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THE IRIS



Celebrating Associate Distinction Success



Above: Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima*
by Lachlan French ARPS

Below: Badger
by Suzanne Behan ARPS



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- Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send typed or hand written copy.
- Digitally captured photographic images to support your article (whether vertical or horizontal) supplied as 8bit tif or 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.
- If your image is selected for use on the cover of The Iris you will be asked to supply a larger file.
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Eurasian Red Squirrel
(Sciurus vulgaris)
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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

Winter is now upon us. I do hope that you all enjoyed an Autumn season full of photographic opportunities. Whether fungus, rutting deer or simply colour, autumn is a wonderful time of year.

There is much of interest in this issue - Tim Cossins has sent an account of his interesting trip to Honduras and Paul Shilliam FRPS tells us of his travels in Africa.

Yealand Kalafayan ARPS documents the behaviours of White Storks at a site on the coast of Portugal, complete with some interesting images. Sonja Knox FRPS shares information about a wildlife site in Worcestershire and Part 4 of my very own 'Penguins of the Falkland Islands' continues with information and pictures about the Magellanic Penguin.

I would like to congratulate those of you who were successful with Nature Distinction applications at the Autumn assessments. Please get in touch if you would like to be included in the Spring issue of The Iris. The work of two successful members is featured in this issue. Lachlan French gained his ARPS with a panel of images photographed in Scotland and describes his journey to becoming an Associate. Irish member Suzanne Behan tells us of how her interest in photography and nature began during childhood and developed into a passion for nature photography. Suzanne's moving account of her cancer diagnosis and how nature and photography has helped her to 'live with cancer' is inspirational. I personally found her story very positive and courageous. I extend my thanks and very best wishes to her.

The Entry Form and Conditions of Entry for the 2025 Nature Group Annual Exhibition are included in this issue for those of you who prefer not to enter online.

My apologies for the late publication of this issue. This was due entirely to a house move. Suffice to say, these things never go as one might wish and one day I might discover where everything is!!

This will be my penultimate issue as Editor. I find it hard to believe that there is not a single person in the group who does not have the skills to take over my role. If no one steps up, the Spring issue may well be the final issue of The Iris but I hope not.

Perhaps I won't be the first, but Season's Greetings to you all and Good Health, Happiness and good photo opportunities for the year ahead.

Dawn Osborn FRPS - Editor



From the Chair

In the Summer issue of *The Iris*, I said I was still waiting for summer to arrive in the UK. Now at the end of October, I am still waiting! It has not been a great year for weather and as a result UK butterfly numbers have been well down. The Group however remains strong and Group Members have continued to produce to great nature images.

I look after the Monthly Competition, which has proved very popular and has now been running for over a year. Great images, particularly the leading ones each month. Statistics: in the first twelve months, 557 images were entered averaging 46 per month. Birds were the most popular subject (56% of entries), mammals second (21%), invertebrates third (17%), underwater fourth (2%) and lastly fungi + plants + other subjects (4%). Figures like these help us to tailor the Group's activities to reflect Members' interests. Please keep entering as the quality of the images is an inspiration to all Members.

Websites:

Over 320 Members are now registered on the Nature Group website - it's an excellent place for us to provide NG news, advertise Events, host Galleries of Members' images, show the accepted images from our Annual Exhibition as well as run the Monthly Competition. We intend to continue using the Lightbox section of the website to provide constructive critique of Members' images, particularly for those working towards ARPS and FRPS.

RPS Developments:

I have no more news on the planned sale of RPS House in Bristol. This should not have a significant impact on the Group although as I said in the summer, I do have concerns about how the RPS is going to manage Distinctions in the future.

The RPS plan to charge each Special Interest Group (SIG) for the services it provides. These include Financial, Membership and Website/IT services. The charge is likely to be just under 20% of Members' subscriptions. SIGs and Regions are working hard with the RPS to ensure that the RPS delivers the services we are being asked to pay for. The Nature Group Committee is monitoring the situation and assessing the likely impact on our finances.

Group Membership:

I am very pleased to report that the Group membership is slowly increasing and as of the 31st October 2024, the Group had 980 Members.

The Iris:

I firmly believe that *The Iris* is the best of the RPS Special Interest Group journals thanks to the tremendous amount of hard work and expertise that Dawn Osborn puts into producing each issue. But we face two challenges: firstly Dawn would like to step down as Editor at the 2025 AGM; secondly the ever increasing cost of producing and more particularly mailing a paper journal.

If you are interested and have the skills to take over as Editor of *The Iris* – or help with the production – then we would very much like to hear from you. Please contact either myself or Dawn.

In the three years since *The Iris* moved to the larger A4 format, the cost of printing and posting it has increased by over 50%. Of particular concern is the cost of overseas postage so we may have to ask Overseas Members to read *The Iris* online. Your thoughts please.

On a more general note, we need to strengthen the team that runs the Group. So if you are interested in helping to run your Group, then please contact me.

Field Meetings and Workshops:

This year, Ann Miles has put together another excellent programme of UK Field Meetings. Ann would very much like to hear from Members prepared to organise a Field Meeting in their local area.

The Macro Workshop that we ran in early July for 15 Members at Welney was very successful. Particular thanks to Nick Bowman, who organised it. I am very keen to build up a programme of workshops to help Members develop their nature photography skills. Please let me have any ideas for topics and venues.

Residential Weekend 2025 – Date for your Diary:

Preston Montford Field Studies Centre near Shrewsbury is booked for the weekend of Friday 6th to Monday 9th June 2025. The Group has not been to Preston Montford since summer 2015, so it will be great to revisit some of Shropshire's excellent Nature Reserves. Watch the Group website for further information on cost and how to book.

Congratulations to Suzanne Behan ARPS and Lachlan French ARPS, whose successful panels appear elsewhere in this issue. More to follow in the next issue of *The Iris*.

Enjoy your Nature Photography.



Honduras

by Tim Cossins ARPS

In February 2024 my wife and I went on a tour of Honduras booked through Naturetrek. We had looked at Costa Rica but chose Honduras due to the fact that we stayed in one location. The Immigration and Customs paperwork prior to the trip was difficult but Naturetrek were helpful. Even the customs form had to be done online before we left for home but the lodge staff were again very helpful. After three flights over three days we finally arrived in Honduras and after a three hour drive with lunch and a comfort break we arrived at the Pico Bonito Spa Lodge in time for dinner.

Based in its own rain forest, Pico Bonito Spa Lodge has many trails surrounding it and it is reported to have ca. 420+ species of birds within the local area. There are in excess of 750 species in Honduras with more being added. Our lodge was spacious and very comfortable. Food was very good with all meals taken alfresco on the veranda. Oh so very pleasant. Even at 8 o'clock at night. We had two guides at all times with our party of 13. Alex Alvarado was superb. His knowledge and spotting was first class. He was assisted by Joel who was also very knowledgeable.

My photo gear consisted of my trusty Canon R5, RF100-500 f4.5-f7.1 lens, along with an EF100mm f2.8 IS USM L Macro lens, RF24-105mm f4 L lens and an RF1.4X convertor. The RF100-500 was used for all the butterfly and dragonfly shots - the macro was never used.

Day 2 - Rest and familiarisation walking the trails around the lodge. Many photos were taken but due to the early start the light was not brilliant. High iso the solution. However it soon brightened up and the photography improved.

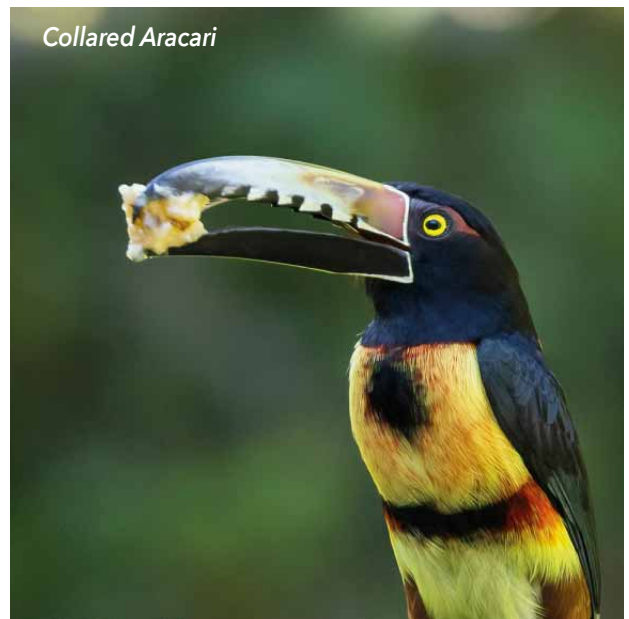
It soon became clear that distant small birds were going to be a problem, even at 500mm. Fortunately, the R5 has a setting which sets the sensor to a 1.6x crop factor. I had carried out much testing before our holiday to be sure it could give acceptable quality images. However, this reduces the file size from an estimated 60mb Raw file to approximately 24mb. When back home the raw files were processed through Bridge then Camera Raw. After converting to jpeg in camera raw then cropped – final file sizes were in the order of about 1mb. Images were then passed through Topaz Denoise to clean up. This was OK but poor quality for my required standard of photography. OK for digital LCD projection but limited the possibility of a good size print.

The focussing of the R5 with animal eye detection was okay. RF1.4X convertor was tried but focussing at distance was far too slow so I had to rely on the 1.6X crop factor for distant shots but always returned to full frame sensor for closer shots.

We walked the trails and took many photos. After our evening meal we went out on a night walk. It was



Red-eyed Tree Frog



Collared Aracari

pitch black, the only illumination coming from head and hand held torches. We managed to find some very nice subjects and I was amazed at the images illuminated with a hand held torch. A very nice Red-eyed Tree Frog was awakened from slumber and offered some good opportunities for nice images, lit only with a torch. I was amazed by how small they are.

Some other species of note were:- Collared Aracari, Montezuma Oropendola, Black-headed Trogon, Wedge Tailed Saberwing, Crowned Woodnymph, Grey Hawk, and Blue Throated Goldentail.

Day 3 - Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge. Travelling by boat through the mangroves we saw many species and had some good photo opportunities. Our guide and boat man were excellent. Many species were photographed at close quarters from the boat. The excellent image stabilisation of the kit allowed hand held shots with no problems.

Other species of note were:- Turquoise-browed Motmot, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Ringed Kingfisher, Fascinated Tiger Heron, Wood Stork, Northern Jacana, Lineated Woodpecker, Boat-billed Heron, Green Heron, Osprey, Water Kingfisher.

Day 4 - Rio Aguan Valley .Our target the endemic Honduran Emerald Hummingbird. This trip commenced at 3:45am and a three hour bus ride in search of this elusive bird which is only found at three sites on the island. Along the way we stopped frequently and



Grey Hawk



Preying Mantis



Montezuma Oropendola



Crowned Woodnymph



Green Honeycreeper



Olive-backed Euphonia



Boat-billed Heron with young



Eastern Meadowlark

managed many roadside pictures. We arrived at an army base and soon found the elusive Honduran Emerald, with good views and photo opportunities. We also found other birds to photograph. Being well inland the heat was overpowering. This area is noted for having the highest temperatures in Honduras.

Species included:- Honduran Emerald Hummingbird, Blue Grey Tanager, Northern Mockingbird, Great Kiskadee, Eastern Meadowlark, Errant Flycatcher, Roadside Hawk, Egret, Pigmy Owl, Southern Lapwing, Black and White Owl.

Day 5 - Corinto Pearl was located close to our lodge and we saw a variety of specimens. As we walked the trails many species were spotted. The Sun Bittern was found through a small opening in the woods large enough to allow a clear shot. This was strange as it shouldn't have been there. Other species of note were:- Baltimore Oriole, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, Smooth-billed Ani, Turkey Vulture, Gartered Trogon, Yellow-throated Warbler, White-necked Jacobin and Turquoise Cotinga.



Blue-grey Tanager



Green Crowned Woodnymph



Sun Bittern

Day 6 - Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. Again, we walked trails looking for birds. Of special note was the sighting of a Slate Grey Seedeater. Alex went wild when he spotted it. After years of running tours it was a lifer for him. After putting it on his Facebook page we learnt that two of his friends were flying in from Belize Guatemala the next day just to see this special bird. I was very happy to have captured some images of it. We then drove to the main town of La Ceiba (the capital of our Altandia region) for lunch at a local Taverna with a sea view. Whilst we waited for our meal some of decided to take a walk along the beach. We wondered why no one else was on the beach and then the heat hit us! We managed a few shots of coastal birds including Sanderling, Royal Terns, Gulls, a Vulture, a Grey Pelican and overhead a Great Frigate bird. On our way back we stopped to photograph a Brown Booby which posed for us at the end of a pier.

Other species of note were:- Nicaraguan Grackle, Great-tailed Grackle, Squirrel Cuckoo, Olivaceous Piculet, Slate-Grey Seedeater, American Redstart and Streaked Xenops.



Lineated Woodcreeper



Slate grey Seedeater



Brown Booby



Cyndo Longwing



Day 7 - A final look around the lodge and exploring the trails. Weather was wet for the first time - we dodged the showers by not straying too far from the lodge. In the afternoon we spent time in the Butterfly house and the Serpentarium. A few of the pit vipers were brought out for us to film in the open at close quarters. But not too close! That RF100-500 really came into its own. Of note was finding an Apoica nest. We were warned not to touch anything, not even the branch as these are nocturnal swarm wasps. Most definitely a "do not disturb" moment.

Other species of note were:- Black Jacobin, Violet-Crowned Woodnymph, Cocoa Woodcreeper, Chestnut Coloured Woodpecker, White Faced Capuchin monkey, Green Honeycreeper, Violet Sabrewing, Yellow-Olive Flatbill, Olive-backed Euphonia, Red-capped Manakin, Grey-breasted Sabrewing,

After yet another very nice lunch we set off home for our three flights home over two days.

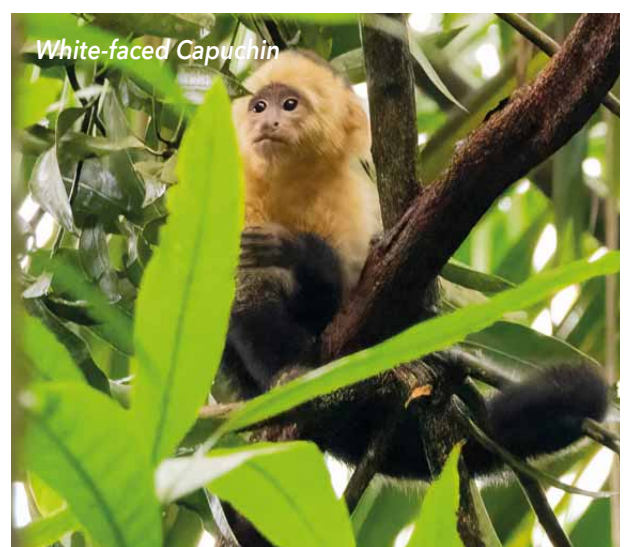
My speciality at home is entomology. I love butterflies and dragonflies. So many species were filmed in Honduras. However, identification is proving difficult. I was also amazed at the flora - such large colourful plants and flowers and which I enjoyed the opportunities to capture.

Back home the 6,500+ raw photos were uploaded, backed up, and copied to a working directory. The backup master files are never touched and are there should they be needed. 2,000+ photos were quickly deleted, the rest were assessed and the best processed through bridge and camera raw. The end product was 4,458 final jpeg images and 52 videos at full FHD quality recorded on a CF Express 500gb card. All still images were recorded to 64mb SD cards which were changed daily. Just for insurance purposes.

All in all it was a fantastic trip and I would thoroughly recommend it. The walks were slow and flat (grade A) so for people like me it was ideal. The Naturetrek company were helpful at all times.



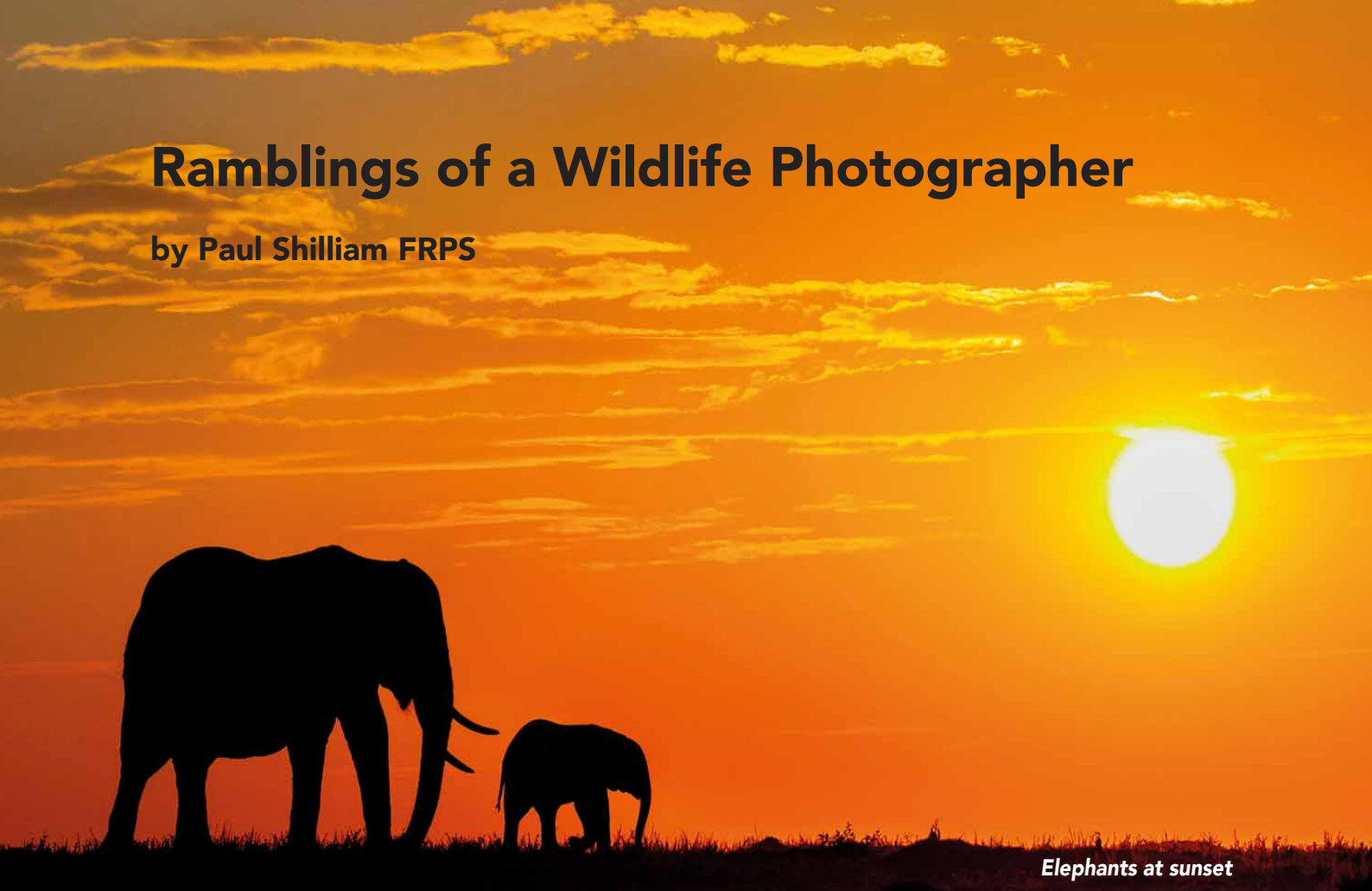
Red-mantled Dragonlet



White-faced Capuchin

Ramblings of a Wildlife Photographer

by Paul Shilliam FRPS



Elephants at sunset

Having travelled to Africa many times over the past twenty five years I was surprised when I heard a comment by one of the participants at a Nature Group zoom meeting during the covid era. The person in question suggested that photography in Africa is easy and wildlife photographs are given to you on a plate. Whereby the park ranger will take you out each day to where all the animals are found, all you need to do is click your camera and you could easily become wildlife photographer of the year. It is a statement that could not be further from the truth and I suspect many readers who have been on safari in Africa will most likely agree.

Firstly, it will not be a ranger who will drive you around it will be a safari driver/guide. The purpose of a ranger is to protect the game reserve and the wildlife within, usually they have little to do with tourists. The safari guide will chauffeur you about and hopefully, depending on his enthusiasm, experience and expertise, will help you search and perhaps locate those iconic animals of the African bush. Nothing is guaranteed.

The game reserves in Africa are not Zoos or Disney World, they are wild places where animals are free to roam. All wildlife is on a quest for survival, they are constantly searching for food, water and the wellbeing of their offspring, roaming is a natural trait. For instance,

that herd of elephants you encountered on your evening game drive could be 50 miles away by the time you visit the same spot the next morning.

In the beginning

As mentioned, my experience of Africa started over twenty five years ago with my first ever trip outside Europe. I was heading to Kenya for a couple of weeks on the beach, plus three days on safari. I had never taken a photograph before, it was my wife who always took the family holiday shots but I was going on safari and when on safari you take photographs of animals.

I purchased my first camera a Canon film camera with a 200mm zoom lens, apparently I needed a whole lot of film of different ISO. So I purchased different sizes of 100, 200 and 400 ISO rating. Why I was not sure but it must have been important. Over night I thought I had become a "Wildlife Photographer", how wrong I was.

When on this inaugural safari I took a photo of every animal or bird I saw, no matter how near or far, I wanted a picture of every species I encountered, it was tick box photography. I was not aware of things like composition, depth of field, exposure and sharpness. Although the photography was poor I had become hooked by it and addicted to Africa. I have returned to Africa on many occasions and my photography has somewhat improved.



Banded Mongoose



Male Lion at sunrise



Lion cub running

Getting better

I knew my photography was good when I was asked to supply framed photographs for a local hospital but I did not know how good. That was many years ago and I believe that my photographs are still there now. I then joined the camera club scene and progressed. When I retired I decided to prove my worth and join the big boys club, with RPS distinctions as my target.

Because of my passion for Africa it was always my intention that my Fellowship would be based on African mammals but I had to be successful at the first two Distinctions before I took on that challenge. I secured both Distinctions by the spring of 2018 with an ARPS in travel photography, it was only then I could move onto the Fellowship, I knew this was going to be a different kettle of fish. The first issue for me was to determine what differentiates an FRPS African wildlife photograph from that of a ARPS image. What are the components that make an FRPS image distinctive and distinguished? The second issue was how I should go about capturing such images.

Good Wildlife Photograph

Over the years I have learnt there are a number of key elements that impact the success of African wildlife photography and it may surprise some people to find out that the make of your camera or size of your lens is not at the top of the list. In my opinion the destination, time of year and mode of transport will have the greatest impact. I'm not talking about run of the mill safari photos (good as they are) but those special photos that are different to others and those that cannot fail to impress.

Travelling around in a 4x4 on safari is not the ideal method for top notch wildlife photography. Why? Because it is a compromise. Typically there will be five other passengers each with a different reason for being



Greater Kudu female

there. It may be that some are not photographers and for others it may be their first time. So everyone wants something different and therefore compromises your photography. I have found some of my best wildlife photographs are when I have waited (and waited), rarely when I turn up and take a quick shot. Your fellow passengers may be keen to move on quickly and not stay too long in one place. It could be that your seat position in the vehicle could compromise the best shots, perhaps the subject you want to shoot is on the other side of the vehicle and someone is in the way. I believe the more people in the vehicle the greater the negative impact is on good wildlife photography.

Field craft and patience

The images in my Fellowship Panel were obtained by various methods. One third have been taken from a photographic hide, another third have been taken from a hire car driven by myself and the last third have been taken from either a 4x4 safari vehicle adapted for photography with max three photographers or a standard 4x4 safari vehicle with me as the only passenger.

The hide for me has been my most successful as wildlife are more confident and act naturally when they choose to come to you rather than you approach them.

I do however, enjoy travelling around Namibia in a hire car with Etosha as my destination, the freedom allows me to choose where and when I go. The wildlife in Etosha use waterholes frequently as the waterholes are the only source of water during the dry season. Choosing the right waterhole impacts on success, also identifying direction of the sun, how photogenic the waterhole is, where to position the car and what animals visit that waterhole and when.

On one occasion, at a particular waterhole it was obvious that there was something going on, you could tell by the number of vehicles positioned on one side. On investigation I found a single female Lion had trapped a male Kudu in a small pond. The Kudu did not want to come out of the water and the



Lion Pride



Female Lions drinking



Scene at a waterhole



Lion and Kudu stalemate



Injured Kudu attempting escape



Male Cheetahs



Bull Elephant up close

Lion did not want to enter the water - stalemate! At some point the action would take place but no one knew when, so I found a good spot, parked up and setup. The temperature was in excess of 40 C and the hours passed by slowly, most of the vehicles had given up and moved on but I decided to stay to see what happens. Eventually the action started but it was all over in a flash. Unfortunately the direction of travel they chose was away from me and the subjects were surrounded by clouds of dust. I did not get the picture I wanted but that's wildlife photography. All was not lost because during that six hour period we were treated to a plethora of elephant activity as a family of about sixty elephants did what elephants do best but in a bigger pond adjacent to the trapped Kudu. I was able to pick and choose particular shots and the result was I had exactly what I needed, providing many shots to consider for my panel.

One of my favourite images in my Fellowship panel was taken from a hide located on the eastern end of Etosha. Again the name of the game was patience and field craft. Over a period of three days I spent a total eighteen hours in this hide, waiting for the right opportunity.

On one particular morning a small pride of lions had spent the night around this small waterhole, they left just as I arrived at first light. However, what remained was their scent, the lion scent was all over the place which made all wildlife somewhat nervous. Every animal approached the waterhole with extreme suspicion. It was clear to see that they were on edge during their visit; they were nervous and spooked easily. So, all cameras were put on silent mode and all movement in the hide kept to a minimum.

There was one particular herd of Zebras that totalled about eight adults and just this one small foal, it took over 2 hours for this herd to pluck up enough courage to reach the water after many attempts, sometimes stampeding away because they were edgy. Eventually they arrived at the waterhole but it took a while to position themselves to drink. My camera was focused on the foal all the time, it was the foal who would be the target, I knew there would be some special images here somewhere.

Then it happened, an Impala panicked and spooked everything around the waterhole. It was utter chaos. The little foal was the last to move but I had him in focus and captured his every move, just what I wanted.



Elephant family drinking

Reflection

When I look at those photographs I took in Kenya on my very first safari it brings a little smile to my face. To think how naive I was to believe I had become a wildlife photographer just because I had bought a camera with a 200mm lens.

During the years between then and now I have observed many photographers in safari vehicles and wonder if they think the same as I did. Maybe they would be scanning the horizon for something to photograph with top of the range cameras and long lenses, perhaps covered in camouflage material. I would ask myself are they "tick box" photographers like I was,

masquerading as a wildlife photographer or are they the real McCoy? Only their images will tell the truth.

To be a good wildlife photographer will take time and dedication, it does not happen overnight! Perseverance and patience is essential. Learning from your mistakes is a must. Good wildlife photography is not all about equipment, field craft and vision play an important part. When you eventually acquire the "Seeing Eye" - visualising the image before you take the shot - then you know you have made it and can call yourself a wildlife photographer.

Paul Shilliam FRPS - www.photosnapshot.co.uk

Black Rhino



My Scottish Journey to Associate

by Lachlan French ARPS

My current journey in photography was facilitated by my retirement in 2019 and inspired by two presents. The first being Colin Prior's stunning tome of *Scotland's Finest Landscapes* and the second a week's photography trip to Assynt on the West Coast of Scotland. I was a keen holiday photographer but it became pretty apparent that I didn't have the necessary expertise to really do the stunning locations justice. I always find the critique session at the end of a week like this both inspiring and chastening!

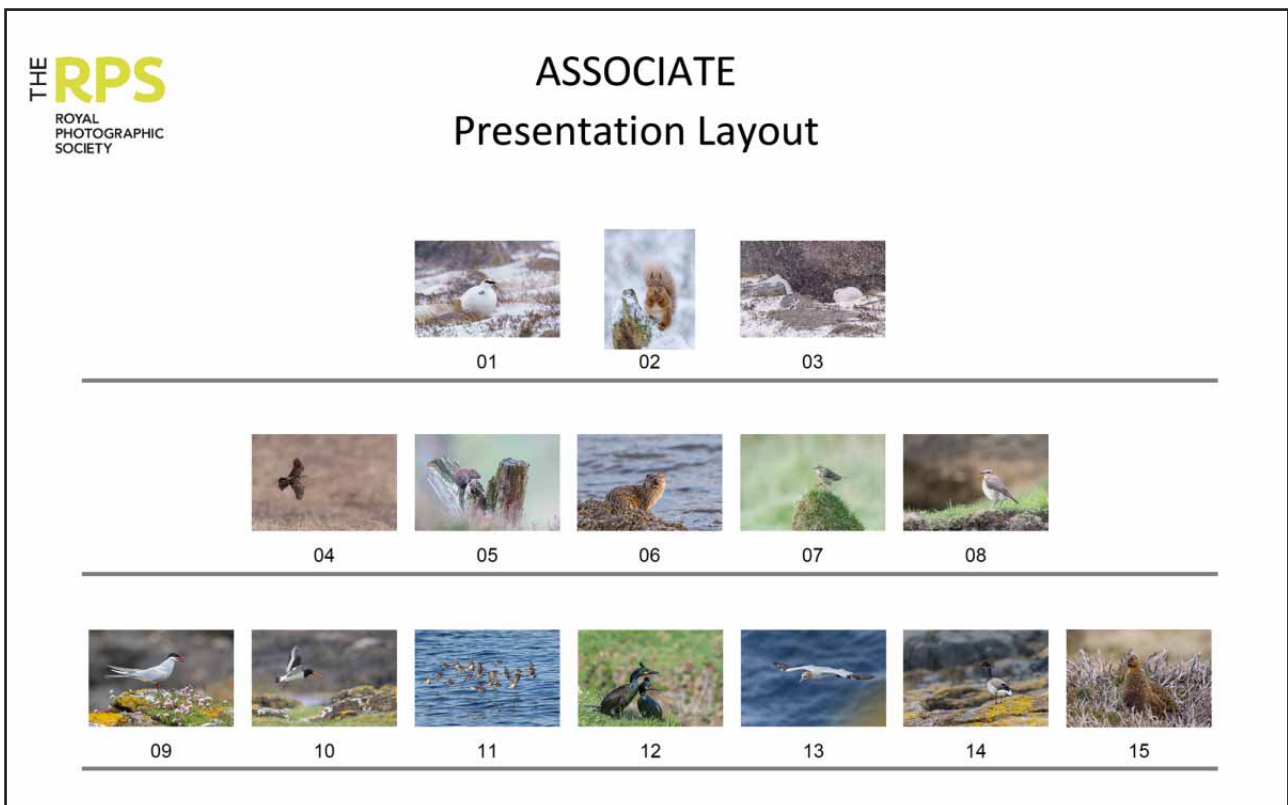
On my return home I joined Saffron Walden Camera Club, which is a relatively small friendly club. I was soon introduced to the RPS which led to me signing up for the RPS/Open University Digital Photography course in 2021 and then my LRPS followed in 2022.

At the assessment day for my LRPS I spent some time talking with Viveca Koh who had provided invaluable advice on my submission. The two key pieces of advice she gave me re an ARPS was to take my time and to find a theme that would really inspire me. I had spent

two weeks the previous winter in the Cairngorms photographing local wildlife, including a couple of pretty wild snowy days. This combination provided some unforgettable encounters and sowed the seed for a nature panel on Highland wildlife.

I had a number of ideas for a Nature panel and needed some specific guidance as to how to approach this. I was able to arrange a 1:1 with Moira Gardner from the Nature Distinctions Panel and shared my ideas on themes and a range of potential images. Moira was extremely helpful in helping me put a plan together and also setting the bar for the standard of images required. Many images fell at this hurdle, but there is nothing better than a fairly heavy dose of constructive honest feedback. It was definitely one of the key stages in the process of achieving my ARPS distinction.

By this time I had also joined Cambridge Camera Club, a club with many talented nature photographers who provided incredible support and encouragement throughout this process and my broader photographic journey.





For me there is one key skill that applies throughout all the components of the distinction journey and that is attention to detail. It applies in the taking of images, in the processing of images and it also applies in presentation. It is incredible how just changing the size of the mounted images can impact the overall look and coherence of a panel.

As I continue to explore different genres I have not developed a particular style but a consistent theme is trying to get the basics right. That is a fundamental building block to developing a style. At the top of the list of photographers that have influenced me would be Colin Prior for his signature highland panoramas as well as his more recent intimate landscapes. There are also a number of local photographers in the Cairngorms doing some stunning work including the nature photography of Andy Howard and Neil McIntyre and landscapes of Ed Smith.

As I am still relatively early in my photographic journey and am still enjoying different genres I will continue to take opportunities as they arise and see where that leads. I have recently become an English Heritage photography volunteer at Audley End. This has involved some varied projects and is proving both challenging and rewarding. In time I am sure that the journey will lead to another ARPS, probably in the Landscape genre, and hopefully a Nature FRPS but that is a considerably bigger challenge!

My only advice for anyone aspiring to achieve the ARPS distinction is to remember that the basic objective is to have fun taking images and enjoy developing yourself as a photographer. I think the distinction process provides two key elements to achieve this: the focus of putting a portfolio of images together and most importantly a learning experience. Sometimes the learning experience is a fairly steep one, but that often leads to the best results.





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My expertise and experience as a photographer has developed considerably over the last few years and the RPS distinction process has had a significant positive influence. To me the most rewarding part is looking at the images I take and seeing them improve; it is even better if other people start to enjoy your images as well!

The two images (5&6) that I enjoy the most from my panel were both taken on a trip to Shetland in March 2023. The Otter was taken early in the morning at low tide and was my first real close encounter with this wonderful animal, a morning to remember. The Skylark was taken on the walk back to the car park at Hermaness NNR and was an exercise in perseverance. Having spent the day photographing Gannets I thought it would be easy to capture a Skylark Ascending. A good hour later I decided I had done as best I could and one of my images did make the grade.

Another of my favourite images is the group of purple Sandpipers in flight. This was taken on a sunny February morning at Tarbet Ness on an impromptu visit to the lighthouse. I happened to have my 200-600 on the camera and was pleased to capture the image on a single fleeting fly past.

The one glaring omission from my panel is the lack of a deer image, probably the iconic highland animal. I had two images that were considered. One a group of three Hinds and one of two Stags, both taken on the snowy and atmospheric February day mentioned earlier. The two stags being your classic 'Monarch of the Glen' image (below) was unfortunately not eligible as it had been in my LRPS. The hinds were short of their legs and the rear one was out of focus, so also not to be included.





Statement of Intent

The aim of my panel is to encourage a greater appreciation of the wildlife of the highlands and islands of Scotland. My objective was to capture a diverse range of both mammals and birds, in different environments and varied weather conditions.

Most of the images were taken either in the Cairngorms National Park or on the small Isles off the west coast of Scotland. Images were taken in a broad range of habitats including sea cliffs, woodland, moorland, grassland and seashore.

An experienced local guide was used to carefully approach the Otter and a commercial hide was used to photograph the Red Squirrel and Vole.



Species List

- 01 Rock Ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta*)
- 02 Eurasian Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)
- 03 Mountain Hare (*Lepus timidus*)
- 04 Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*)
- 05 Short-tailed Vole (*Microtus agrestis*)
- 06 Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*)
- 07 Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)
- 08 Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)
- 09 Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- 10 Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)
- 11 Purple Sandpipers (*Calidris maritima*)
- 12 Shags (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)
- 13 Gannet (*Morus bassanus*)
- 14 Brent/Canada Goose Cross (*Branta bernicla/canadensis*)
- 15 Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus*)



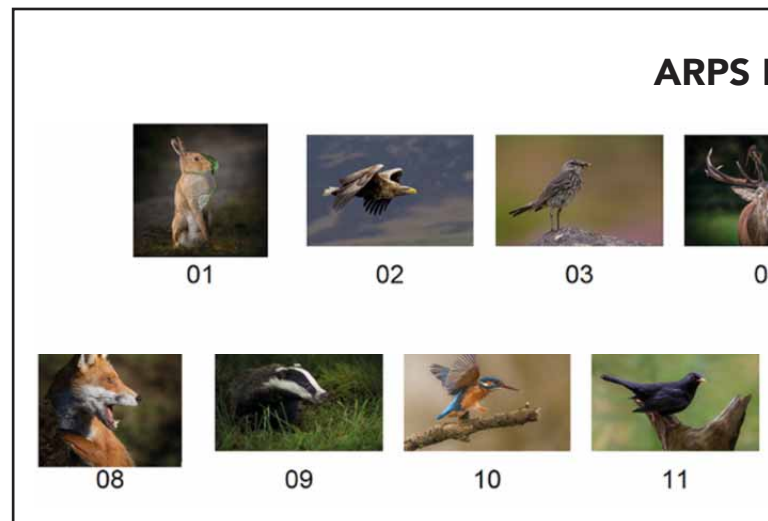
Healing in Nature

by Suzanne Behan ARPS



They say certain smells will remind you of specific occasions people or places, and for me smelling the chemicals used in a photographers darkroom instantly take me back to my childhood and my memories of my Grandad John, a professional photographer in Dublin for over 60 years. At the back of his shop was my Grandad's sacred space, his darkroom. This small but magical place filled you with wonder as a child. Bottles and jars filled with all sorts of chemicals, including developer, stop bath and fixer and a green light hanging by a string overhead. There were metal trays, timers and his enlarger - all the tools of his trade. The latest batch of negatives and photographs would be hanging up to dry on lines of string going from one side of this small space to the other. I still remember the pure magic of being allowed to develop a photo and watching the image suddenly appear on the paper submerged in the tray of chemicals. This was better than any toy - this was my introduction to photography and something that has stayed with me for life.

By the time I was in secondary school I'd developed a keen interest in photography and joined the after school photography club run by a teacher, a keen darkroom photographer who took time to pass on his knowledge. It's people like this, giving their time, that are vital to ensuring a whole new generation get to experience the joy and the art of photography. Of course, my Grandad was still keen to teach me too and took great joy in



knowing I was learning the skills of the darkroom. Learning how to use a camera and sharing his lifelong passion I guess led the way into my journey with photography. It's funny how over time we all fall into the genre or niche style of photography we love most.

As a kid growing up, David Attenborough and his series "Wildlife on One" was a highlight in our house. Having a love of nature while living in a city can be challenging but the ritual of the Sunday afternoon drive always led us to the pine forests of the Wicklow Mountains or Dublin's beautiful coastline. Areas such as Dublin Bay, Howth and Bull Island Nature reserve were all regular destinations back then and still are for me today. When I got my first 'real' camera, a Nikon DX40, I soon realised that nature photography requires a longer lens and gear quickly began to accumulate as did the cost. As my interest in wildlife photography grew I progressed to a Nikon D750 and joined a club. Finding like-minded people really helps to develop and improve your photography.

In time I applied for my Licentiate with the Irish Photographic Federation and was successful. The natural progression was to eventually continue on to an Associate Distinction, but life took a different road. Like many, I received the life changing news of a cancer diagnosis. From this moment everything changes, the everyday you knew becomes a thing of the past and a new schedule of appointments, hospital stays, operations, scans and chemotherapy become the new normal all in an attempt to merely survive. Being a wildlife photographer and being stuck in a hospital bed for weeks at a time knowing that the seasons are changing and the natural cycles of spring and all it brings was going on without me.

Knowing that I couldn't escape the confines of my illness was quite depressing and mentally it took its toll. I knew I wasn't physically able to be out there with my camera and having to be in total germ free environment



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Layout

			
4	05	06	07
			
12	13	14	15



when your immunity is so compromised is tough. But in my mind I went out there and knew that when this last 8 month cycle of chemo was over I was going on a trip to get away. It was my promise to myself and a goal to reach. I convinced myself I would see the magical Caledonian pine forests of the Cairngorms again and many of the other amazing places I had visited in the Hebrides. In the meantime, on the days I felt strong enough, just sitting in my own garden watching the birds would scratch that itch. I had to connect with nature somehow.

It has been well documented that the positive effects of nature on illness and mental health have a phenomenal power to add to the healing process. For me the mere sense of escapism was profound, to go to a forest or lake and have no phone signal was a guilty pleasure, no hospital can phone, no doctor can call to schedule another procedure. For a few hours you are simply off the grid and don't have to say "I'm fine" to someone when really you aren't. My chemo regime gave me the chance of a further 18 months or so. The doctors told me this was my predicted prognosis, no more surgery was available and no more chemo would be effective. I was then referred to the Palliative Team. These are words you can't comprehend in your mid 40's. Strangely your fight or flight responses kicks in and you want to take control of the situation. At first there is anger then there is a sense of power and desire to control how you go when the time comes, then there is peace and coming to terms with "it is what it is". Slowly over time you start living again when in fact you are essentially dying. I adopted the term "living with" rather than "dying of" cancer. I wanted to do as much as I could and see as many places as my physical health would allow. My body had been through several complicated surgeries and poisoned by toxic chemo drugs - nothing was that easy anymore.

I finally began to think about trying to complete my A before I started to feel unwell again. It was something that I wanted to achieve, and once more it became a personal goal. Some of the bird images were taken in my garden and Dipper, Kingfisher and Hare all within a few miles of my home when that was all I could manage. When I finally got the strength to take that trip, I captured the Crested Tit, the Sea Eagle and the pair of Red Deer Stags.

I applied for my Associate with the Irish Photographic Federation in Sept 23 and was successful. I wasted no time and immediately applied to the RPS for the next Natural History Distinction Assessment - March 2024.

I was also successful. I found both processes similar to some degree but very different in other ways. I felt a sense of achievement when one RPS assessor stated "you can feel the passion for nature in these images through what was a great personal struggle for the photographer". I'll forgive them for stating on three occasions that it was a "great example of British wildlife" despite my species list identifying the Red Deer as native to Ireland along with most of the other images. Bar three, all taken in Ireland. It's an easy mistake as we do share a lot of common species but one to consider when overseas members are applying too.

My statement suggests that there is healing in Nature. The natural world offers a reprieve from the fast pace of daily life, giving the mind a chance to slow down and reconnect. Just being out in natural surroundings allows for moments of reflection, which helps to process your emotions and gain perspective when you are living with serious illness. Thankfully I have been one of the lucky ones. I have continued to thrive despite my given prognosis and have upgraded my camera gear. I have surpassed my 'best before date' ... It's been a struggle but with determination you can achieve anything. FRPS will be the next hill to climb.....

Statement of Intent

In this panel I present a selection of images taken throughout my healing journey with cancer.

Growing up I was an avid nature lover which developed into a love of capturing wildlife through my passion for photography.

Some of the images are simple portraits taken from the confines of my garden when I was unable to venture further afield due to the restrictions of my illness.

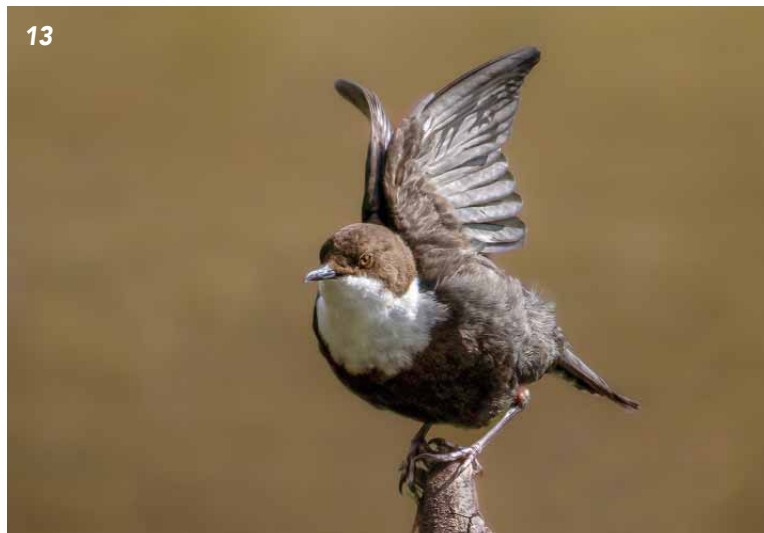
Others are mammals and birds photographed in their own wild habitat when I was stronger and more physically able.

All are taken with natural light and my own field-craft.

Carefully placed alongside each other in this panel, I am reminded that there is healing in nature.

Being able to be back out in nature doing what makes me happy is a blessing and one that should never be taken for granted.

Suzanne Behan



Penguins of the Falkland Islands

Part IV. Magellanic Penguins

by Dawn Osborn FRPS



Magellanic Penguins are probably the most numerous of the Penguin species to be found in the Falkland Islands. Having said that, their numbers often appear to be less than the Gentoos. This is because Magellanic Penguins nest below ground whereas the other species all nest above ground and consequently, during the breeding season, half of them are on the nest and many others are feeding at sea. Nevertheless, their conservation status is that of 'Near Threatened/close to Vulnerable'

Magellanic Penguins are considerably shyer than many of the other species and are easily spooked. On the beaches they will scurry into the sea, but if you settle down and remain still they will soon return. On land, they will hurry out of sight and hide in the tussock; if near the burrow they will disappear below ground and watch you by turning their head from side to side to look at you first from one eye and then the other.

The Falkland Islanders call Magellanics Jackass Penguins due to their braying and during their breeding season you can hear them at all times of the day and night. Magellanics return to their breeding sites around mid September. They excavate their burrows in the soft peaty ground of the coastal heath or below Tussock pedestals and with reasonable access to the beach. Great care should be taken when walking across/near a Magellanic colony - the turf may be thinner than you think and its very easy to put one's foot through the roof of a burrow!

Eggs are laid around the middle of October and will be incubated for approximately 40 days. Typically there will be two chicks. Nesting below ground does have its benefits - very young chicks are safe from predators and protected from the worst the climate can throw at them. The downside is that as the chicks get older, both

Crossing the beach



Magellanic Penguin calling



Magellanic bringing nesting material to the burrow



Courtship

Striated Caracara with prey



parents need to go to sea to feed them. The older they get, the bolder and more curious they become about the world outside the burrow - if they put their heads too far out of the burrow they may be dragged out by a waiting Striated Caracara. The chicks will be visible at the nest hole from about Christmas onwards and are covered with light brown down above and a dirty white below. They will 'fledge' late January/early February

and will have lost most of their down but will remain supported by their parents. By the time they are a year old they will be fully proficient at sea and will return to the site of their origin. These immature yearling birds appear fully grown but do not have the distinctive black and white plumage of mature adults and will not breed until the following season. Adult birds will moult at the end of the season and return to sea in March.

Magellanic parent with two hungry chicks





Magellanic coming through a wave



Coming ashore

Magellanic average about 14 inches in height and like all penguins, have an almost comical waddling walk. If startled or alarmed they will often fall on to their belly and propel themselves forward using their feet. Viewed head on they almost have a parrot like face but viewed from the side they are quite a handsome species. Watch them in the ocean and they are something else. Their bodies become like torpedos, sleek and fast.

Other members of their genus include the Humboldt, Galapagos and the South African penguin species. All are similar but with variations in beak size/shape and plumage.



More pictures on the back cover.

Kit used: Canon DSLRs and Mirrorless plus lenses in various focal lengths including: 24-70, 70-200, 100-400, 100-500 and 300mm + 1.4X/2X extenders.



Curious Magellanic



Portrait of a mature Magellanic



Magellanic collecting on the beach at sundown

2025 Members Exhibition of Prints and Digital Images

Exhibition Selectors: Richard Kay FRPS, Greg Lovett ARPS, TBC

Exhibition Calendar:

Entry system will open	2nd January 2025
Closing date for entries	15th March 2025
Selection Day	23rd March 2025
Report cards	by 30 th March 2025
Exhibition Opening	12th April 2025

Entry should be made 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 member that cannot use the online entry system can send a completed entry form along with their images via email to rpsngxsec@btinternet.com.

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 2025 issue of 'The Iris'. All exhibition entries and results will be shown on the Nature Group website: <https://www.rpsnature.org.uk/>

Slide shows of all accepted images will be available on request from the Exhibition Secretary.

Digital Entries

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

Print Entries - Important

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

This year we are only accepting unmounted prints on A3 paper. Prints will not be returned.

All accepted prints will be mounted and displayed at the Exhibition Opening. They will also be shown at Edinburgh PS later in the year.

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 2025

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. **Nothing may be added to the original image by any means.**
- Images of captive subjects or those captured using live bait are not permitted.
- 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 'Iris', the RPS Journal, and the Nature Group's 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

- Prints must be submitted unmounted on A3 paper. The image may be any size within the paper. DO NOT trim the paper to match the image but leave the paper as A3.
- 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.
- Prints will NOT be returned

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 email/memory Stick or by electronic means using Wettransfer or Dropbox. File naming protocol: - Category and number corresponding to the details on the entry form, space, and Title. (e.g. **PA1 Common Seal DB1 Oxeye Daisies**). Please use both upper and lower case, as in these examples. **Please do not use this method of entry unless you cannot use the online entry system.**

RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2025

ENTRY FORM (Manual Entry Only)

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 2025

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:

The fee for entering the exhibition is £10

Please note, prints will not be returned.

Payment to be made via the NG Exhibition Event on the RPS website. A link to the payment event will be provided to all members at the time the entry opens.

Please do not send cheques with your entry.

Please send your print entry to:

RPS Nature Group Exhibition
 c/o Ralph Snook ARPS
 8 Knole Close
 Almondsbury
 Bristol
 BS32 4EJ
 Email: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

A Hidden Gem.

by Sonya Knox FRPS

After a long period of travelling this Spring, we came upon a website advertising Photographic hides. Sadly, by the time that we arrived there, all the various young birds had fledged. Rest assured, we will be returning in Spring 2025!

The business is owned and run by Sharon Levi. All the Hides are situated on their farm in Worcestershire. The hides are solidly built, with super comfy swivel seats. Gimbles and plates are provided.

The species currently being offered are Little owls, Kestrels and Kingfishers, however, a wildlife pond is currently under construction and may provide a hide for photographing Otters in the future.

The farm has several large mature Oak trees in which the Little Owls nest. The Kestrel hide is adjacent to a field where a Kestrel nest box has been built high

up on an artificial pole. I understand that the Kestrels bred successfully this year. So annoyed that we missed both the young Owlets and the young Kestrels!

Sharon is very knowledgeable, but amazingly, is not a keen photographer. I hope that I was able to pass on some tips on making the perches used for feeding the birds a little more photogenic. I look forward to seeing the results, possibly this Winter.

The farm is very conveniently situated close to the M5. A caravan is also available for anyone that wishes to stay overnight. We went in our own motorhome and although it is not set up as a camp site, we were allowed to hook up to the electricity and spend the night there.

For further information please visit Sharon's website: brinepitwildlifephotography.co.uk
Well worth a visit!



The White Storks of South West Portugal.

A photographic project by Yealand Kalafayan

Summary

The White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) of South West Portugal are unusual because some of them build their nests on rocks in the sea. They are the only White Storks that do this. I first encountered these birds [Image 1] in mid-February 2018 when I was on a walking trip with my wife. The nests were occupied by adults but there was no sign of chicks. From time to time these enormous birds took flight across the sea [Image 2] or across rock faces [Image 3]. As I had wished to travel light I had left my camera behind and only carried a mobile phone.

Seeing these storks made such an impression on me that I resolved to learn more about them and to return with my camera and a suitable lens at a time when there would be chicks in the nests. Then came Covid and it was not until mid-May 2023 that I was able to go back for a brief three day visit. During that trip I obtained a few usable photos and more importantly I identified a good locality from which to observe and photograph the sea-nesting storks. In 2024 I re-visited the same locality on two occasions at the end of April and end of May. I was able to observe and photograph the birds for a total of 8 days.

Background

It is not entirely clear why some of these storks have begun to build their nests at sea. For hundreds of years storks have built their nests in trees or on suitable man-made structures such as roof tops, church steeples, pylons or telegraph poles [Image 4]. It is only in the last 30 years that this sea-nesting behaviour has been documented.





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The population of storks fell gradually during most of the last century with a nadir in the 1980s. Since then there has been a rapid population increase in the Iberian Peninsula. The data on this is reliable because there has been a coordinated census of wild storks throughout Europe every decade since 1934. (There were attempts to count nesting storks as far back as the 19th century but they were not systematic). There are currently probably over 60,000 pairs of storks in Spain and Portugal. More accurate figures will soon be available as 2024 is the year of the decennial census. Prior to the 1990s almost all storks in Iberia migrated across the straits of Gibraltar in order to spend the winter in West Africa. By the 2004 census the vast majority of Iberian storks were resident throughout the winter.

This change in migration pattern has probably come about because the birds have learned to supplement their usual diet of amphibians, small mammals and large insects by feeding from landfill sites. Crucially this food source is available all year round and has rendered migration unnecessary. In addition, changes in agricultural practice, particularly the expansion of rice farming, have been accompanied by the accidental introduction of the Red Swamp Crayfish (*Procambarus clarkia*). This nutritious crustacean is more easily hunted in the winter months when the water levels in wetland areas are higher. It constitutes a significant year-round part of the diet of this population of white storks. [Image 5]

The consequence of year round residency and the related expansion of the population seems to have 'pushed' some of the storks into nesting on off-shore rocks. The best estimate is that only a few hundred pairs currently nest in this way.

Methods

The clifftop locality that I had first noted in 2018, and which I had then re-confirmed as suitable in 2023, allowed me to survey a long ridge of rock stretching westwards out into the sea. I counted seven nests of which six were definitely occupied in 2024 [Image 6]. About five minutes' walk away around the cliff there was another rock in the sea supporting a further four nests of which three were occupied. [Image 7] This one locality allowed me to keep an eye on nine nesting pairs.

A local contact directed me to some inland sites where I was able to observe and photograph storks feeding, gathering nesting materials and mating.

I found accommodation less than ten minutes from my observation site. The owners seemed sympathetic to my strange hours. My day started with the dawn and I usually popped back briefly for breakfast in the middle of the morning. After about 3 pm the angle of the sun made photography difficult. I then sometimes travelled inland to photograph the storks in their feeding areas.





Alternatively I stayed at the coast in order to continue observing the birds during the late afternoon. I wanted to understand as much as I could about their behaviour.

Equipment

I used a Nikon D800 with a Tamron 150-600 zoom lens. The reach of this lens was adequate but only for the closest nests. My attempts to use a teleconverter were not successful so I discontinued this fairly quickly. I also carried a Nikkor 24-70 lens. Stability was provided by a Manfrotto tripod mounted with a Benro gimbal.

Fledglings and Nest Behaviour

Every occupied nest had fledglings [Image 8]. Most sources say that White Storks lay 3-5 eggs. I did not observe any nests with more than three eggs or

fledglings. There were several nests with fledglings of different sizes. It is apparently normal for the hatching of eggs to be spread across several days or even weeks. Infanticide (but not fratricide) apparently occurs and I observed one nest containing one live chick and the dead body of a second chick [Image 9]. Over several days I witnessed the adult often pecking at the corpse but it did not attempt to throw it out of the nest.

The adults spent much of their time just standing still or sitting down. Standing on one leg was quite common and is apparently an attempt to reduce heat loss from the legs. These periods of inactivity were interspersed with preening. On sunny days and particularly around midday the adult would stand up and shade the chicks [Image 10]. They sometimes busied themselves with tidying the nest, throwing out debris or re-arranging the nesting materials. [Image 11]. Sometimes they walked carefully backwards in order to defecate outside the edge of the nest [Image 12].





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The storks share the rocks with Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*) and Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus michahellis*) [Image 13]. The latter two species seemed to threaten the Storks directly from time to time and the Storks have to defend the nest.

Parental Roles

The adults take turns in incubating the eggs and in caring for the fledglings. The males and females look alike and it is not possible to determine which is which. One adult flies inland to feed and to gather nesting material. At least for the birds I was observing the birds exchanged roles about every 2 hours. Sometimes several birds returned together suggesting a degree of cooperative feeding in this locality. After a brief greeting between the returning bird and the one that had been watching over the chicks, the latter flew off. The two birds were together for little more than a couple of minutes at each changeover.



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Greeting Ritual

The greeting ritual consists of both birds arching their long necks over their back whilst clattering their beaks [Image 14]. Most pairs repeated this action about half a dozen times. The ritual lasted about 30 seconds. Sometimes the returning bird brought back nesting material such as straw and appeared to 'give' it to its mate [Image 15-17].

Feeding

As soon as the first bird had departed the chicks would generally start to beg the recently returned bird for food [Image 18]. The adult regurgitated food directly into the nest. The chicks fed immediately and seemed always to be hungry. The growth rate of the young is impressive and they attain adult stature in around two months.



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Fluids

Sometimes the adults brought fluids for the chicks. In these instances the adults inserted their beak into the chick's beak [Image 19 or vice versa [Image 20].

Arrivals

The adult returning to the nest from its inland feeding place generally flew low over the cliff and arrived at the nest in a wide arc. During normal flight the head, neck, legs and feet are all extended [Image 21]. Just prior to landing the legs drop down and the neck is flexed in a characteristic posture [Image 22]. The incoming bird often carried nesting material in its beak [Image 23].

Departures

Taking off is easy as the nests are high above the sea. The departing adult simply steps off the nest [Image 24] and flies away over the rocks [Image 25] and then over the sea. At this location the storks barely need to gain height as their nests are only a few tens of meters below the level of the cliffs and the landscape is flat for several kilometers inland.





Storks Inland

At this time of year the countryside is a patchwork of untended floral meadows and agricultural fields some of which are already turning brown. The storks can be found foraging and collecting nesting materials in both environments [Images 26 and 27]. They can be also be found in estuaries [Image 28].

Mating

Although I did not witness any birds mating while observing the sea-nesting sites, I was able to photograph several instances at one of the inland sites [Image 29]. The onset of copulation did not appear to be preceded by any obvious signal from either bird. However when I looked back at the images I had obtained of these birds during the preceding 10-15 minutes I noticed that they had frequently adopted the same posture as each other and held this position for a few seconds. This did not seem to be part of a sequence of choreographed dance moves. Rather, each pose was interspersed with other asynchronous activities. However when the photographs are put together the pre-copulatory behaviour seems striking - see images on the Back Cover.



Personal Lessons

Prior to undertaking this study I had devoted most of my efforts to macrophotography of butterflies and flowers. This project has been a real eye-opener. Developing new photographic skills together with the stimulus of learning about birds in general and Storks in particular has been most rewarding. I would encourage anybody with an interest in Natural History photography to take on projects such as this one.



Calling at the burrow



Struggling against the wind in a sandstorm



Smart looking Magellanics



Immature Magellanics

