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Editorial

For the benefit of any of you that don't know me, let me introduce myself. My name is Dawn Osborn and I've been a committee member for ten years or so. My first committee job was to produce a report of the Group's activities for the Groups & Regions section of *The Photographic Journal*. Four years ago I became Vice-chairman and my two year term as Chairman ended in April. A very keen amateur photographer for more years than I care to remember, my favourite topics are nature (flowers and birds primarily), travel and (mono) landscapes. I produce both slides and prints - the latter are now printed digitally, having abandoned my darkroom about six years ago. I work full time doing pretty much what I am doing as editor of *The Iris* - typesetting, design and layout. I like to be busy, often burning the candle at both ends and putting myself under too much pressure to achieve too much in too little time. I almost always achieve my own deadlines but this often happens at the expense of things like answering letters and returning phone calls. So, if you write or phone and I don't reply, I apologise now, because unless a reply is essential, I probably just won't have time. (I *always* answer my email.) My time really is at a premium and (selfishly) I don't want to forfeit my own photography in order to manage *The Iris*.

Clearly, I need help! More specifically I need your help, because without it there will be no magazine. The help I need is in filling *The Iris* with both interesting articles and quality images. If you have recently returned from somewhere of interest to nature photographers, developed a technique for photographing a particular species or subject, or have some useful tips on digital printing or modifying a piece of kit for example, don't keep your experiences to yourself - please share them with your fellow members through *The Iris*! Please help me out - use the long winter evenings to write something for *The Iris*. I look forward to receiving your articles and pictures.

Finally, I would like to say 'thank you' to my predecessor, John Myring, who has done such a splendid job for the past eight years. John will be a tough act to follow, but I will do my best, and with your help, *The Iris* will go from strength to strength.

From the Chair

As I write this article in the first week of September, the sun continues to shine foretelling yet another lovely day in what has been quite a remarkable summer. I cannot remember when it last was that I carried either a lightweight jacket or sweater 'just in case', nor indeed a waterproof or brolly. The only fly in the ointment has been that my garden has certainly suffered along with the rest of the nation's of course. However by the time you read the magazine it will be just a memory albeit a pleasant one.

As most of you are aware whilst I am happy to take any natural history subject my main emphasis has always been botanical and August has never been shall we say the busiest month for me, and this year certainly not. Searching around for new material I decided to fulfil a long held ambition and build a moth trap. Martin Withers supplied me with the plans and with the help of marine ply, clear acrylic sheet and the necessary electrical bits and bobs for the mercury vapour lamp I was soon up and running.

The results have been quite good considering that I live in suburban Nottingham, on the edge certainly, but still well lit. I wondered if the numbers of moths visiting would be low, but most nights have given me some interesting material to photograph. There is of course a low success rate, in many cases the moths fly off before you can push the button and I prefer not to box and chill them, but it is all good fun and I have one or two nice pictures, at least they please me.

Burnished Brass and Gold Spots are quite docile, whilst Silver Ys are far too lively. It will be interesting to see how the moth fauna changes over the year and it has certainly given me another interest.

Another reason for taking a few more pictures is that I have bought another camera body, unfortunately my much loved EOS 5s were not metering quite accurately with two of my new generation lenses. I was having to compensate, the 300 IS f4 requiring half a stop less, the Sigma 180 macro half a stop more. It was all getting a bit of a fiddle and so I bought an EOS 3 and so far so good.

Would this be the last 'film' camera that I would buy? I wondered. My output essentially goes into building and renewing my slide presentations, consequently I print very little material. However, the scene is changing very quickly! I know that many of you have either gone entirely digital or certainly half way and I could be joining the digital ranks sooner than I had anticipated. Some of the results I have been seeing recently are really quite beautiful, so sharp and with lovely clear colours. Mind you, the digital camera would be only the first expense, then no doubt there would be the digital projector. It never ends!

Have a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

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The Nature Group Convention

Report by Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

When we decided on the date for the Convention back in September 2002 we had no thought that it would coincide with the hottest weekend of this year, nevertheless it proved to be a huge success. Brooksby College provided us with a splendid new lecture room and we used the adjacent Stable Bar for all meals apart from our Saturday evening dinner, which was served in the Old Hall. Including residents and non-residents there were 38 of us, and this number seemed to work particularly well since it enabled everyone to mix very easily.

Mike Lane FRPS got us off to a wonderful start with his talk 'Modern Wildlife Photography' which showed some splendid bird photographs from world-wide locations. Those of you familiar with Mike's work will already know just how good it is, he really is a top man. Some of his very recent work, with soft foregrounds and backgrounds, is particularly impressive, although as he says, not to everyone's taste. He certainly set the stage for the whole weekend.

On Saturday morning we divided into two groups, one remaining for 'A' & 'F' advice guided by Colin Smith FRPS the present Chairman of the panel ably assisted by Tony Bond FRPS and Martin Withers FRPS, the other group going out to Brown's Hill Quarry at Holwell led by Peter Jones ARPS. Both groups enjoyed the activities although as the temperature soared in the quarry the only creatures full of energy were the butterflies and dragonflies, most of us beginning to wilt.

The afternoon started with a talk from John Jones ARPS, 'Life in the Darkness'. John is, amongst other things, a pot-holer and this talk is a photographic account of a study of the wildlife to be found in a particular pot-hole/cave near to Wirksworth in Derbyshire. Beautifully photographed and engagingly presented, he showed us spiders, beetles, fungi, bats, even a nesting blackbird just inside the entrance. Much of the knowledge is new to natural history and he plans to publish a book on the project shortly.

Following refreshments, we enjoyed three lecturettes from Maggie Manson LRPS, Nicholas Reuss ARPS and John Cucksey LRPS which took us across the world - India, the Pantanal, Southern Africa, U.S.A. and Canada. We saw some lovely work and the presentations complemented each other perfectly.

Replete from a silver service dinner we sat back to enjoy a presentation by Richard Revels FRPS 'Butterflies and other mini-Beasts'. Some beautiful photography of British butterflies and very informative commentary, leading on to in-flight photography of hornets leaving and returning to their nest. Here Richard discussed some of the techniques as well as the dangers involved! He showed some memorable images including as good a glow-worm picture as I have ever seen, as well as some glorious backlit subjects. It was altogether a great evening.

Tony Bond FRPS got us underway on Sunday morning with his talk on 'Fungi'. He began by discussing the techniques he uses and followed it up with some lovely photographs of this most difficult group of organisms. As with all subjects, lighting is important and particularly so here; too sunny - hopeless, too dull - lifeless. Tony seemed to get it just right. He showed how just a touch of flash could lift the subject without it appearing to have been used at all. Perfect.

Following a break for coffee, we had three more lecturettes from Martin Withers FRPS, Colin Smith FRPS and myself. Martin showed some beautiful flower studies followed by a range of Alpine butterflies from Italy and France, whilst I chose to show some of the pictures I had taken so far this year from flowers to moths and patterns of nature. Colin took us back to the Alps, this time to Switzerland, for some stunning flowers and butterflies.

After a good Sunday lunch we all headed homewards having enjoyed a splendid weekend.

Dorset Weekend - 2nd to 5th May 2003.

Report by John Fairbank ARPS.

Eighteen members and partners assembled on Friday afternoon for a delicious tea in the Kingcombe Centre near Toller Porcorum and were pleased to meet old friends, some of whom had been on previous trips based at Burton Bradstock, and to make new ones. On this occasion we did not have a local leader but with advice from the helpful Centre Warden, Nigel, we planned excursions for the following two days.

The Saturday was overcast, cold and windy with occasional showers, in the morning, but we went down to the coast at Bexington Beach where there were only a few flowers of any interest, Tree Mallow (*Lavatera arborea*) and Sea Kale (*Crambe maritima*) neither very photogenic. Farther inland there were some faded Cowslips (*Primula veris*) and rather poor Early Purple Orchids (*Orchis mascula*) that were taken in case there were none better later on. Our next port of call was another stretch of beach close to the Chesil Bank and some hardy ones went exploring there in a shower whilst some of us hazarded our lives shooting Rosy Garlic (*Allium rosea*) on a narrow verge beside the busy main road.

We ate our excellent picnic lunch, provided by the Centre, and went on to Chapel Coppice where there were numerous banks covered in Bluebells (*Endymion non-scriptus*) amongst the trees, and beside a stream. Farther into the copse were some good Early Purple Orchids and beside the road was a lovely single specimen of Lords & Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) just developing.

Between us we had a dozen or so cars that would have caused awful congestion in the very narrow lanes so it was providential that the centre had a minibus that we could hire and John Bebbington could safely drive.

The Centre is based in old farm buildings comfortably converted and it was a toss up whether we were better off in the Cowshed, close to the dining hall, or the Barn farther up

the lane where we had interesting slide shows each evening. The food was excellent and the Warden and staff went out of their way to make us comfortable.

The Sunday was sunny but very windy so our photography of Early Purple and Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*) at their best and in their masses at Hardington Moor was to say the least difficult. There were also specimens of Adderstongue Ferns (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) too small to be affected by the wind.

After picnic lunch overlooking the Moor, and enjoying extensive views, we moved on to Blackett's Copse where a short walk took us to extensive banks of Ransoms (*Allium ursinum*) among trees and beside a stream with again Early Purple Orchids farther on.

Some of us then went on to Powerstock Common for early specimens of Common Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) that looked particularly attractive against the sun.

It was most unfortunate that Kath Bull, who had organised the event, was recovering from a serious heart operation and unable to attend. However Eileen Taylor and Nick Jarvis ably took over.

There was some discussion during the last evening regarding a similar weekend in 2004. We had been in the area on four previous occasions, in May or June, with a professional leader who knew the best sites and got us permission to go onto private land; some members thought this a better arrangement and wondered whether we should make it a regular venue or whether we might find another area as attractive?

It was most unfortunate that Kath Bull, who had organised the event, was recovering from a serious heart operation and unable to attend. However Eileen Taylor and Nick Jarvis ably took over.

Discovering digital

David Osborn FRPS

Modern technology advances at an amazing pace, regardless of whether we're film-based die-hards and electronic sceptics. I have little doubt that manufacturing developments and marketing trends will convert us all to digital imaging in the not too distant future.

The speed at which digital imaging is progressing and improving is exceptional. Image quality at the top level is such that it already out performs film. In the US, where world camera sales are at their highest, nearly all of the professional wildlife photographers have already made the switch to DI and looking at the huge financial and developmental investments made by the camera and film manufacturers, I'm sure they'll soon convince us all to follow suit.

That being said, I must confess I was never really convinced by the principals of DI and had never seriously considered changing. However, not wanting to bury my head in the sand and knowing that change was upon us, I knew it was only a matter of time before my hand was forced. With the introduction of Canon's 2 new digital EOS SLRs, both of which have received excellent reviews, I thought the time was right to leap forward into the 21st century and try out this new medium. After all, an image is an image regardless of how we choose to record it.

Although still very sceptical, I visited my Canon dealer to purchase an EOS10D and then set about getting to grips with the new terms, technologies and methods of modern image capture.

At the onset it has to be said that the camera has proved to be very easy and pleasant to use and the cross over in systems hasn't been a problem. Canon have, in every respect, been exceptionally clever and in next to no time I was very familiar with the camera and its controls, in fact I was more than happy with the whole operation within the first few hours, an SLR is after all an SLR.

On first usage the major difference you find is that instead of putting film into the camera, you slide in an electronic chip called a flash card - a slightly confusing title as it doesn't actually flash anything. The only other external difference is the monitor on the back of the body. I'd always thought of this as a gimmick, but once I'd become familiar with it, I found it to be a rather useful tool, enabling you to preview your work. This has proved exceptionally useful while working in the field. I also found it hard to accept that I could make a whole range of ISO settings and take hundreds of shots on the same flash card. But hey - just accept that you can! It is such an amazingly useful feature. If anything, the main confusion during the whole exercise was coming to terms with the jargon associated with DI.

The next thing to get your head around is the image recording format, what on earth is that all about? Well actually once explained, even though initially confusing, it is rather easy. Basically it controls the size and quality of the image you intend to record. The only problem is that you need to decide that before taking the picture. For most uses I've settled on 'large fine jpeg', or 'RAW' images if I need particularly high quality or commercially usable material. As far as the camera is concerned that's about it.

You soon appreciate the benefits of being able to:

- change the ISO setting whenever you want
- take loads of shots on one card,
- use the monitor to preview your work and
- choosing from a variety of image recording settings.

Why change?

If you're happy with film, then why change? There's no real reason. However, I've discovered so many system advantages which previously I'd never considered and had more fun and enjoyment from my photography than I've had in years, that I'd never consider changing back!



▲ Corn Bunting

▼ White Stork delivery





▲ Common Spotted Orchid detail

▼ Fragrant Orchid detail



System advantages

- Film only gives you one piece of original material. DI can give you endless duplicated copies with no loss in quality, there's no danger of losing or damaging your precious originals, you can make loads if you need to.
- The facility to immediately preview your work as soon as you've taken it. If its not right you can then take the shot again - an amazing tool for the NH photographer. Then as soon as you're home you can preview it on the PC for a final check on quality, a lot easier than continually having to get the projector out. For me, one of the major advantages of a DI system is being able to view your work immediately.
- Once you've purchased the flash cards, you've got endless film usage at no additional expense. I estimate I will have recouped the expenditure on film and processing costs against the outlay on flash cards within a year. The flash card is guaranteed for 10 years and in addition to this, with no film wastage involved, you actually find yourself taking far more pictures and experimenting a great deal more than you ever would have using film. What a great way to learn - bash away at whatever, if you don't like it, delete it. You're not actually wasting anything other than your own time.
- The camera manufacturers have ensured that both film and digital cameras work with their current systems, so you actually only need to change the camera. An additional advantage is that most digital cameras offer an increase in image magnification of approx 1.6x, effectively making your 600mm lens almost 1000mm overnight and at no additional expense; an exceptionally useful by-product of the system and, as NH photographers, we all find the extra few mm's of magnification more than useful.
- Useful data (focal length, shutter speed, aperture, etc.) is recorded along with the image and can be accessed through the browser in image editing software such as PhotoShop. (see right) ►

- During the past year I've found an increased need to forward images via the net but never been able to do so other than pester Dawn to scan images for me. Now that I have the material readily available on the PC I can achieve that easily. The images can also be projected, printed and forwarded - the whole process being controlled by you, an advantage which I have come to appreciate greatly of late. I haven't done any prints of my own for years and only ever had a handful professionally reproduced from slides, but I have to say, as a definite non PhotoShop expert, I am now producing the best prints that I have ever done and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. Which brings us onto quality.
- Image quality is excellent! I can only repeat that I'm producing my best prints ever and I'm doing it myself.
- Image storage is another plus. I can get the equivalent of approx 12 slide films onto a single CD.

My original idea behind moving into DI was as a back-up to my film based work, but I have enjoyed my digital work so much that in a very short space of time it has almost completely taken over and replaced it.

System disadvantages

To date the only major disadvantage is the expense. However, look at Canon's marketing strategy and note how prices over the past year have fallen. I would estimate that within two years or so digital SLRs will be of the same specification and price as their 35mm equivalents. Then watch out!



Reports on Field Meetings

Hampstead Heath - Sunday 23rd March 2003

This meeting was a bit experimental, being rather early in the year for a Nature Group meeting. Unusual for March; the weather was bright, sunny and hot! A dozen or so members, plus three members of the Hampstead Heath Natural History Society, assembled at Hampstead Youth Hostel and, after a quick cup of tea, set out on Hampstead Heath Extension. We examined some of the ancient trees which I had helped to survey. Along with the trees themselves, we also photographed bracket fungi (*Ganoderma applanatum*), Pine Ladybird (*Exochomus quadripustulatus*), Lichen (not identified) and woodland landscapes. A Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was also spotted in one of the ponds. We then moved on to the Hill Gardens, where we were able to photograph the garden flowers and a pretty pergola.

Lunch was taken in Golders Hill Park - by now it was hot enough to sit on the grass and enjoy ice-creams! Finally we finished off the day with a leisurely stroll back through the woods to the Hostel.

Diana Antonescu

Sunday 25th May 2003

Whether it has anything to do with global warming or not, I do not know, but of one thing I am sure, the seasons are becoming less predictable. 25th May was chosen for a mothing event, as it would normally coincide with peak season for many moths, including the photogenic Hawkmoths. However, it was not to be. May 2003 was unusually cool, especially at night, and hence very few moths were flying. Two nights before the event and my trap was completely empty. Luckily things did improve slightly over the next two days and on Sunday morning there were at least a few different species in the trap. I was grateful to a couple of local lepidopterists who came to my aid by bringing along some specimens from their own traps. Also my wife located a few amphibians from around the garden, so all in all we had enough specimens to go around until lunchtime.

In the afternoon we shared cars for a visit to a couple of local nature reserves. Beginning at Pilch Field (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) we were able to photograph Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*), Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), Marsh Marigold (*Caltha palustris*), and a few butterflies and craneflies. Finally we visited Linford Wood (Milton Keynes Parks Trust) where we were able to photograph Early-purple Orchids (*Orchis mascula*) in a woodland setting, plus a surprisingly large crop of Dryad's Saddle fungus (*Polyporus squamosus*) on an old Ash tree.

The following day, Bank-holiday Monday, was not originally billed as part of the event. However, all Sunday's attendees were invited and on the day, six of us gathered for a day out in the Chilterns. Our first stop was at Hartslock (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust), where we found several good specimens of Monkey Orchid (*Orchis simia*) along with a few White Helleborines (*Cephalanthera damasonium*). A short drive from here took us to the Thames at Goring, an excellent site for Club-tailed Dragonfly (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*). We observed at least eight nymphs climbing out of the water and emerging into winged dragonflies. A couple of nymphs were carefully transferred to sites on the riverbank where the various stages of emergence could be more easily photographed. Several Banded Demoiselles (*Calopteryx splendens*) were seen flying. There is also a nice flower meadow here, which provided alternative subjects for those less interested in the *Odonata*.

After a late lunch we moved on to Homefield Wood (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust), the site of the rare Military Orchid (*Orchis militaris*). Here the warden kindly allowed us to remove the cages to allow photography of some of the better specimens. This site also had plenty of Fly Orchids (*Ophrys insectifera*), plus some White Helleborines that were rather more advanced than the ones we had seen earlier. Hence we were all happy to spend the remainder of the afternoon at Homefield Wood.

Nick Jarvis ARPS

Reports on Field Meetings

Oxwich Bay, Sunday 8th June

On what will probably have been the hottest weekend of 2003, the Oxwich Field Meeting was really splendid and attended by twenty members from locations including Aylesbury, Bath, Biggleswade, Cannock, Cheltenham, Dartmoor, Kenilworth, Kingswood, Newport and Solihull. Some members had attended the Kenfig meeting the day before and had made a short holiday of the weekend, utilising the facilities of a variety of pleasing B&Bs in and around the Gower,

At the beginning of the day, mine was the only car in the car park, by the end there were many hundreds. Fortunately, one of the advantages of Oxwich is that most people don't venture far along the beach and therefore the rocky shore and the Nature Reserve were empty.

One of the first things to be seen were Springtails, the only insect of the seashore, floating on the surface of a shallow pool; followed quickly by Brittle stars, chitons, a Pipefish worm, prawns, a Butterfish and Dog Whelks with egg clusters. Some pools were inhabited by dozens of small hermit crabs (they are rarely found singly) scuttling about in a variety of shells. Spawn of *Aeolida papillosa*, the grey sea slug, was seen and soon after, a pair of mating adults. Several Broad-clawed Porcelain crabs, Shore, Edible and Swimming crabs were seen as well as Beadlet anemonia, including one strawberry variety.

On the way back to the cars for a hasty lunch, many sea potatoes were dug from the wet sand, also a very large dark grey Gaper with its foot partially exposed, and some very unappealing burrowing anemoneas, *Peachia cylindrica*.

Following lunch we headed into the dunes, where we found many fine spikes of orchids; Southern Marsh, Early Marsh, Pyramidal, Fragrant and Twayblade; also Round-leaved Wintergreen and early Foxgloves climbing out of the Creeping Willow. The Red Beetle (rather like a large but unspotted Ladybird) which lives on the Creeping Willow was much photographed. *Orobanch minor* rose out of a carpet of Yellow Rattle; Sea Stock and new tufts of Marham Grass created stunning

shadow patterns on untrodden sand; colourful splashes of Bloody Cranesbill's contrasting with the blue sky and the sand; beautiful patches of Yellow Rockrose and Yellow Sedum with vigorous growths of Sea Holly. Add to this fun, friendship and ice cream and you have a very memorable day.

My weekend was rounded off nicely by a visit to Worm's Head with two members who stayed on. The extremely low tide produced a goodly number of creatures not seen during the previous day: Green Pea Urchins, Snakelocks anemones and, especially attractive, a group of pink and mauve egg cases of Dog whelk. Best of all, the very rare and small Cushion Star, *Asterina phylactica*, brooding tiny young. This was a thrill as there are only seven sites listed in the UK where this small cushion star can be found - Worm's Head having only recently been added to the list.

The date for the 2004 Oxwich Field Meeting will be Sunday 6th June.

Margaret Hodge FRPS

Pulborough, Sunday 8th June 2003.

I visited Pulborough on the Tuesday prior to the meeting and found nothing at Pallingham Quay and only two damselflies at Stopham Bridge. On Sunday morning two members called to enquire, but in view of my earlier check of the sites and the weather at home (heavy rain and thunder), I put them off. Despite the poor forecast the weather was dry with a light wind and arriving in Pulborough I was met by four members (this would have been six had I been less pessimistic).

We enjoyed a good morning - Beautiful and Banded Damselflies were seen, also Blue-tailed, White-legged female form '*lactea*' and Large Red, plus May Flies, one having shed its skin, and various other insects which we are still trying to identify. In the afternoon it became too windy for photography and we concluded the meeting at about 2.30pm.

Ian Vaughan.

Reports on Field Meetings

Morgan's Hill, Sunday 6th July.

In my somewhat limited experience, there are two main worries in setting up a Field Meeting. Firstly, will enough people (but not too many) want to attend, secondly is the selected date right. Both are particularly relevant at Morgan's Hill in North Wiltshire as the best areas for wildlife are small and the seasons for the day's target species, Marsh Helleborine and the Marbled White are very short. Seventeen members and friends had planned to join me and this was rather too many for one group, so when Dawn Osborn phoned late on Saturday to ask if there was still room I was delighted - at my request she agreed to take charge of half of the group whilst I was showing the rest the photo opportunities provided by the colony of flowers in the ancient Quarry, a decidedly fragile environment with shallow soil and narrow access paths.

The day was bright and not too windy, and the actual attendance was fourteen. Sadly two early arrivals returned home before the start due to a twisted ankle. So twelve stalwarts marched up the Roman Road which borders one side of the Reserve and we found the Marsh Helleborines at their best - in full flower but not scorched as so often happens, and there were two distinct colonies, so plenty of room for tripods and photographers to spread out. Other flowers showing well were a few late Pyramidal Orchids, Eyebright, Restharrow, Chalk Milkwort, various Scabious, Roundheaded Rampion and large groups of Cranesbill. Some very tolerant Marbled White butterflies posed happily, and we also found the usual Meadow Brown, also Large Skipper, Ringlet, Small Heath and just one Silver Y Moth.

The weather held all day and, although we hadn't seen a great range of wildlife, I think everyone had enjoyed the visit, not least for the panoramic views of the surrounding hills. We eventually dispersed at around four o'clock.

I would like to thank all those who joined me and hope they got some good photographs.

John W Hankin LRPS

Field Meetings 2004.

Each year at this time, the Nature Group Programme Secretary begins his job of compiling a programme of events for the forthcoming year. This usually begins with a request to include the 'booking form' in *The Iris*. The programme is included in the Spring issue, and your editor needs to have the copy by the end of January, so the programme secretary, Nick Jarviss, requests that the form is returned by the New Year. Inevitably, very few will find their way back to Nick and he will then have the unenviable task of telephoning as many contacts as he can (usually leaders of previous field meetings) to persuade and cajole them to host another event. Unfortunately, the programme of events becomes smaller and smaller each year!

With a membership envied by other RPS Groups (and exceeded only by the Digital Imaging Group) it seems odd that only about 1% of our members are willing to host an event. Why is this? What are you afraid of?

The Nature Group is much more enjoyable if you participate! Field Meetings are fun! They offer both host and visitor the opportunity to meet other members and build new friendships. For the visitor there is also the added advantage of visiting a new site with the benefit of the host's knowledge of what the site has to offer and where to find it.

There is no point complaining that 'you don't do anything in my area'. Here is your opportunity to organise a field meeting yourself, at a venue and time of your choosing. You are not expected to 'teach' anything and the only knowledge required is of the venue itself. Committee members give a lot of their time working for the Group and cannot organise field meetings at venues that are located in parts of the country miles from where they live. It is up to you, the members, to ensure that there is something on in your area and that the programme of Field Meetings continues. Please volunteer to host a Field Meeting. The 'form' is on page 27 - please return it now. Thank you.

Dawn Osborn

A new format for the Annual Exhibition

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Our annual exhibition is one of the jewels in our crown. The standard of work remains very high and the travelling exhibition is now being seen by more and more people as the number of venues increases year by year.

The exhibition's aim of course is to attract as many pictures as possible from as many members as possible and covering the widest spectrum of subject material possible. Do we actually do this? Who knows. There are certainly large numbers of birds and large numbers of mammals in the entries with somewhat fewer of flowers, fungi and insects whilst other subjects comprise fewer still. Is this representative of the membership's photographic interests? From correspondence received by our previous editor, John Myring, and myself it may be that it is not. A re-occurring point being that a number of subjects are simply not as photogenic as for example a bird and are not as likely to be selected, consequently the member concerned feels that there is little point in entering.

Whether this is really correct is probably impossible to measure and we could debate it until the cows come home! It is nevertheless a perception held by a number of members. Other members have corresponded with us on the subject of more interpretive work, patterns and designs in nature and so on. There is undoubtedly a trend towards the acceptance of this style although I know that many of you feel that it is not true nature photography, once again that could be debated ad infinitum. The classic definition of nature photography is that it is the photograph of a species such that a well informed person could identify it. Many of you, probably the majority, still work to that, but others feel that the definition should be widened somewhat to include the more interpretive approaches.

Whatever your own feelings are I think it is essential that the natural history/biological content of the photograph must never become of secondary importance for it is then no longer a nature photograph.

With these thoughts in mind your committee debated possible changes to the annual exhibition, from leaving it as it is or taking a more radical approach with up to twelve categories.

After one of the most lively discussions that I can remember we decided to make a trial of having three categories, Animals, Botanical including Fungi and Other which would include Geology as well as the more interpretive subject approaches, the decision into which category any particular image should be entered resting solely with the author.

There will be, as at present, slide and print sections each selected entirely separately. A winner will be chosen from each category and a Gold medal awarded to the best of the three, the other two being awarded Bronze Medals. Highly Commended and Commended awards will be given as well as personal selector awards. Remember that all this applies to both slide and print sections.

It is important to realise that we have attempted to respond to your suggestions and we shall be interested to see what effect it has on the entries and the general balance of the exhibition.

Editor's note:

The entry form for the 2004 Annual Exhibition is included as the centre pages of this issue. Make a note in your 2004 Diary to remind you to send in an entry.

A Lane in Oman

by Mike Lane FRPS

The Sultanate of Oman has long been an isolated land to foreign visitors. The tourist was not welcome despite strong links with Britain and a very Pro-Western outlook. Our troops train there, but visas were only issued for expatriate workers with needed skills.

It is only very recently that this has changed and a tourist industry developed to exploit the 1,000 miles of pristine coastline and historic forts. Tour companies specialising in nature, especially birdwatching have been quick to move in and bird photographers are following. Many photographers have always been aware of the Oman's wonderful potential due to the prestigious Danish couple, Hanne and Jens Eriksen who have lived and worked in the capital Muscat for many years. Their brilliantly executed pictures have had many of us in awe and wonder.

The few British photographers to visit seem to have chosen November as the most promising time of year when good numbers of raptors are migrating through. Between October and March temperatures range between 15°C and 25°C, but outside of these months it is likely to be too hot for comfort.

My friend Dr John and I arrived in the middle of November after what should have been a direct 8 hour flight from Heathrow, but the plane was cancelled and we were diverted elsewhere before catching a connecting flight. We eventually arrived, but not our luggage (48 hours later). To cap that the car hire company would not accept our pre-paid vouchers and we had to pay again (resolved later). Finally the airport cash machines would not accept any of my plastic and the banks were closed. No money (other cash machines in the city worked perfectly). Fortunately our first nights pre-booked accommodation had not been burnt to the ground!

The first drive into Muscat was favourable. The modern, well tarmacked multi-lane dual carriageway made driving in an Arabic country seem surprisingly pleasant and relaxed. Green watered lawns and spectacular traffic islands

made it difficult to believe we were in a country comprised largely of desert. Cities in the Oman go to great trouble to decorate their traffic islands. There may be a large boat in the middle of one or a treasure chest or pile of large books. Even water falls, model animals or pots of tea. It makes giving directions easy, "take this road until the pot of tea island, then hang a left until the cockleshell island".

Hotels prices are slightly higher than other Middle Eastern countries, but we managed to find some bargains. In Muscat we stayed at the Qurum Beach House Hotel (Tel: 564070) with two very large, clean rooms and satellite TV for £15 a night each. Restaurants are as numerous as alcohol is rare, but beers can be found in some hotels. Meals are very good value.

Car hire is a debatable issue. The Oman is a country where 4WD could be advantageous, but of course expensive. We only had 2WD and occasionally missed out because of this, but I doubt whether it would have been worth the extra cost for the few pictures we lost. Philip Newman who arrived a few days before us had a 4WD Isuzu Trooper. This cost £35 a day with a daily limited mileage of 200kms free. Our car cost half as much and was unlimited mileage. On a two week trip 2WD drive will do and I believe Phil only got to one place we could not, which was a known sandgrouse drinking pool. Petrol of course is very, very cheap.

Before the trip tourist visas were required from the Oman embassy in London (Tel:020 7225 0001) and I took a Lonely Planet travel guide with me called "Oman & the United Arab Emirates" and it is invaluable. For a bird site guide there is only one, the "Birdwatching guide to Oman" by Hanne & Jens Eriksen and Panadda & Dave Sargeant, published by Al Roya.

The book mentions obtaining permits for the Sunub Waste Disposel Site just outside of Muscat and for Sun Farm at Sohar. We did this in advance through Siw Rantapaa-Buring of Vision International. (siwومان@omantel.net.on). Siw









is a tour organiser and could arrange the whole trip including accommodation and car hire, but we did most of it ourselves. The permits were not expensive and we collected them from Siw when we arrived in Muscat. We were never asked to produce the permit at the rubbish dump, but better safe than sorry.

The rubbish dump should be the first port of call. Maps of its location are in the Eriksen's book, but as our copy was in the lost luggage we followed the rubbish trucks until we found it. Carcasses are dumped here every day and hundreds of eagles can fill the sky in November, hence Muscat is known as the 'Capital of Eagles'.

Great-spotted and Steppe Eagles are the most common and can easily be photographed from the car. Other species that may appear are Imperial and Tawny Eagles as well as Lappet-faced Vultures, Egyptian Vultures and Brown-necked Ravens. Not too far from the tip is the Al Ansab Lagoons at the back of the sewage works. Various birds present themselves for photography on the tracks around the waters edge.

Once our luggage arrived we set off further north to Sun Farm at Sohar. An easy 4 hour drive and not to be missed. There was still plenty of accommodation available here with no need to book in advance, but it was more expensive. We stayed at the Al Wadi Hotel (Tel: 840058) for about £25 a night each.

At the security gate entrance to Sun Farm we did need our permit, but once inside could drive around the huge estate at will. We got excellent pictures of Marsh and Montagu's Harrier, Common Kestrel, Indian Roller, Indian House Crows, many species of waders around the farm ponds and numerous Larks and Pipits. 3-4 days are needed to do the farm justice. Although the Eriksen's book does show other sites in the area, they proved to be good for birdwatching, but hopeless for photography.

After Sun Farm we drove south through the desert empty quarter to Salalah on the coast. It is a long drive. Some 20 hours at best, but there is the option to fly and pick up another car hire there. We drove because I love deserts and we might get Hoopoe Lark on the way, which we did. At one of the rest stations, Qabit there is a

Sandgrouse drinking pool where Philip was able to photograph from his 4WD, but we were forced to turn back. The birds fly in to drink about an hour after first light, gulp down the water in 15 seconds and depart apparently.

At Salalah on the south coast we stayed at the very comfortable Salalah Beach Villas (Tel: 235999) again in large double rooms and kitchen for about £12 each with TV. Within 400 metres was the East Khawr (estuary), which was a photographers delight. The waters edge was perfect for car window photography and full of a huge variety of waders, Gulls, Flamingos, Spoonbills and Eagles. The other estuaries along the coast offered some photography, but none as good as the East Khawr.

As always in hot countries early morning starts are essential and we were usually down at the waters edge before the sun was up until I discovered the camels and how wonderful they looked silhouetted against both sunrises and sunsets. I have a soft spot for camels from my first career as a zoo keeper. They were my favourite charges.

Bird wise the highlight for me was Hobby resting on a low branch on migration, which allowed a close approach and several rolls of film. Philip Newman was staying in the same hotel at this point so we sent him a text on the mobile to tell him it was there, but fortunately it was gone before he arrived! The Osprey on a branch was also rather special.

The Oman is a wonderful place for bird photographers looking for a new Lesvos, Florida or Falklands. With time visiting photographers will discover new locations there and try it at different months of the year. February/March would be well worth exploring, but whatever time of year I would not be able to resist a few more backlit camels.

Al Wadi Hotel

www.southtravels.com/middleeast/oman/alwadihotel/

Salalah Beach Villas

www.fishing-oman.com/beachvilla.html

Qurum Beach House Hotel

www.s-h-systems.co.uk/oman/ruwi37839.html

Eriksen's "Birdwatching guide to Oman"

www.birdbooksdirect.com/oman.htm

The 6400 ISO Badger.

Russell Edwards ARPS



I had been invited to photograph the badgers at a sett controlled by the local Wildlife Trust but on condition that I did not use flash as this might upset or frighten the badgers away.

My own experience with badgers and flash is that the first time the flash goes off they take little notice, the second flash makes them think it is going to rain and the third flash convinces them and they run for cover. Whilst photographing badgers in Scotland I found that they were not at all concerned by the flash but at other locations I have found that badgers are frightened by it.)

The Trust had erected a viewing hide, open to the public, which overlooks a well established badger sett, home to about a dozen badgers. The front of the hide has a glass panel which goes down to ground level and the sett is very dimly lit by mains electricity - too dim for any photography but sufficient to see the badgers.

As the existing lighting was totally inadequate for night photography I purchased two 500 watt security lights at a fiver each and screwed them to the hide above the viewing window. (With permission of course! See Iris Summer 2003)

This improved the lighting a couple of metres in front of the hide but not much further.

I lay on the floor of the hide, handholding my Nikon F90X fitted with Nikon 105mm micro lens and took the photographs through the plate glass at an exposure of 1/125 of a second at f2.8. The camera was loaded with Fuji Superia 800 ISO film which I uprated by 3 stops to 6400 ISO. Uprating simply requires extra development time; 30 seconds for 1 stop and thereafter 40 seconds for each subsequent stop. So for a 3 stop uprating, I increase the developing time from the standard 3 minutes 15 seconds to 5 minutes.

The light from the security lights was very yellow and it was tempting to put a blue filter in front of the camera lens to prevent any yellow cast on the finished print but this would have reduced the exposure by 2 stops. Instead I removed what would have been a yellow cast on the print by increasing both the yellow and red filtration on the enlarger by 100% -35 magenta, 70 yellow was increased to 70 magenta and 140 yellow when I made the finished print.

Apart from a developing tank no special equipment is required. I use Tetenal's Colortec C-41 Phototabs which contain both the developer and bleach/fix in tablet form giving both good keeping qualities. The standard developing time is 3 minutes 15 seconds at 38°C. for all films and the bleach fix time is 6 minutes.

In my opinion, Fuji Superior 800 ISO print film must be one of the finest films on the market and offers remarkable quality for its speed even when uprated. The fast shutter speeds it permits help to prevent camera shake and the need for a heavy tripod even when using long, fast lenses; a shutter speed of a 1/1000 of a second or faster enables me to hold a 500mm f1.4 lens on a monopod, allowing greater mobility when tracking animals. Print film is easily processed and ideal for those who make their prints digitally.

Musings of a Naturalist

by Michael Shirley ARPS

A Naturalist, being a person who observes Natural History in the Field, and in particular zoology and Botany must of necessity be of a curious mind. How else can observation lead to speculation and further observation to the unravelling of secrets? Not long ago, it being early Spring and a fine warm day, I was pleased, but not surprised, to notice that the first Bombyliids were abroad in the garden. The first one in fact I discovered in the greenhouse, where its high pitched whine of rapidly beating wings alerted me to the fact that the visitor was neither bee nor wasp. As the door and windows were open I did not attempt to catch it in order to prevent it being trapped behind the insulation sheeting, as will happen with the less agile bumbling bees.

As a nectar feeder, the little hairy ginger coloured fly with its long long proboscis, would no doubt have been attracted by the Daturas whose subtly sweet perfume pervaded the air. So agile are these little insects, so much masters of their element, that one can observe them as they hover motionless or dart to one side or the other, just for the sheer pleasure of the sight.

I was reminded of some seemingly strange behaviour on the part of these flies during early summer in Iran. I had landed my aircraft to off-load and to pick up passengers at Ahwaz, a small town to the north of my base, Abadan. It was very early summer and becoming very very hot on the ground. However the aircraft cabin, having been cooled in flight, remained at a lower temperature. Upon returning to my aircraft and entering the still cool and of course shady passenger cabin I was amazed to find a group of some fifteen or twenty quite large Bee-flies, hovering and circulating in a small area just inside the doorway. For flies which feed from flowers blooming in the sunlight, these antics seemed quite extraordinary. Why should sun-loving insects seek the shade in this manner. If of course that was what they were doing. On subsequent visits to Ahwaz over the next week or so the performance was repeated, with varying numbers of the flies taking part.

Spring in S. Iran is short and with its passing the searing heat of summer soon desiccates the flowers. No flowers. No nectar. No Bombyliads. I have seldom seen more than one of these insects in the same place at the same time. Two at the most if a female has attracted the attention of a male. Perhaps the species at Ahwaz had different habits and was more gregarious. Whatever the case I have not been able to fathom further than my first speculation. Insects do have to control their body temperature and perhaps normally they do this by seeking the shade of trees. My aircraft just happened to save them a journey away from the airport premises.

Bombyliads are parasitic upon ground nesting bees. Once, long ago in my youth, I was watching the comings and goings of a large queen Bumble Bee as she attended to the requirements of her nest and its little pots of honey. During one of the periods when the bee was not visible to me, a Bee-fly arrived in front of the Bee's nesting burrow. The fly began a series of jerking flight movements toward the dark hole. Very fortunately the light was behind the fly so that the thick golden hairs of its body were limned with light. This then made it possible for me to observe that each time the fly darted forward, in an almost upright position, it released an egg which sailed like a little glistening white bomb, into the dark cave before it. I have never seen such a thing since. And what a photograph it would have made!

More of Michael's musings in the Spring issue.

Improve the stability of your Gitzo tripod

by Charles Brown ARPS

Having used a Gitzo tripod for some time I have been very satisfied with both its basic very rigid design and standard of engineering, for apart from showing some minor cosmetic wear, it performs just as well now and is as rigid as when purchased ten years ago. The only problem I have encountered is that when used with heavy long focus lenses and camera bodies, it can be a little top-heavy and sometimes unstable in windy conditions when, after being carried in the usual manner with the legs extended, it is just placed down on uneven ground. After having it blown over in the Falkland Islands with a 500mm Canon lens and body fitted (fortunately with no damage since by luck it tipped over onto a soft dump of tussock grass), I decided to make a small modification to the tripod head to reduce the possibility of such an accident.

The basic reason for the problem appeared to be that with the legs extended and opened out (so that the stops on the top housing engage with the adjustable leg sliders in their normal 'pushed in' position), the true angle of the legs to the vertical is only about 20 degrees. This angle seemed to be too shallow and could well be increased to open out to around 30 degrees, which would substantially improve the overall stability. By simply cutting about 3.0 mm from the top of each of the three leg sliders this desirable increase in the opened angle of the legs was achieved without any detriment to the function of the tripod.

The leg sliders which bear the name 'GITZO' are made from diecast aluminium alloy and can easily be cut using a normal handyman type hacksaw and the resulting sawn edge cleaned up with a fine tooth flat file. Although I felt that the sliders could possibly be cut in situ by wedging a small piece of wood behind them, when in the fully pulled out position, I ultimately decided to remove them from the legs and then cut them more carefully and accurately by holding them in a vice (since the sliders are of diecast aluminium I was careful not to over tighten them in the vice)

The procedure to remove the sliders from each of the legs for modification is as follows

- 1) Unscrew one of the dome headed nuts and then gently tap the exposed all-thread spindle with the attached remaining dome-nut to remove it from the leg 'U' Bracket. Take care to retain the 2 thick washers from the outside of the 'U' Bracket and the 2 thin shim washers from the inside. The leg with U' Bracket is now free.
- 2) Using a socket spanner remove the now accessible hexagon headed shoulder bolt from inside the 'U' Bracket, taking care to retain the micro-thin spring washer beneath the bolt head. It is as well to keep this washer on the shank of the bolt for safety.
- 3) The Slider is now free and can be carefully placed in a vice and the 3.0 mm sliver of metal cut off the top edge and the sawn surface dressed with a file.
- 4) Repeat the exercise in reverse to reassemble taking care to replace all the washers and not to over tighten the dome nuts and shoulder bolts.

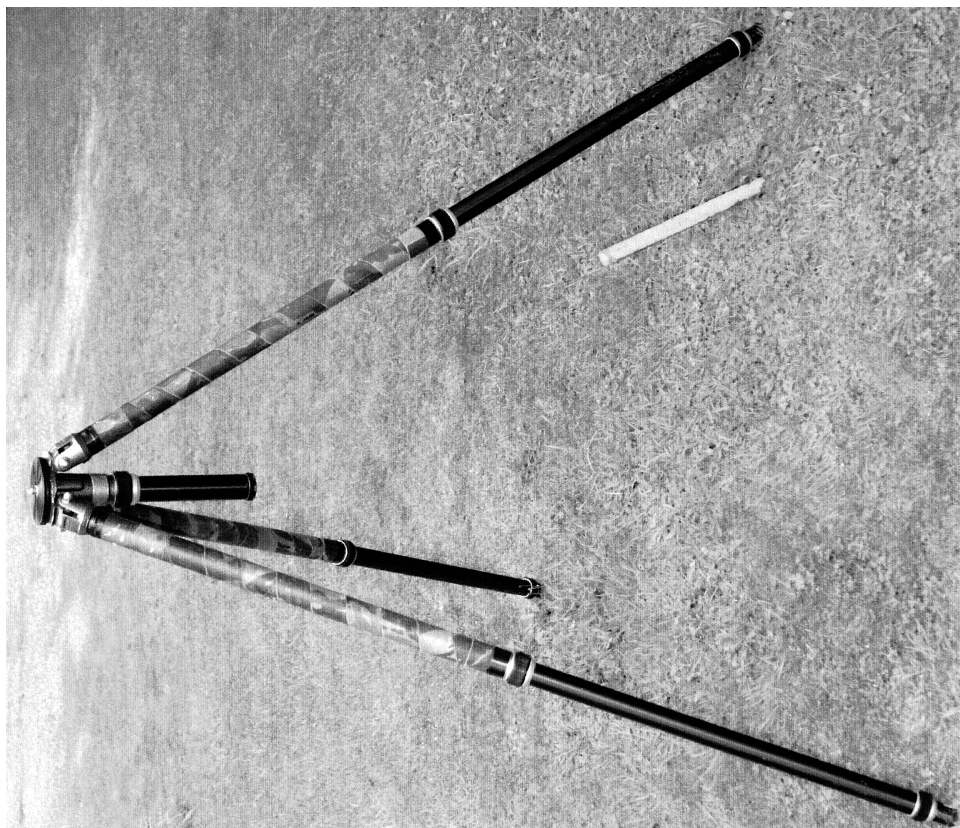
I worked on each leg in turn to make sure that all the individual components went back from where they came.

The complete job sounds far more complex than it really is and takes only an hour or so. The modification is well worth the trouble, particularly as it could prevent a costly disaster in the field, to say nothing of a large insurance claim.

Dress sawn top of Slider with file

Editor's note: I have a similar modification to my Manfrotto tripod which enables the legs to be opened much wider therefore positioning the camera within a few inches of the ground.

▼ Modified Gitzo tripod showing new position of leg
(original position indicated by wooden peg)



▼ 3.0 mm sliver of metal cut from top of Slider



To hang or not to hang?

by Heather Angel Hon FRPS

Some people shoot specifically for the wall – whether to impress a judge’s eye or to tempt a prospective buyer. Throughout my life as a photographer I have produced pictures for the printed page.

Even though the two objectives are by no means exclusive, some subjects which work as a small reproduction in a book or magazine simply don’t succeed as a large print on a wall. Over the years I contributed a few prints to exhibitions. Then, in 1981, on the publication of the book, *‘The Natural History of Britain and Ireland’*, for which I supplied all 350 pictures, my first solo exhibition opened at the Science Museum. This was sponsored by Kodak and it toured Britain for several years.

Almost two decades later, whilst I was checking colour proofs for my book *‘Natural Visions’*, I began to ponder the idea of creating my own solo exhibition. Full of enthusiasm, but completely naïve, I set off along a road with many dead ends and brick walls.

Initially, I was faced with the chicken and egg situation. Should I get the venues clinched or go for sponsorship first? I decided to tackle the latter because I knew it would be a costly affair to produce 50 A2 and A3 prints with matts and frames ready for hanging. I shall be forever grateful to ACTPIX in Rhayader, Powys, (who had produced my dupes for many years), for doing all the drum scans. CPL in Edenbridge had kindly agreed to do the printing in their off-peak times; but pulled out shortly before the company folded. A generous contribution from Hasselblad covered the matting and framing, which left me with the printing.

A chance placing of my modest stand opposite to the popular Marrutt Digital stand at Focus 2000 brought us together. I explained my dilemma. They most generously not only donated paper and inks, but also loaned me an Epson 3000 printer which can produce prints up to A2. It was a steep learning curve, but my son, Giles, was a great support.

While all this was evolving, my PA and I tried calling many London exhibition venues. Essentially, the responses fell into three categories.

1. ‘We are fully booked for the next two years.’ Which is fine and what would be expected of a popular gallery.
2. ‘Yes, we would be happy to let you have our gallery in a few months time for a rent of 2K or 3K a week’!
3. ‘We only do FINE art prints.’

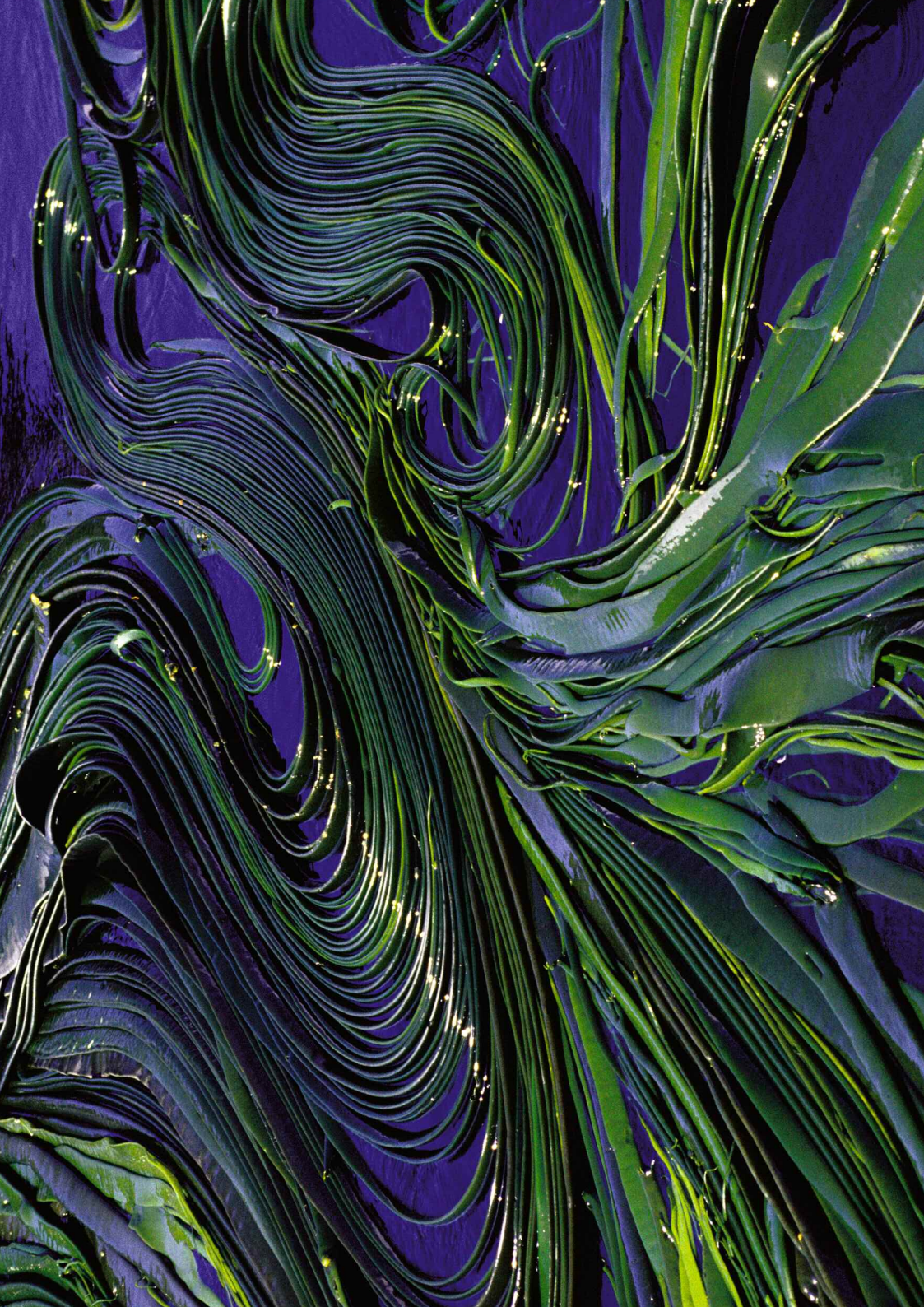
So that meant we had to look outside London. Our first lucky break came when Dimbola Lodge (Julia Margaret Cameron’s home) on the Isle of Wight had a free slot in June 2000. Ever since then, the exhibition has been fully booked and has been on view at 15 locations in Britain as widely dispersed as Edinburgh, Chester and Gosport.

Out of the blue, in 2001 the British Council approached me for a replica exhibition to tour some of the countries where they have offices. To date, *‘Natural Visions’* has been on show in Cairo, Kuala Lumpur and Beijing.

As a frequent traveller to China. I was not looking forward to Beijing in winter - a drab, cold season - but the warmth and interest shown by the many people I met in Beijing far exceeded any expectations. I had an action packed week lecturing and giving workshops, as well as meeting the press and a live Q and A session with students at Tsinghua University which was televised.

What had started off as a modest affair, with copies of my book *Natural Visions* - on which the exhibition is based - being the sole merchandise item; gradually gained momentum with several book titles and many hand-made A5 cards for sale at each venue. The annual income has proved to be well worth our time and effort. Also, it has made my work known to a much wider audience than the book buying public.





It is always easy to be wise with hindsight and had I known the run would extend from 2000-2004, I would have produced some posters at the start.

Would I do it again? Yes, I would, but this time my whole approach is quite different. The concept for the exhibition content has been planned from the onset and I am shooting for the wall. Next time I definitely won't be transporting the exhibition around Britain!

Heather Angel's new website:
www.naturalvisions.co.uk
has nearly 14,000 images of her own work and that of associate photographers.

Natural Visions 2003-4 Venues

25 October - 7 December 2003

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
Queens Road, Bristol, BS8 1RL
Tel: 0117 9223571 www.bristol-city.gov.uk

1 April - 8 May 2004

Haslemere Educational Museum
High Street, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LA
Tel: 01428 642112

22 May - 18 July 2004

Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery
Chequer Road, Doncaster DN1 2AE
Tel: 01302 734293

Pictures

Page 25 **Panda Slide.** Wolong Reserve, Sichuan Province, China.
Nikon F4, 80-200mm lens. Ektachrome 100 Plus.
Giant Panda may spend 18 of every 24 hours feeding. Bamboo is so un-nutritious that Pandas do not hibernate and must feed in all weathers. This panda lost its footing and slithered ignominiously down a snow covered slope, giving a humorous picture.

Page 26 **Sinuuous Seaweeds.** Bull-kelp in sea, nr. Dunedin, New Zealand.
Nikon F4S, 300mm lens. Ektachrome 100 Plus.
The contrast between the khaki-coloured bull kelp fronds and the rich blue of the rising tide was irresistible. I was mesmerised by their swishing back and forth, reminiscent of swirling snakes.

Page 33 **Salmon Run.** Adams River, British Columbia, Canada.
Nikon F4, 300mm lens. Ektachrome 100S.
The rippled surface and a slow shutter speed helped to convey an impression of movement of scarlet sockeye salmon bodies. During a dominant run, which occurs once every four years, the massed fish jostle for position on the upstream journey to their spawning grounds.

Back cover **Penguin Patterns.** Adelle penguins. Laurie Island, South Orkneys, Antarctica. Nikon F4, 500mm lens. Ektachrome 100 Plus.
My eye was attracted to the tonal contrast and graphic shapes of black penguin backs marching over snow-covered ice, framed by blue shadow areas.

RPS Nature Group - Field Meetings 2004.

Location

Meeting Place

Grid Reference

Leader(s)

Day & date

Cost (eg car parking)

Main subjects of interest :-

Items to bring (tick as applicable and add any other necessary items below).

Stout Shoes ☐ Wellingtons ☐

Waterproofs ☐ Packed Lunch ☐

Additional information:-

Name

Address

Tel No:

E mail:

Please complete this form as soon as possible (not later than 3rd January 2004) and send to:-

Nick Jarvis ARPS
Hive Cottage, 5 Milton Road,
Willen, Milton Keynes,
MK15 9AB.
Tel: 01908-607257.
E-mail: nickjarvis@aol.com

Surveying Ancient Trees.

by Diana Antonescu

There are over 400 ancient trees on Hampstead Heath, many of which are more than 300 years old! The survey will reveal exactly where these ancient trees are so that they can be protected and cared for in an appropriate manner. We aim to achieve this by analysing certain features such as: girth, dead wood and cavities. This is extremely important as it also helps us establish which trees should be classified as veteran! Age difference is very important and we have to distinguish between trees which are merely middle-aged and those which are truly ancient trees!



1) A surveyor examines an ancient oak on Hampstead Heath.

2) The tree 'heals' itself following removal of a branch.



Further information
can be obtained from:
www.heath-hands.org

The area I surveyed was area 9 - Hampstead Heath Extension. Each time we go out on a survey we fill in a Survey form. We examine a tree to see which of the following categories it belongs to:

- Maiden - free grown tree, not managed - with unmodified natural crown.
- Pollard - trees which have been cut or broken at about 2-3m high, with re-growth mainly from this point. When neglected, each stem may become the size of a mature tree - these are called lapsed pollards!
- Multi-stemmed - these trees naturally form several stems near ground level, usually birches - thus giving the appearance of a natural crown.
- Shredded - maiden tree with side branches having been cut close to the stem throughout the crown.
- Coppice - multi-stemmed from near ground-level, arising from past cutting of a maiden tree.
- Stumps - shattered/fractured stumps, whether there is any live growth or whether the entire tree is dead.

When we have determined to which category the tree belongs we then look at the hazards and the habitat. We have to consider the proximity of veteran trees to nearby structures, the intensity of public use of the area around the tree and the likelihood of failure. The hazards need to be carefully assessed so that these ancient trees can be properly managed and expert advice sought where necessary. Old trees invariably contain many wounds. It is extremely important to assess what may otherwise lead to the eventual failure of crown limbs or even the trunk itself. In the case of the ancient oak (pictured above), the tree recovered well.

Congratulations

The following members recently achieved their Associateships.

Name	Subject
Anthony Fell Market Warsop, nr. Mansfield.	General wildlife
Julie England Lytham St. Annes.	Underwater
Monica Pepper Worksop.	British & foreign wildlife
Rosemary Simpson Loch Flemington, Inverness.	Underwater
Barum Kumar Sinha Patna, India.	Birds and mammals
Michael Huggan Alton.	African birds and mammals
Maggie Manson Oakham.	Desert Wildlife the Pantenal

Update

Please note the following amendments to the list of Wildlife Trust addresses published in the Summer issue:

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust,
Elm Tree Court, Long Street,
Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 1NJ
Tel: 01380 725670
Email: info@wiltshirewildlife.org
Website: www.wiltshirewildlife.org

Norfolk Wildlife Trust,
Berwich House, 22 Thorpe Road,
Norwich, Norfolk, NR1 1RY
Tel: 01603 625540
Email: admin@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk
Website: www.wildlifetrust.org/norfolk

Dear Editor,

On reading the recent letter from Gavin Duley (Issue No.86, Summer 2003) I am prompted to put into words some thoughts that have been on my mind for a while. The subject of 'plants and flowers past their best'.

Nature and the course of natural history has long been a fascination to me, much to the bewilderment to many of those around me. Now if I take a photograph of a bird, a mammal or an amphibian there is no question that it should be well composed and exposed etc. But there is no general restriction as to which stage of life that creature should be at, whether it be newly born, a juvenile, in adulthood, in old age or even death. Yet if I take a photograph of a plant or flower I am led to believe that it would not be acceptable for a nature panel if the subject were not at its best.

So for example: an orchid should be in full and perfect bloom, a toadstool should not be in a state of decomposition, and a picture of a dead tree would be much frowned upon. And yet I cannot help but question this notion, is there not a great deal to be learnt about nature by seeing it when they are past its best. Death is after all an important part life and nature - it is the source of nutrients for the next season, it is the food for the worms and other detritivores and it is fundamental to the food chain. Without death there would be no life. So should we not record its path?

Photographers would never put such a restriction on portraiture, for then there would never be shots of aged women with wrinkled faces, with newborn babe in arms, neither of an interesting characters' head but not their feet, nor yet of the 'great and the good' (well, then again the latter might not be a bad thing). We should not restrict ourselves or be restricted to the glamour shots of nature. Or perhaps I have been misinformed...

Yours faithfully

Tremaine A O Cornish

Editor - What are other members thoughts?

What's On

The nights are getting longer and soon there will be much less to photograph. Listed below are some events which should be of interest to Nature Group members.

November 2003

- 19** Mike Lane - A Lane in a Polish Marsh.
Reading Bird Club. Tel 01344 452058.
- 20** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
LVNP, Waltham Abbey.
Contact Les Borg. Tel 01438 717841
- 27** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Keyworth CC, East Midlands. Contact Robert
Hawkesworth Tel 0115 9281050
- 29** Wildlife Photography Workshop with
Mike Lane.* Leicesters.

December 2003

- 06** Birds of Prey Workshop with Mike Lane*
Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 17** 'Good Picture' - see opposite page for
further details

January 2004

- 20** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Tonbridge CC.
Contact Kath Bull Tel 01892 663751

February 2004

- 03** Mike Lane - A Country Lane.
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Tamworth.
Tel 01827 282893.
- 04** Mike Lane - Back Down a Country Lane.
Cardiff Digital Group.
Email kathyindinas@yahoo.co.uk
- 09** Mike Lane - A Lane Through Bharatpur.
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Droitwich.
Tel 01905 779862.
- 10** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Spectrum, Guernsey.
Contact Jo Mahy Tel 01481 249455
- 13** Mike Lane - A Lane in a Polish Marsh.
RSPB Harving Group. Tel 01708 452171.
- 16** Mike Lane - A Lane in Spain
RSPB High Peak Group. Tel 01663 762344.
- 19** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Poulton-Le-Fylde PS., Blackpool
Contact Geoff Smith Tel 01253 500904
- 27** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Menai Bridge CC., Anglesey.
Contact Brian Iddon Tel 01248 853283

March 2004

- 01** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Yeovil PS., Yeovil.
Contact Chris Hicks Tel 01935 474557
- 06** Reptiles Workshop with Mike Lane*
Oldbury, West Midlands.
- 08** Mike Lane - Back Down a Country Lane.
Greater Manchester Bird Club.
Tel 0161 865 1401.
- 10** Mike Lane - A Lane in Spain
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, Solihull.
Tel 024 7630 8977.
- 16** Nature Group Travelling Exhibition 2003
Leamington Spa PS.
Contact Peter Furze Tel 01926 426593
- 19** Mike Lane - A Country Lane Returns Again
RSPB Leicester Group. Tel 01509 215081.

April 2004

- 03** Birds of Prey Workshop with Mike Lane*
Stratford-upon-Avon.

June 2004

- 19** RPS Travel Group trip to Namibia. For full
details contact Travel Group Secretary, John
Cucksey on Tel 01263 740415 or
www.rpstravel.org

* For further information on workshops with
Mike Lane contact Jessops on
Tel 0116 2326191.

If you have an event which would be of interest
to Nature Group members, please send details
to the Editor.

Miscellaneous

For Sale

Pentax SMC-A 400mm f5.6 manual focus lens in excellent condition. Closest focus 2.8m (approx 9ft). Sliding hood, Skylight filter (77 mm diam). Case.

£450 plus carriage/insurance.

Contact: David Manners

Tel 01823 661453 or

Email: david@davidimages.co.uk

Good Picture?

An RPS Symposium organised by the Imaging Science Group aiming to provide imaging practitioners, keen amateurs and students with some insights into important aspects of digital image quality and provide guidelines for assessing the output produced by the various systems available. The event takes place on 17th December 2003 from 10am to 4pm at University of Westminster, Regents Street, London. Cost £35 (Concessions £15) incl. lunch. Full details from: Dr. Mike Christianson
Tel: 0208 424 5774 or www.rps-isg.org

Of interest to Nature Group members.

The RPS Travel Group have organised a trip to Namibia departing from London on Saturday 19th June 2004, returning Friday 2nd July, arriving London Heathrow next day.

Namibia is an arid country with large tracts of desert along its Atlantic coast and offers both stunning wildlife photo opportunities as well as the scenic beauty of the Namib desert, famous for its shifting sands and dunes, unique and fascinating flora and fauna. The tour also includes visits to Luderitz, Kolmanskop, the giant sand dunes of Sossusvlei and Etosha National Park, one of Africa's most productive areas for wildlife photography.

The cost will be £2,115 per person plus the return flight

For further information/full details please contact: John Cucksey, Travel Group secretary, on Tel. 01263 740 415 or log-on to the Travel group web site at www.rpstravel.org

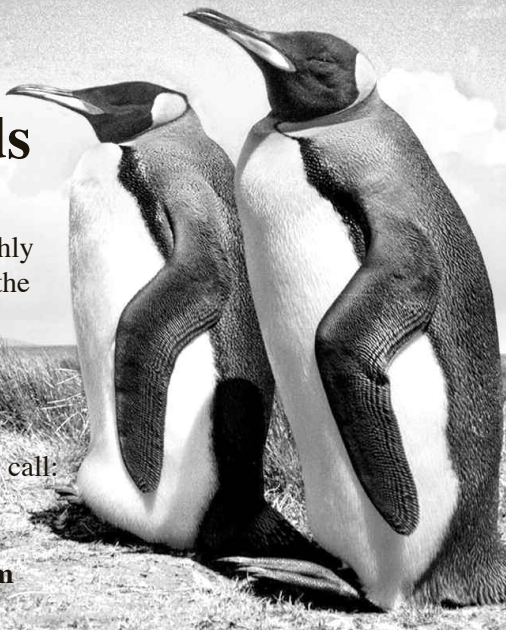
'Journey South' to the **Falkland Islands**

David Osborn FRPS EFIAP
will be leading the tenth of his highly
acclaimed wildlife photo-tours to the
Falkland Islands departing

November 2004

For information or a brochure please call:

Tel: 01889 881928
or e-mail: poppyland3@aol.com



Committee Pen Portraits

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

I have always counted myself as very fortunate to have been brought up with an interest in nature and some of my earliest memories are of blissful, happy days spent in the countryside full of fascination and wonder. At school too, natural history was encouraged and coupled with the fact that I had been given my first camera, a folding Kodak 620, the two interests were destined, eventually, to merge.

My natural history interests have always been very catholic and whilst I am happy to photograph most subjects it has always been the plant kingdom which has taken up most of my time, indeed both my 'A' and 'F' panels were of flowers. I have always enjoyed lecturing and I love the photographic freedom that enables me to build and present successful slide shows, which are the main outlets for my work. My years as Secretary of the Nature Group have been full of interest and I look forward to the two years of Chairmanship.

Trevor Hyman LRPS

Although I have been interested in photography, the natural world and travel for more years than I care to remember, I've only put these all together comparatively recently (i.e. 20 years). To give credit where it is due, I think a week on Skokholm with Tony Wharton really sealed my 'fate' in Nature photography. My interests are wide and varied from birds (I still have yet to take good flight pictures), land creatures (unpredictable) and flora (anyone who claims that these are 'still life' hasn't really tried it!). Of course, all of these give me an excuse for travel to scenic parts of the world.

I've received an enormous amount of help and encouragement from everyone in the Nature Group and decided that the best way to repay this was helping out when the cry came for a new Treasurer. My great delights have been getting my 'L' in 2000 and an acceptance in the 2003 NG Annual Exhibition. I am thinking hard about the next step - an 'A'

John Myring ARPS

I've been in the Nature Group since its formation, 27 years ago, joining our committee in 1989 and becoming Honorary Treasurer two years later, a position I held for ten years. The last two were concurrent with my being editor of *The Iris*, which I did for eight enjoyable years until 2003. Currently I'm our Group's representative to the RPS Advisory Panel. I helped to rewrite our Regulations and am one of the team who produced the CD-ROM 'An Interactive Guide to obtaining your Nature Associateship'. My current project is to make all issues of *The Iris* available on CD-ROM, commencing with Issue No. 1 (the first newsletter), although whether or not I achieve this remains to be seen.

Photographically I'm a dabbler, certainly not competitive, and gained my 'A' in Nature in 1982. An 'F' is way over the far distant horizon. Subject matter has always been predominantly nature or pictorial. I could write pages on my views about merging the two but Dawn would not have room to print them. My interest began as a teenager using B & W 120 film when I built my first enlarger using a Fox's Glacier Mint tin as a lamp house (apologies to younger members who will not be familiar with the object). For some years now I've worked only in 35mm colour transparency; that is until this year when I went completely digital.

Nick Jarvis ARPS

Although I have been interested in photography and nature for many years, it was only after ill health forced an early retirement in 1995 that I put the two together. Since then my photography has been almost exclusively of nature subjects, with occasional landscapes. I am particularly interested in the photography of fungi, and gained my Associateship with a panel of fungi slides in 2000. The difficulty of identifying fungi has led me to a second hobby of mycology and membership of the Buckinghamshire Fungus Group. I am also a member of the Milton Keynes Natural History Society and a trustee of the Disabled Photographers Society, in which I served as Exhibitions Secretary for three years. Currently I am the Group's Programme Co-ordinator as well as administrator of the Online Notice Board.



