance I needed to produce my LRPS submission and I achieved the Distinction in October 2015.

In 2018 I thought I'd try photographing Natural History. This coincided with me having to retire from golf due to injury, so I had a lot more time to focus on photography. I am fortunate that I divide my time between living in East Cambridgeshire and North Norfolk, so I have good access to several excellent wildlife reserves. It didn't take long before I realised that photographing wildlife was more enjoyable and I relished the challenge of capturing not only good stationary birds and mammals, but of wildlife in action. I became a member of Cambridge Camera Club, a club that has the reputation of producing excellent wildlife work, so I was able to learn from fellow members.

I quickly learned that not only did I need to develop my image taking skills and master the camera settings but needed to have a much better understanding of the birds and mammals I wanted to photograph. Where are they found, what time of the year do they show, what's the best time of the day? I also needed to try and coincide my visits with appropriate weather conditions to take advantage of the best light. Furthermore, I had to work on my field craft skills as even with a long lens you need to get close enough to get a high-quality capture. I started to see a step-change in the quality of my work during 2019 and my confidence grew accordingly. In addition, Ann Miles FRPS provided encouragement by

## and Birds of the East of England



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4 Marsh Harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*



5 Grey Plover - *Pluvialis squatarola*



6 Common Seal - *Phoca vitulina*

8 Northern Gannet - *Morus bassanus*







7 Bar-tailed Godwit - *Limosa lapponica*



9 Great Crested Grebe - *Podiceps cristatus*



10 Dartford Warbler - *Sylvia undata*



11 Goldfinch - *Carduelis chloris*

telling me that my best work was of the required standard for an ARPS submission.

I decided to work towards producing a panel of work with the aim of obtaining an ARPS Distinction in Natural History. Given that I was starting to gain a good working knowledge of my local reserves; receiving positive feedback on social media from local people about the quality of my work and their appreciation of me sharing my images of the wildlife that's present; I decided my panel would be primarily local wildlife.

I have regular access to several mammals, plenty of wading birds and lots of woodland birds, so that's what my panel consists of. I also set myself the task of including 15 different species. My Statement of Intent reflects my aim and objectives.

Having looked at the ARPS panel templates, I was drawn to the 3, 5, 7 panel as I thought it might suit the images I had in mind. Also, this appeared to be a less common layout and that appealed to me. I selected what I regarded as my best 25/30 images and my first decisive decision was to have a top row of mammals, middle row mixed and woodland birds on the bottom row.

My initial inclination was to try and accommodate all my 'best' images. However, to create colour harmony and achieve a balanced cohesive panel this was not possible. I tend to be the type of person that wants to get things done asap. On this occasion, I put the brakes on myself and revisited the draft panel several times over several days until I was satisfied. As it happens, I ended-up with 2 panels although each panel had 13 of the 15 same images, but with 2 alternatives for the other 2 images.

Given the pandemic I was not able to attend an RPS Advisory Day. However, I thought it important that I get a second opinion from someone who has been awarded an ARPS in Natural History and whose work is highly regarded. The outcome of this was that a few of my images needed some processing tweaks to get the most out of them. They concurred that the panel with more action shots was stronger.

Next, I booked my 1-to-1 Portfolio Review. A mutually convenient date was agreed for a Zoomed meeting between myself and Natural History Distinctions Chair, Mick Durham FRPS. He commented on my Statement of Intent and then discussed the panel layout for my 2 options. Following this Mick commented on each of my images highlighting any areas that needed addressing.

The process took about 40 minutes and Mick provided me with a written commentary of the information he had relayed to me.

There were some key lessons learned along the way:

- 1 Some of my subjects were too big in the frame and they needed a little more room.
- 2 I needed to assess my images with more care to derive the best outcome.
- 3 I should take more time with processing in order to optimise my images.
- 4 On the plus side, I'm reasonably good at panelling.

Having listened to the comments of Mick Durham and my trusted friend and taken their advice onboard, I felt quietly confident that my submission would be successful.

If you are part-way through this process or planning to try achieving ARPS yourself (any genre not just Natural History), I can highly recommend the two stage process once you have a draft panel. Fellow members at Cambridge C.C. have gone through the same process to gain their ARPS. Once you have a good portfolio of work in your chosen genre and your work has been critiqued by experts you trust; if you take similar steps to me I feel confident that you will give yourself the best possible chance of obtaining your ARPS Distinction.

On learning that I had achieved my ARPS Distinction I was really pleased - that's probably an understatement! What's more, I never thought I'd find a pastime I'd enjoy as much as I did golf, but fortunately I have! Now I'm wondering if I have what it takes to gain a Fellowship?

## Statement of Intent

*The aim of my panel is to illustrate some of the mammals, sea birds and woodland birds found in the East of England, hoping that these will help more people to enjoy the nature on our doorstep. I have found that with nature photography that you achieve the best results by getting to know your local area and developing one's field-craft skills. Whilst a few of these mammals and birds can be found relatively easily most of them are more secretive and some people may never have seen some of them.*

*My objective was to capture images of 15 different species in their natural habitat and to reveal their behaviour.*



12 Barn Owl - *Tyto alba*



13 Great Spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos major*



14 Jay - *Garrulus glandarius*



15 Green Woodpecker - *Picus viridis*



# Planning for an ARPS submission.

by Stephen Rodger ARPS

When I was asked to write this piece on the planning that goes into an Associate level distinction, I thought that what would be most useful would be to give a more detailed answer about part of the process I undertook rather than a brief overview of the whole thing. In part this is driven by the fact that there are already some excellent written materials available from the RPS website. So, with my space here I'd like to focus on the idea of research. The two aspects I'd like to cover are basic field research and image research.

## Basic Field Research.

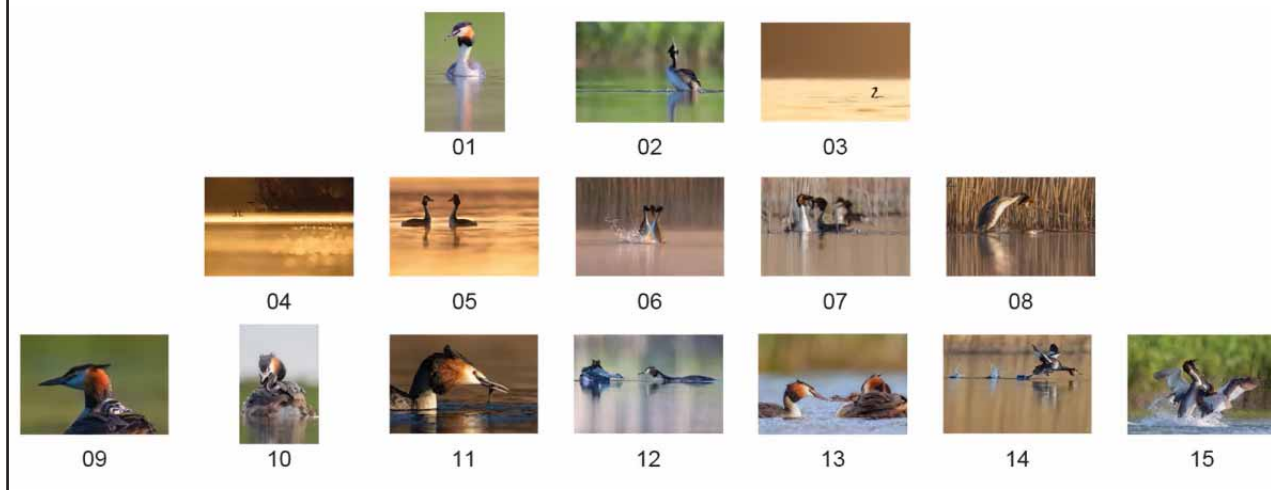
Probably right from the off I would advise putting the camera away (for some considerable time) and instead if you haven't already got some, acquiring a pair of light-weight binoculars, wearing a pair of sturdy shoes and if you also possess a dog get them involved too! Start by walking around your local area methodically (deliberately walk different paths) and see what wildlife is available to photograph. Do you really need binoculars? Yes, you do! Unless your interest is in the macro or world of flora, your potential subjects will have much better senses of sight and smell than you do. Binoculars level the playing field somewhat. On any given walk, I regularly see much more with binoculars than without.

When you first start out all that's going to happen is that you'll see the backsides of a bunch of stuff. This is



perfectly fine. As time goes by, especially if you walk at similar times, you'll notice patterns of where the animals are, and you'll be able to use your binoculars to

## A Year in the life of the Great Crested Grebe



scout for them ahead of time. This also allows you to assess what their comfort zone is. The reality is that if you're interested in nature, you'll very likely be doing a version of this already.

You'll have noticed by now that I'm suggesting you shoot locally. This is because if your submission for the ARPS assessment is initially unsuccessful and requires a few re-shoots, this is easily achievable if you shot close to home but somewhat less easy if you've decided to submit images from your trip of a lifetime to see Mountain Gorillas in the Congo.

After a little while you're going to have a sense of what's available and what interests you as a subject. It may be a single species or a range of different animals. In my case I settled on a single species which was the Great Crested Grebe.

Why pick the Grebes? Firstly, I had easy access to a wild site with a large body of water that typically held three pairs of the birds. Secondly, these birds exhibit a wide variety of behaviours which are photogenic and thirdly (and possibly most importantly) there were regular dog walkers in the area. Pardon me? Yes, for me anyway dog walkers (and other walkers) are my friend, because they typically follow a defined path and do a wonderful job of habituating wildlife to humanity without taming it.

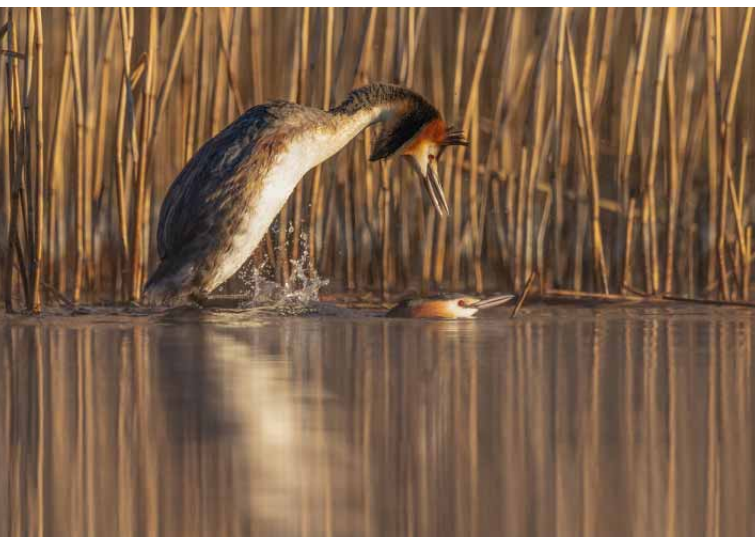
#### **Image Research.**

So now we pick up the camera? Nope. Now we have our species narrowed down, so we start picking up some books, and we have quite particular books in mind. Personally, I have all ten books of the British Wildlife Photography Awards (BWPA): Collections 1 – 10. In addition, all the books of The Bird Photographer of the Year, as well as ten books of The Wildlife Photographer of the Year. Now while these all retail at £25 new, most of my copies were bought second hand on eBay for between £3 - £5. Price deflation in the second-hand book market is brutal.

In my case I went through these books looking for images of Grebes and other water birds. Popping over to the bookcase just now I can see that BWPA Collection 2 has the first of my bookmarks on page 47 with Andrew Parkinson's: Great Crested Grebe with a fish. So far so boring. What exactly are we doing with these books? Well, we are educating our visual memory with what constitutes a 'very good' photograph of our chosen subject. The definition of 'very good' is being







set by an internationally recognised panel of judges. It's not our opinion. Each picture has a little story of how it was taken written by the photographer, read a bunch of these and you'll build up a very clear picture of what you're going to be doing. In my case sitting in a lake wearing waders! The appendix has a summary of the camera used, its settings and any other important gear. Read a few of these and you're going to discover what gear you need to buy. Genius huh? In this instance we see that a Nikon D3s was used with a 600mm f4 lens and the picture was taken at 1/200sec at f4 at iso400, also the camera was mounted on a Gitzo tripod with a Wimberley head. Alright so I need a 600mm f4 lens! Game over! Nope, focus and think. The D3s was launched in 2009 and chip technology has improved hugely in the last 12 years, the picture was shot at ISO 400, you could easily get the same noise levels shooting at ISO 1000 today, so do you need an f4 aperture? Nope. Would f5.6 work? Yes, of course, as would f8. Looking at what was achieved with 'old' kit is a wonderful antidote to the marketing machine which will tell you nothing can be achieved without the latest gear. Don't buy that lie!

The printing is good in these photobooks, because it's the pictures that sell them, so you get to see well processed and printed pictures. No 'burnt out' whites, etc. Once again when you come to process your pictures you now have a library of well printed pictures to assess yours against. The photobooks contain the shortlisted images that year, this is your focus. Ignore what won, came second etc they are irrelevant. The shortlisted pictures are typically the top 1-2% of all submissions and the standard is above what the ARPS requires (in my opinion). This will allow you to critically appraise your own pictures against a high benchmark, before the RPS judges weigh in! Being able to take constructive criticism 'well', bounce back and persevere is a key element of success, and this will prepare you for that. We don't want you throwing your toys out the pram when a judge tells you your whites are too white! Use this to build resilience.

You're aiming high, but that's the point. Let's be honest if you're doing the ARPS you're probably also thinking about an FRPS in the future too. Sure you are!

At this point you now know what camera gear you really need to pick up (as opposed to want) and you now have an idea of what constitutes a 'good' photograph of your species in the eyes of others. So now pick up your camera and get out there. Good luck!



### **A year in the life of the Great Crested Grebe.**

This submission is intended to cover the major behavioural milestones that take place over the breeding season for an adult Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), and as such to inform the audience of these behaviours.

These fifteen photographs have been shot over an extended three-year period in a single wild location to build up a body of work that deals with the major behavioural aspects of these birds.

The intention is to focus on significant behaviours as opposed to producing a 'calendar shoot' with a picture for each month. The sequencing of the pictures will follow a timeline starting with the bird itself before moving on to finding a mate, courtship displays and mating and finally raising a family and defending territory.





# The Hidden World of my local Insects

by André Neves ARPS

2020 has given us a rare opportunity to stand back, reflect and rethink our priorities as individuals, communities and as a society in general. In fact our survival on this beautiful planet, as a dominant yet vulnerable species, may increasingly rely on our ability to rebalance with nature and reduce our individual and collective negative impacts on it.

I have been interested in insects for a long time. They form the most diverse and abundant class of animals on Earth. Four hundred million years of evolution have endowed them with the unique ability to adapt, survive and thrive in nearly every ecosystem. We also owe some of these little creatures huge gratitude as key pollinators of many of our fruits and vegetables. Regrettably, recent studies have shown that global insect populations have declined 45% in the last four decades. The Butterfly Conservation Society has reported that, over the last four decades, 70% of butterfly species in the UK have declined in occurrence and 57% have declined in number. The Royal Horticultural Society report that some UK iconic bee species that rely on specific nest sites and flowers, have also shown significant decline in the last three decades.

Beccy Speight, the Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), reminds us that it is not all doom and gloom. In order to let nature rebalance again we need more mosaics of habitats on our land; more sharing, more complexity, less intensification. The new pilot scheme of Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI), to be introduced in England this year, is a positive step in the right direction. It will allow farmers to be paid for implementing measures that help protect local wildlife, rather than previous area-based incentives. Farmland represents three quarters of land use in the UK so the management of the farmed environment can have a huge impact on wildlife. Given time these new support schemes could foster landscape recovery, lead to hedge expansion, peatland restoration and provide an incentive for planting new woods. There will be more trees, meadows and wetlands; giving wildlife, and insects in particular, a chance to recover. Importantly, all of these measures may contribute significantly to the reduction of our CO2 emissions.



I have been fascinated by nature and photography since my childhood years in Portugal. I have always admired natural world imagery and started my photography journey some three decades ago by borrowing my father's Nikon SLR. My serious take on photography did not start until some five years ago when I joined the Melbourn and District Photography Club, a welcoming and supportive community, which has been a great source of photographic knowledge and inspiration. Three years ago I also joined the Cambridge Camera Club, a larger community with a rich heritage of photographic interests. Over time, I have developed a strong interest in macro photography. Having known of the RPS for many years, and after attending advisory days, I submitted a panel of nature images and was thrilled to be awarded my LRPS in 2019.

After missing the healing power of nature during the lockdown of 2020 I was eager to leave the house with my camera and ready to survey my local insect populations. Happily waking up before dawn on some chilling mornings, I have now realise that the day of an insect starts slowly before rapidly speeding up as the sun warms the air. Between mid-May and late-July, the differences in early morning and late day temperatures, the quality of light and the level of insect activity are incredible. I felt privileged to witness first-hand the richness of the biodiversity of insects not far from my doorstep. Nevertheless, as Sir David Attenborough recently







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reminded us, we are all suffering from 'shifting baseline syndrome'; our ability to forget across generations how biodiverse the natural environment used to be. If I had been able to survey my local patch some 10, 20 or 50 years ago it is likely I would have witnessed a more diverse insect ecosystem. However my local insects have shown me that they can thrive in the smallest of habitats, from an uncultivated strip of meadow between arable fields to a short hedgerow separating a busy road from a monoculture field. Given the smallest opportunity, insects will always find a way to complete their fascinating annual life cycle and indirectly enrich our lives. I am particularly fascinated by butterflies and bees and their apparent endless energy and determination.

Towards the end of last year, having spent months playing with the layout, I started to put together an ARPS panel of local insects. I sought advice online from Mick Durham FRPS who kindly provided a valuable and constructive critique of my images. I submitted my panel for the April 2021 online assessment and was delighted and honoured to gain my ARPS in Natural History. I am very grateful to members of the Melbourn and Cambridge Clubs for their help and support.

#### Images:

- 1 Six-spot Burnet Moths (*Zygaena filipendulae*) mating.
- 2 Male Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*) on Meadow Oat-grass.
- 3 Chalk Hill Blue pair (*Polyommatus coridon*) at sunset on Devil's Bit Scabious.
- 4 Male Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*).
- 5 Female Meadow Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*) on Meadow Foxtail.
- 6 Male Marbled White (*Melanargia galathea*) on Wild Oat.
- 7 Female Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*).
- 8 Male Small White (*Pieris rapae*) on Meadow Oat Grass.
- 9 Female Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) on Common Knapweed.
- 10 Male Ghost Moth (*Hepialus humuli*).
- 11 White-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) Worker nectaring on English Lavender.
- 12 Male Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) on Common Ragwort.
- 13 Common Blue Damselflies (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) mating.
- 14 Female Migrant Hoverfly (*Eupeodes corollae*) nectaring on Star of Persia.
- 15 Queen Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) roosting under Greater Knapweed.



**Technical References:** I use a Nikon D850 full frame DSLR camera. The high-resolution (47 MP) sensor and excellent low-light performance allow me to capture insect details with great precision. I find combining the D850 with either a 105 mm prime lens (Sigma 105 mm f/2.8 EX DG OS HSM Macro OS) or a mid-range telephoto zoom lens (Nikon 70-200 f/2.8G ED FL VR) coupled with a tele-converter (Nikon AF-S TC-17EII), to be particularly effective for static or dynamic insect photography. I use a good quality solid tripod and ball head and recommend it for high resolution detailed macro images of static subjects. I also use a monopod with the telephoto lens for more dynamic images of insects. Lastly, I often used a small LED light source. I usually work during the early or late hours of the day when the light is softer and insects are mostly dormant. The soft light will flatter images and insect motion should be minimal. Check the local weather forecast ahead of time (the Clear Outside app is excellent) and aim for a morning temperature below 17°C and minimal wind speed (<10 mph).

### Statement of Intent

The insect world forms the most diverse and rich class of animals on our planet. Recent visits to local nature reserves, conservancies, meadows, hedge-rows, and my own garden, have demonstrated to me how local wildlife can adapt and thrive in the smallest of habitats. I have portrayed insects living within a 30 mile radius of my home, in their natural environment and in close relationship with local flora, featuring seasonal behaviours that include feeding and mating. This is my vision and tribute to a small world that lies hidden away and yet is very near and critical for us all.





# Gathering Wool

by John Bebbington FRPS

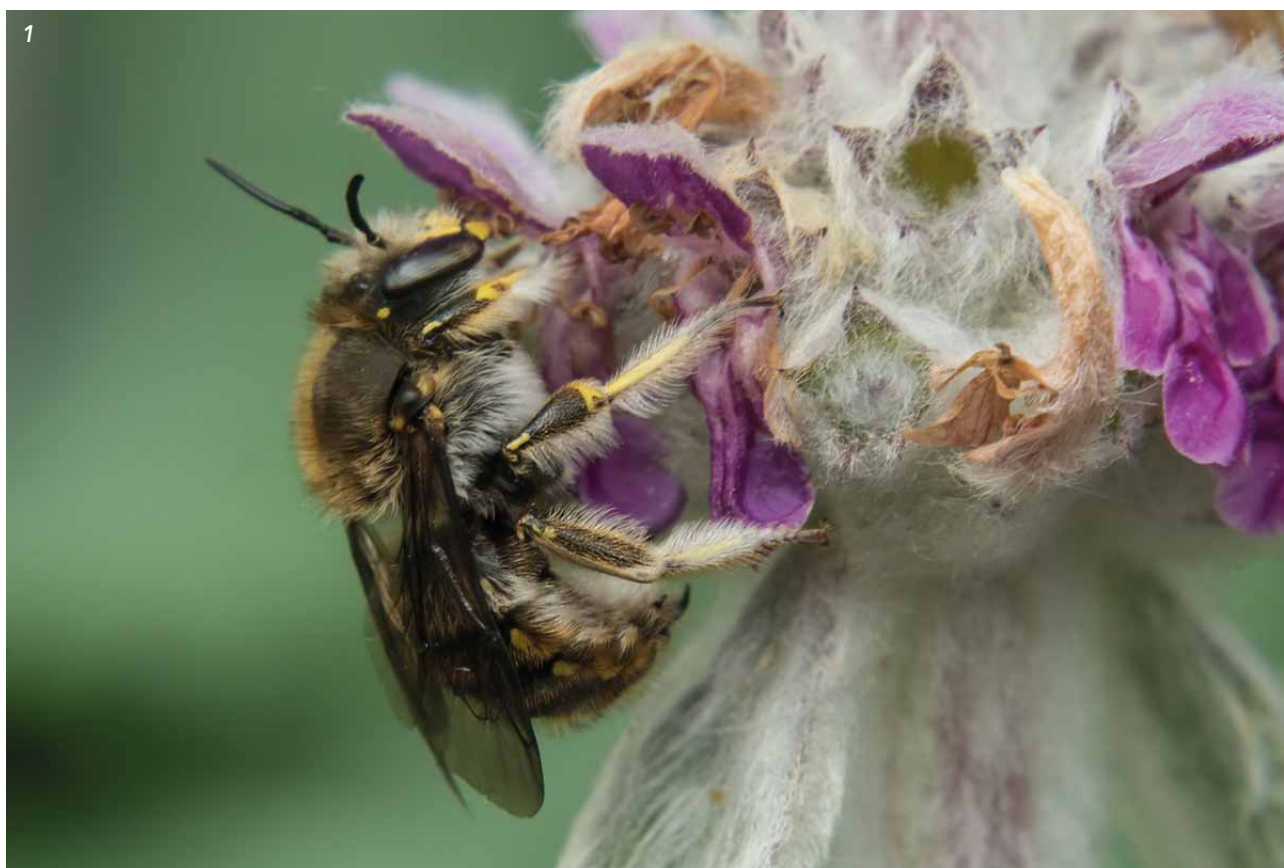
We have observed and identified a wide range of bees in our garden, but in July 2019 we noticed an unfamiliar Solitary Bee – around 10mm long - nectaring on a plant of Rusty Foxglove (*Digitalis ferruginea*).

Referring to the 'Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland' (Falk, 2015) we identified it as a male Wool Carder Bee (*Anthidium manicatum*). Researching its natural history we discovered that the common name comes from the fact that the females (which, unusually for solitary bees, are smaller than the males) gather plant hairs to line and plug their nest holes.

Sadly we were unable to find females, but were amused by the behaviour of the male which spent a great deal of time patrolling the area around the Foxglove plants. According to Falk the males are aggressively territorial, defending their territory by head-butting, stabbing with the sharp points on their abdomen and even killing other bees.

Further research revealed that favourite plants for the females are Hedge Woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*) and Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*), both of which (especially Lamb's Ear) have silky hairs on their leaves. Although we have Hedge Woundwort in our garden it is in an overgrown area not very conducive to photography so we decided to buy a plant of Lamb's Ear the next spring and observe it closely. However before we could do this Covid struck and we were in lockdown! We didn't see any Wool Carder Bees during 2020.

This year, when released from lockdown, we purchased a large specimen of Lamb's Ear and placed it in a large pot in what seemed a good place for both the bees and ease of photography. As soon as it began to flower a male Wool Carder Bee arrived and took up station on the plant, basking on the leaves, nectaring and driving away other bees (solitary and bumblebees) from the plant and from neighbouring Salvias. Unfortunately I was unable to record this behaviour – it was too unpredictable and fast!





Unusually one of the males spent several minutes nectaring on a flower spike at the same time as a worker White-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) without reacting to it.

After a week or so a second male and two females appeared; the males engaged in aerial combat (again, sadly, no images) and on two occasions a male copulated with a female.

Initially the females collected plant hairs from the under-sides of basal leaves but later moved higher up the plant, making it easier to record their behaviour. I was able to photograph them cutting the hairs off the leaves and stems and then gathering them up into a ball.

When a female had gathered sufficient plant hairs she would fly vertically up the plant stem (possibly an orientation flight?) before disappearing to another part of the garden. We were sadly unable to find nesting sites.





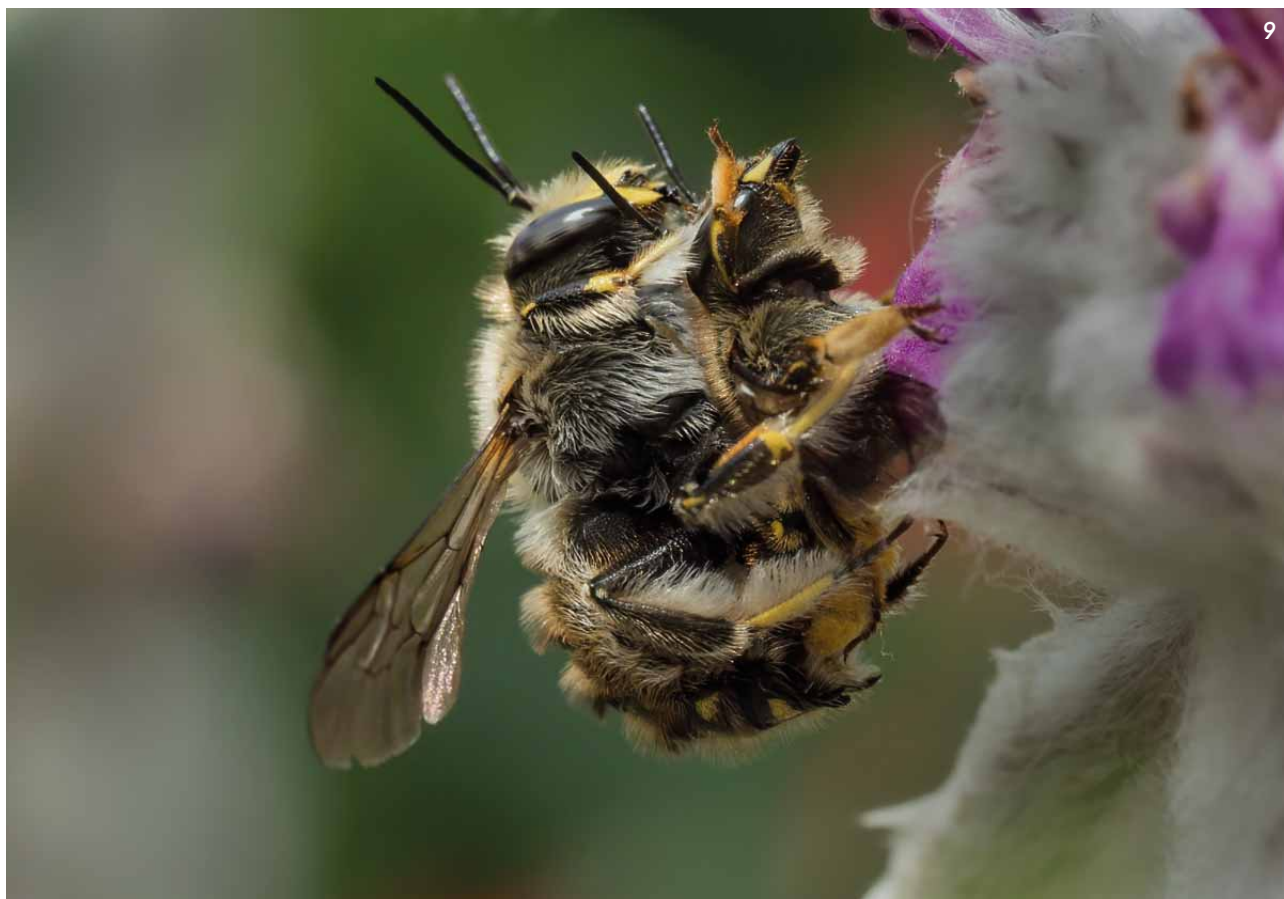


By the end of July the plant had finished flowering and the bees, which are single-brooded, had disappeared. I achieved some decent images, there are still some outstanding; a male attacking a bumblebee, males in aerial combat, a female in flight with her ball of plant hairs and a female arriving at her nest site. I hope to obtain these in 2021, and will position a 'bee home' with a variety of suitable holes and crevices next to the Lamb's ear plant!

Reference: Falk, S; Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland. Illustrated by Richard Lewington. Bloomsbury 2015. ISBN 978-1-910389-03-4.

#### Images:

- 01 Male nectaring on Lamb's Ear flower
- 02 Male basking on Lamb's Ear leaf
- 03 Male and White-tailed Bumblebee nectaring on Lamb's Ear flowers
- 04 Male nectaring on Rusty Foxglove flower July 2019
- 05 Male in flight
- 06 Female gathering plant hairs from Lamb's Ear stem.
- 07 Female nectaring on Lamb's Ear flower
- 08 Female gathering plant hairs from underside of Lamb's Ear leaf
- 09 Wool Carder Bees copulating





## 2022 Members Exhibition of Prints and Digital Images

Exhibition Selectors: Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS, Mike Lane FRPS, Julia Wainwright FRPS

### Exhibition Calendar:

Entry system will open	25 <sup>th</sup> November 2021
Closing date for entries	20th February 2022
Selection Day	2nd March 2022
Report cards	by mid-March 2022
Exhibition Opening	9 <sup>th</sup> April 2022
Returned <b>unaccepted</b> entries	Late April 2022

The strongly preferred method of entry is via the online entry system. All Nature Group members will be sent an invitation email that will contain a link to the entry system. Any members that cannot use the online entry system can post a completed entry form along with their images, and a cheque for any payment due to the address shown on the form.

The Members Exhibition page of the Nature Group section of the RPS Website will contain a link to the entry system, and a copy of the entry form can also be downloaded from there.

Gold Medals will be awarded to the best print and best digital image of the exhibition. In each category a Bronze Medal, plus Selector, and Highly Commended certificates will be awarded. The 'Tony Wharton' award will be presented to the most successful entrant in the exhibition.

The acceptance list, plus a selection of award-winning images, will be published in the Summer 2022 issue of 'The Iris'. The awarded images will also appear on the RPS Gallery website.

Once again this year's slide shows of all accepted images will be available to download from the Nature Group Dropbox Account, there will be no DVD automatically issued to each entrant.

### Digital Entries

The maximum dimensions for digital files are 1600 horizontally and 1200 vertically.

### Print Entries

**Please read the information on print submissions before you send your entry**

All accepted prints will be displayed at the Exhibition Opening. They will also be displayed at Edinburgh PS and possibly other locations. The 2022 accepted prints will therefore be retained until the 2023 AGM. Unaccepted 2022 prints will be returned at or immediately after the 2022 AGM along with any accepted prints from the 2020 exhibition that have not yet been returned.

Further details of the entry conditions can be viewed in the online entry system, the Nature Group area of the RPS website, and on the manual entry form.

## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2022

### ENTRY FORM (Manual Entry Only) 1 of 2

ENTRANT DETAILS (Please complete legibly in **BLOCK CAPITALS**)

Name: ..... Honours: .....  
Address: .....  
.....  
.....  
Post Code: ..... Tel No: .....  
Email: .....

I accept the Conditions of Entry and confirm I am a member of the RPS Nature Group

Signed: .....

### Entry Fee

**There is no fee required to enter the exhibition.**

**The fee for returning print entries by post remains at £8.**

**Please note, prints from overseas entrants will not be returned.**

Prints will be returned by

Royal Mail 2<sup>nd</sup> Class or MyHermes      **Return postage £8.00**      £.....  
A signature may be required on delivery.      **Total Amount Due**      £.....

**Please send your entry to:**      **Please make cheques payable to:**

RPS Nature Group Exhibition  
c/o Ralph Snook ARPS  
8 Knole Close  
Almondsbury  
Bristol  
BS32 4EJ

RPS Nature Group

Email: [rpsngxsec@btinternet.com](mailto:rpsngxsec@btinternet.com)





## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2022

### ENTRY FORM (Manual Entry Only) 2 of 2

#### IMAGE ENTRY DETAILS (Please complete legibly in Block Capitals)

##### Prints – Category A

All creatures – birds, mammals, reptiles, marine life, insects, etc.

Cat Id	Image Title
PA1	
PA2	
PA3	
PA4	

##### Prints – Category B

All plant life (including flora, fungi, lichens) and all other subjects including geological and microscopy, plus patterns, (design and form found in nature).

Cat Id	Image Title
PB1	
PB2	
PB3	
PB4	

##### Digital Images – Category A

All creatures – birds, mammals, reptiles, marine life, insects, etc.

Cat Id	Image Title
DA1	
DA2	
DA3	
DA4	

##### Digital Images – Category B

All plant life (including flora, fungi, lichens) and all other subjects including geological and microscopy, plus patterns, (design and form found in nature).

Cat Id	Image Title
DB1	
DB2	
DB3	
DB4	



## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2022

### CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

Entry is restricted to members of the Nature Group of the Royal Photographic Society.

#### General Conditions

- All entries must be titled with the correct English name. **Only use the scientific name where there is no English name. Trivial and/or cute titles are not acceptable and will result in disqualification.**
- All images must convey the truth of what the author saw at the time of taking. **Any manipulation must be confined to exposure adjustments and the removal of minor blemishes or distractions.** The final image must have been produced from a single negative, transparency or digital recording and must not be a combination of images. The only exception is focus stacking.
- Images of captive subjects or those captured using live bait are not permitted, but see the Exhibition page on the RPS website for a more detailed explanation of captive.
- Work accepted in previous Nature Group Exhibitions is not eligible regardless of which section it was entered into, ie prints cannot have been accepted as slides/digital images, and vice versa. **This also applies to near duplicates of previous acceptances.**
- Entering this Exhibition assumes that entrants agree to their entries being used to promote the Nature Group by inclusion in for example, the Exhibition slide shows, the '1st's, the RPS Journal, the Nature Group's section of the RPS website, and the Nature Group Gallery Website. Copyright of all images remains with the author.
- Acceptance of entries will be notified by a report card which will be emailed to all entrants.
- Whilst every care will be taken of all entries submitted, the Nature Group cannot accept any responsibility for loss or damage, however caused.
- Submission of work implies acceptance of the above conditions.
- **Failure to comply with the Conditions of Entry will result in your entry being rejected.**

#### PRINT conditions

- Mount size for prints **MUST BE 50cm x 40cm**. Please keep the thickness of the mount to a maximum of 2.8mm. Mounts having Velcro pads, peeling tape, or any sticky substance on the back will be disqualified, as they could damage other prints.
- Overseas entries can be sent unmounted but will **not be returned**. Although overseas prints will not be returned packages should be clearly marked on the outside - 'Photographs for Exhibition only' - to be returned to sender. No commercial value.
- The back of each print must bear the title and name of the author. The title should correspond to the title entered in the online system or the manual entry form. The author's name must not appear on the front. Please include a copy of your entry confirmation or entry form with the prints.
- If NOT entering via the on-line entry system then you must send digital copies of your prints to the exhibition secretary. See the notes below relating to this.
- Unaccepted prints not being collected at the exhibition opening will only be returned if the correct return postage has been paid in advance. Prints will be returned in their original packaging – please ensure this is adequate taking into account the parcel has to be opened by the exhibition secretary. **Accepted prints will be retained for display in 2022 and will be returned after the 2023 exhibition opens in April 2023**

#### Production of DIGITAL files.

- **Maximum size is 1600 pixels horizontally x 1200 pixels vertically.** Files to be in **Jpg** format, in the **sRGB** colour space, and **300dpi**. **Please do not add a background fill as the projection software will do this automatically.**
- For manual entries digital files can be sent by CD/DVD/Memory Stick or by electronic means using Wettransfer or Dropbox. Files should be in a folder clearly identifying the entrant and containing up to 16 image files.
- File naming protocol: - Category and number corresponding to the details on the entry form, space, and Title. (eg. **PA1 Common Seal DB1 Oxeys Daisies**). Please use both upper and lower case, as in these examples. **If sending a CD/DVD burn as Data and close it**, do not use options to write 'Session' or 'Multi Session'.
- All CDs/DVDs will be destroyed after the close of the Exhibition and all unaccepted images deleted.

## **Nature Group Summer Residential Weekend 2022**

# **The Kingcombe Centre Dorset**

**Friday 10th to Monday 13th June 2022**

For the 2022 Summer Residential Weekend, the Nature Group is returning to The Kingcombe Centre in West Dorset. Not only does Kingcombe provide a central point to visit Dorset's many Nature Reserves, but the Centre itself is situated in Kingcombe Meadows, one of Southern England's best Nature Reserves. Watch the RPS Nature Group website for further information on costs and how to book or contact:



**Duncan Locke ARPS**

**Email: [naturesecretary@rps.org](mailto:naturesecretary@rps.org)**

**Tel: 07989 494232**

## **Going Wild with Ann & Steve Toon**

**Saturday 4th December, 2021, 16:00-17:30**

Award-winning wildlife photographers Steve and Ann Toon have been professional for twenty years and their work has been extensively published worldwide. They live in Northumberland National Park but spend four to five months every year photographing in Southern Africa, pursuing personal projects and leading small group photographic safaris to some of the region's top locations.



Ann and Steve have a passion for telling stories through their images. They'll be discussing their working lives as wildlife photographers and their creative approach to producing memorable images, with a particular emphasis on working the light. There is a small charge for this talk and the link for the recording will only be sent to those who register as Ann and Steve are now part of a professional lecturing scheme

**RPS Members £5 NonMembers £10**

**<https://rps.org/events/groups/nature/2021/december/going-wild-with-ann-steve-toon/>**



# Photographing our changing countryside and wildlife

by Richard Revels FRPS

I am sure that everyone reading this will be aware of the changes affecting our countryside and wildlife, and while many changes may be linked to the effects of global warming, it is producing a more volatile climate. Other factors including modern farming practices and other human activities will also be playing a part. Some degree of change is normal in the natural world and has always happened, to both habitats and wildlife abundance, but recently changes are occurring at an alarmingly fast rate.

In the small county of Bedfordshire, where I live, some very noticeable changes to wildlife habitats have occurred in recent years, resulting in the extinction of some local wildlife with many other species noticeably declining. Although there have been some welcome new species arriving in Bedfordshire from both Europe and the southern UK counties, they also include several less welcome species of pests that have now become established in the UK. Regrettably the numbers of declining species is greatly outnumbering wildlife with stable or flourishing populations.

The increase in the human population both in the UK and worldwide is not helping matters and puts even more pressure on many wildlife habitats. We are living in a rapidly changing world with more frequent floods, droughts, and warmer and damper winters generally, but also with some severe cold snaps. Such rapid changes are very challenging for many kinds of wildlife. I would like to suggest that NG members should set themselves a project to photograph their best local wildlife areas, put together sets of pictures of those habitats and the wildlife they currently contain, and publish them as picture books, so that there are good records of these sites available in future years. To have the best value in the future, each picture should have available details of data relating to where (using GPS map reference) and when each picture was taken, the direction of view, so that similar pictures showing the same view can be repeated in the future.

While producing a book that records and highlights wildlife habitats may not bring acclaim like winning a medal in an international photographic exhibition, your photographs may help save a local wildlife stronghold from change or destruction, which in my mind would be

a far greater achievement. Picture books can be presented to planning authorities when a good local wildlife 'hot spot' comes under threat of being lost. Self-publishing small runs of books with today's publishing programmes is fairly easy. However, those published by Natural History Societies, the regional Wildlife Trusts and other conservation organisations may have more influence on the outcome, so although you may lose total control of the book, your images could have more bearing on the end result.

The long term recording of both habitats and wildlife is one of the main functions of local Natural History Societies. They will often publish books about wildlife in their catchment areas; so by joining your local Natural History Society, you could gain a willing partner in getting such books published. I have been a member of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS) since the early 1970's, and over the years have provided them with many hundreds of pictures for their various publications, including several books.

Back in the mid-1990's the BNHS was considering if they should publish a book showing a range of the county's best wildlife habitats at the end of the twentieth century. Being at that time a member of the BNHS scientific committee I was involved in the decision, and being enthusiastic about the project I willingly took on the task of photographing the county's best wildlife habitats during the following three years. That project included recording exactly where I stood (GPS map reference), the date the picture was taken and the direction of view. The data to be used for comparison pictures taken years later.

The resulting book '*Wild Bedfordshire*' (ISBN 0-9506521-6-4) published in 2000 was also planned as a baseline for pictures in the future. The BNHS financed the book and oversaw its publication, including getting grants, editing, indexing, and all the admin needed when publishing such a book. During the three year period from 1996, I visited over 70 different sites to take pictures listed by the BNHS scientific committee as showing a wide range of different types of the county's varied habitats and species. Although I was not paid for my pictures the BNHS gave me a grant that funded most of my travelling expenses.

Before starting the project it was agreed that when published I would be able to obtain copies of the book at wholesale price to sell at my talks and presentations, so making some extra money to help cover various costs incurred. Through linking up with the BNHS and their range of wildlife recorders and site wardens on this project, I gained knowledge of where and when would be the best time to visit the locations that were new to me. That book was published in 2000, and all 850 copies were sold in about 3 years, with profits going to local wildlife conservation projects. The project proved that there is a demand for such books even in landlocked county's with limited numbers of holiday-making visitors.

By about 2016 there had been so many changes to the habitats and wildlife since 'Wild Bedfordshire' was published, that the BNHS agreed that it was time for a follow-up book to be produced containing some of the original habitats pictures, together with new shots twenty years on. After visiting some of the original locations it soon became clear that a number of habitats had been neglected and degraded, while others had been improved for wildlife. There had also been many new habitats created for wildlife in the county, with the majority being part of the Marston Vale Forest project.

Bedfordshire's human population has increased by over 90,000 in the last twenty years and the county is undergoing a massive increase in house building, needed to accommodate the rising population. The consequences of this include the need for more roads which will impact on the countryside with more pollution in both the atmosphere and our waterways. While some new road projects have sown wildflower seed mixes on the verges providing excellent wildlife habitats, it is unfortunate that some authorities then send in contractors to mow the flowers during mid-summer, which is the peak time for pollinating insects. A cut in late September or October is essential to keep coarse vegetation and scrub under control and is all that most verges need.

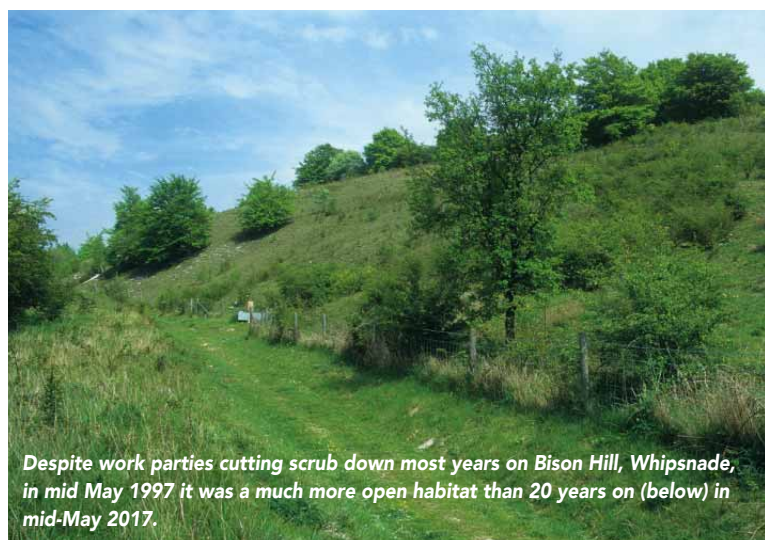
The new book '*Bedfordshire - our changing Habitats and Wildlife*' (ISBN 978-1-9162417-0-1) has 44 more pages than the earlier publication and is more lavishly illustrated with around 400 pictures that are a mixture of old and new habitat comparison pictures, newly created wildlife habitats and a selection of wildlife. Section three in the book shows a range of recent wildlife species gains and losses. The BNHS received the books on the same day as the first Covid-19 total lockdown came into force in March 2020, so all plans for the grand launch in late April had to be abandoned.



Chiltern Gentians - *Gentianella germanica*.

The pictures accompanying this article are all included in the new book, with some comparison pictures of 1990's views, so chronicling the changes that have happened in our countryside during the past 20 years. Anyone who contemplates producing something similar could gather plenty of ideas from this book.

A copy of '*Bedfordshire - our changing Habitats and Wildlife*' (ISBN 978-1-9162417-0-1) can be purchased direct from me and a few other local outlets for cash at £20, or online from the BNHS website: [www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk) at £20 plus P&P. All profits from the book will go to local wildlife conservation projects.



Despite work parties cutting scrub down most years on Bison Hill, Whipsnade, in mid May 1997 it was a much more open habitat than 20 years on (below) in mid-May 2017.



In 1997 the Duke of Burgundy butterfly was frequently seen there, but rarely now. 300 meters away where it is still a more open habitat it is hanging on.





The Garden Tiger and Wood Tiger moths have been lost as breeding species in Bedfordshire in recent times



The Scarlet Tiger (and Jersey Tiger moths) have become well established in Bedfordshire during the past 15 years .



The Purple Emperor were lost as breeding species in Beds in the 1960s. In 2006 the species made a comeback in the county's woods. With plenty of Sallow bushes, their larval foodplant, they have been seen there every year since.



Chalk Hill Blue butterflies feeding on Carline thistle flowers in Houghton Regis Quarry NR. Around a thousand hatch there most years.



Potton Wood Ride in 1996



Potton Wood Ride in 2019



Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, *Ischnura pumilio*, male.



Turtle Dove