

ISSN 1757-2991

THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS
Issue No. 133 / Spring 2019

THE IRIS



RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting 43rd Annual General Meeting Opening of the Annual Exhibition

Saturday 6th April 2019

**Smethwick Photographic Society
The Old Schoolhouse, Churchbridge, Oldbury,
West Midlands, B69 2AS**

(for directions see below)

Programme:

- 10:00hrs** Doors open, tea and coffee available
10:30hrs Welcome and Introduction
10:40hrs 'Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks', Trevor Davenport ARPS
11:40hrs Break
12:00hrs 'The Bizarre and Beautiful in the Insect World', Ann Miles FRPS
13:00hrs Break for lunch
Please bring your own packed lunch as lunch will not be available. There is a dining area. Tea, coffee and drinks will be available at the bar.

13:45hrs 43rd Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group

Agenda:

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the 42nd AGM 2018 (printed in Issue 131 of 'The Iris')
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Secretary's Report
7. Any Other Business
8. Date and Venue of the 44th AGM 2020

14:15hrs Opening of the 2019 Exhibition

Presentation of the Awards
Projection of the accepted images

16:30hrs Close

Throughout the day the prints accepted for the 2019 Exhibition will be on display

Directions:

From Junction 2 of the M5 follow the signs for the A4034 north towards West Bromwich.

Once on the A4034 stay in the left hand lane and after about 1/3 mile turn left at the first set of traffic lights into Park Street.

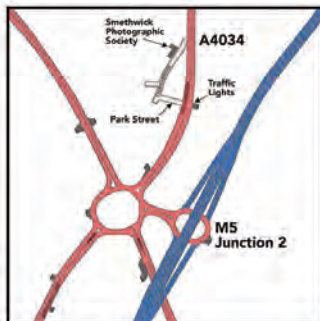
At the end of Park Street turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac).

The Old Schoolhouse is the last but one building on the left.

If you have SatNav use postcode: B69 2AS

Google Maps Coordinates: 52.497771, -2.019776

The long running road works between Junctions 1 and 2 of the M5 are due to be finished in Spring 2019. M5 users should check the status of the road works before travelling and allow extra time if necessary.



Publication information

'The Iris' is published by the RPS Nature Group three times a year. Copy and publication dates are as follows:

Spring	Copy deadline 8th December Published mid March.
Summer	Copy deadline 30th April Published early July.
Winter	Copy deadline 31st August Published early November.

All contributions should be submitted to the Editor. Items covering any aspect of nature photography and/or natural history are welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books. The Editor can be contacted at: iris_editor@griff45.com

Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or wetransfer.com. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied on CD or via WeTransfer.com as flattened 8bit sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Please do not send larger images. Larger files may be needed for the cover.

No payment will be made for material used and whilst every care will be taken, neither the Editor, the Nature Group or the Printers can accept liability for any damage that may occur to photographic material submitted.

The views expressed within The Iris are solely those of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Nature Group Committee or the Editor.

Distribution:

'The Iris' is forwarded to members using address labels produced by the RPS Membership Dept in Bath. Any member not receiving their copy should contact that department so that their name appears on a label in the future. The Secretary will be pleased to post single copies to members who have failed to receive them.

Copyright:

© All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior permission of the copyright holder.

© Photographs and articles - individual contributors.
All other material the Nature Group of the Royal Photographic Society.

Printed by

Partridges UK
Eagle Avenue, Magnetic Park, Desborough,
Northants, NN14 2WD

Design & layout

by Gerald Griffin ARPS

Contents

2 Editorial

3 From the Chair

4 Butterfly and Macro Photography in Bulgaria by Trevor Davenport ARPS

10 My Associate Journey by Simon Jenkins ARPS

14 In Search of Tigers by Liz Cutting ARPS

18 In Search of the Rarest Bird in the World by Kevin Elsbey FRPS

22 Wildlife Encounters in Namibia by Conor Molloy ARPS

26 Club Rookie to Distinguished RPS Photographer My Associate Story by David Brown ARPS



Cover image
Silver-studded Blues Paired (*Plebejus argus*),
by Trevor Davenport taken in Bulgaria.

Committee

Officers

Chairman: Kevin Elsby FRPS

Aylsham, Norfolk,
Tel: 01263-732839 Email: wildlife@greenbee.net

Secretary: Duncan Locke

Kempsey, Worcester. WR5 3JZ
E-mail: duncan.locke@btinternet.com

Treasurer:

Vacant

Vice Chairman: David O'Neill LRPS

Reading, RG1 6DG,
Email: david.oneill@newhorizons.uk.com

Immediate Past Chairman: Richard Revels FRPS

Biggleswade Beds, SG18 8EE,
Email: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Committee Members

Editor of The Iris: Gerald Griffin ARPS

Email: iris_editor@griff45.com

Exhibition Secretary: Ralph Snook ARPS

E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

NG Rep to Advisory Panel: David O'Neill LRPS

Reading, Berkshire
Email: david.oneill@wildhorizons.uk.com

Programme Co-ordinator: Barbara Lawton FRPS

Wolverhampton, West Midlands
E-mail: barbara.lawton@talktalk.net

Webmaster: Ralph Snook ARPS

Bristol BS32 4EJ
E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

eNewsletter Editor: Dawn Osborn FRPS

Dereham, Norfolk
Email: naturegroup_enuws_editor@btinternet.com

John Jones ARPS

Kegworth, Derby
Tel: 01509 672125

Gordon Follows ARPS

Holt, Norfolk.
Email: gordonfollows@btinternet.com

Thomas Hanahoe FRPS

Biggleswade
Email: t.hanahoe@ntlworld.com

Stan Saunders ARPS

Sandy, Bedfordshire
Email: stan.saunders2@btopenworld.com

Ex officio Committee members

President of the Society;
Vice-President of the Society;
Director General of the Society;
Hon. Treasurer of the Society;
Chairman of the Nature A & F Distinctions Panel

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

Firstly, thanks all round to all of the writers who sent me articles for this issue of The Iris - without them there would be no magazine! I had a good response from members who have recently gained their ARPS Nature Distinction and two of them tell their story in this issue. Both of them had their initial submissions turned down and their stories that eventually led to success make a good read. It seems that it is well worth following the advice of the panel!

I am sure there are many other potential writers amongst our readership. Any articles are most welcome but I am particularly keen to reflect the wide Natural History interest of our group and pieces on plants, fungi and the physical world would nicely balance the zoological articles of late. Talking of the physical world, I notice from The Times newspaper that a Professor of Volcanology, Katharine Cashman, has won an RPS award for her wonderful shot of Cappadocia, which was formed by volcanoes. Returning to articles for The Iris, perhaps you could offer a short review of a book that has recently been published or a piece of software or a photographic technique that you have discovered to be really useful. Whatever it is, I am keen to read it. I have produced a guidelines document that may be of help with your writing and pictures so please contact me with your idea.

I am off to southern Africa to photograph the wildlife in several countries this winter and I am keeping my fingers crossed for plenty of action shots. Enjoy your photography this winter too.



From the chair

Welcome to the latest issue of the Iris. As I write this in Norfolk in mid October, the temperature outside is 25 degrees Celsius. 2018 is going to go on record as one of the hottest years we have experienced, possibly surpassing that last great heatwave year I can remember of 1976. In that year, a minister of drought was appointed (Dennis Howell), only for the UK to be deluged with floods shortly afterwards!

There is no doubt plenty of evidence of global warming and much, undoubtedly, is man made. This has major potential consequences, not least for the wildlife we all enjoy photographing. Flowers are appearing earlier each year (Orchids are a good example), and insects are emerging earlier year on year (Swallowtail is a typical example). The lives of birds too are being affected with summer migrants arriving earlier and leaving later each year. As for mammals, I am personally going to make a trip to the Thames tomorrow to see if I can see the Beluga whale which has found a home there for the last three weeks.

In September, I was proud to have held my Chairman's Day at the Smethwick Photographic Society. I am delighted at how successful the event was. I had invited three speakers to give talks. Steve Cham, one of the UK's foremost experts on Dragonflies gave a fascinating talk on the life histories of this wonderful and ancient group of insects. He illustrated his talk with some beautiful images, including short videos, which helped us understand several aspects of their behaviour.

Koshy Johnson FRPS then gave a talk which included a look at the seabirds of Bempton cliffs, together with a wide-ranging pot pourri of other wildlife images from around the world. His efforts to photograph the Gannets at Bempton extended to chartering a small boat early in the morning to catch the best light, whilst he was wearing a device which enabled him to keep as steady as possible while hand-holding a 500mm lens in a bobbing sea. He also mentioned the nausea associated with trying to put the camera on his target under these difficult circumstances. His other images included several shots from India, illustrating a variety of wildlife to be found there.

I had invited three successful ARPS candidates to talk on the day, and to show their successful images. This also proved very entertaining and indeed stimulating for the members in the audience who were contemplating submitting for ARPS or FRPS. David Bird ARPS gave a talk about his successful panel featuring wildlife of the Island of Youth in Cuba. Julia Wainwright ARPS inspired us with her panel of birds of the Western

Paleartic. Finally, Graeme Clark ARPS entertained us with his panel of fungi. All three spoke with passion in abundance about the trials and tribulations of the process of a successful panel, from thinking of an idea, to getting the images, to advisory day / advice on these images, to the assessment day itself, and, most importantly in my opinion, on the drive needed to continue and ultimately succeed with the process when you fall at the final hurdle.

After lunch, it was Austin Thomas' turn to regale us with some stunning images of wildlife he has photographed close to his home (including his iconic Little Owl images) and Africa (including the big cats to be found there). It was another excellent talk. Austin is an electronic engineer by trade and he included some images in his talk of the technical equipment he uses on some of his shoots – including large flash units and very large and heavy-looking batteries to power them!

The day ended with a talk by me on Costa Rican wildlife and I was delighted to show some of the wonderful nature to be found in this relatively tiny central American country.

Well, that's all for now so I wish you a happy Spring's photography.





BUTTERFLY AND MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY IN BULGARIA

Trevor Davenport ARPS

For many years, following the end of World War II, Bulgaria formed part of the Soviet Bloc in Eastern Europe, effectively isolating the country from the developments taking place in Western Europe. Both industry and agriculture were maintained at fairly basic levels compared to the industrialisation and intensive farming that took place in the West. The fall of the Berlin Wall, starting in 1989, changed all this; but, after almost half a century without the ravages of intensification, the Bulgarian countryside retains a diverse and rich flora and fauna to the present day.

It is a country blessed with mountain ranges, vast plains, forests, rivers, lakes and waterfalls spread across three National Parks, 11 Nature Parks, 55 Nature Reserves and hundreds of protected areas. It still has Bears and Wolves and an abundance of birds, reptiles, amphibians and, of course, invertebrates: butterflies, moths, dragonflies, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles and bugs.

It is a country of friendly people where, outside the cities, they live a rustic style of life in nestled villages, many of which are semi-deserted as owners leave to benefit from new freedoms and opportunities. Accommodation is often modest but very good, with excellent food and drink including home produced

wines. It is not unusual to see villagers cutting hay with scythes in meadows surrounding the villages.

There are thousands of undisturbed hay meadows in Bulgaria where it is possible to find resting butterflies in numbers we can only dream about here in UK. I have recently spent time in the lovely Rila Mountains, where, in no more than a few square metres, I found fritillaries in variety, Marbled Whites, Ringlets, Skippers, Coppers, and Blues, all alongside crickets, grasshoppers and a Yellow-winged Darter Dragonfly.

According to various reports, there are between 210 and 220 species of butterfly in Bulgaria; this is approximately four times the number of species we have in Britain; and whilst many of the above species may be local, such as the beautiful Cynthia's Fritillary, which is confined to mountain meadows, many butterflies are widespread and abundant.

During peak flight periods it is not unusual to see dozens of species in a relatively small area. I have happy memories of two small meadows where, beneath buzzing high voltage cables, there were hundreds of various butterflies busy fluttering about until a thunderstorm rumbled in the distance. In the hour before the storm hit, all the butterflies started to settle usually on plants that held populations of crickets and

grasshoppers too. That rain threatened hour was a photographer's dream with daytime roosting butterflies everywhere. It was difficult to keep calm and remember good photographic practice whilst surrounded by hordes of settled butterflies. The storm eventually broke and the deluge put paid to any further photography!

Several nature-based organisations lead summer tours to Bulgaria, usually accompanied by one or two expert guides. Some tours are exclusively for butterflies whilst others also visit places for dragonflies, birds and flowers etc. Expert guides are essential, not only as a means of locating subjects but also to identify the species found. Accurate identification can be troublesome, especially with closely related species that can be remarkably similar to each other, and unfamiliar to us. I am still in awe of guides who can unerringly identify a fritillary at fifteen metres in an instant while it takes me half an hour with a field guide. This business of identification can be just as confusing with crickets, grasshoppers and dragonflies; not to mention moths!

But identification isn't the only problem: trying to photograph insects - especially butterflies and dragonflies in the heat of the day can be an exercise in frustration. (And in Bulgaria daytime temperatures can settle in the mid-thirties in summer.) Firstly, many insects are constantly on the move, particularly when nectaring. Chasing a Scarce Swallowtail from flower to flower in 35 degrees isn't to be recommended, although it beats working out in the gym! And, finally, the harsh light of the middle of the day, with contrast and deep shadows, does not make for good photographs.

I understand that searching for butterflies during the day is a good way to find more species, and if you just want to tick them off on a list then this is fine; but if you want to take meaningful images of them then another approach needs to be considered.

It is a wonderful experience, as day is dawning, to be in a dew-drenched hay meadow, when the world is still, and birds sing in a quiet world. Little can surpass finding dew-covered insects resting on flowers and grasses in the wilderness; all the while being serenaded by the rapturous cadences of a Nightingale in full voice. It is true you get wet boots and socks but, hey, they dry off later. As the morning progresses, butterflies stir and spread their wings to receive the first warmth of the sun; now it is time to work and get pictures before they take flight for another busy day.

I prefer to work with a tripod - which is almost unthinkable during the heat of the day when the insects are manic - because it enables me to compose and frame my subjects with precision. In addition, I prefer to use a long telephoto or macro lens, (mine is a Nikkor





200mm f4) which enables me to work at a greater distance from the subject. It also softens the background detail too. Wielding one of these big lenses and a full-frame camera is tiring, so I am happy to work - in slow motion - from a tripod. In the cool of the morning most subjects are placid and undisturbed by the careful placement of my camera equipment.

And in the evening, to the song of yet another Nightingale, the insects start to roost and cool down. Now they are much more approachable as they settle in for the night. In the soft, sweet light of the gloaming, colour is enhanced and subtle detail revealed. This is the time for a cautious, gentle approach, whispering a prayer that light as good as this could last forever. These are the halcyon days, and these Bulgarian meadows are truly Elysian Fields.

But I have yet to see and photograph the beautiful Cynthia's Fritillary, so I shall be going back again - and again!



Photographs - clockwise

Previous page:

Yellow-banded Skipper; (Pyrgus sidae)

Balkan Copper with dew; (Lycaena candens)

Niobe Fritillary; (Argynnis niobe)

This page:

Marbled White; (Melanargia galathea f. procida)

Black-veined Whites; (Aporia crataegi)

Apollo; (Parnassius apollo)

Bush Cricket with Spermatophore

Spurge Hawk-moth Caterpillar; (Hyles euphorbiae)

Following page:

Lesser Spotted Fritillary; (Melitaea trivia)

Marbled White; (Melanargia galathea)

Female Scarce Copper on Dianthus; (Lycaena virgaureae)

Scarce Swallowtail; (Iphiclides podalirius)

Freyer's Fritillary, mud puddling; (Melitaea arduinna)

False Comma; (Nymphalis vaualbum)







MY ASSOCIATE JOURNEY

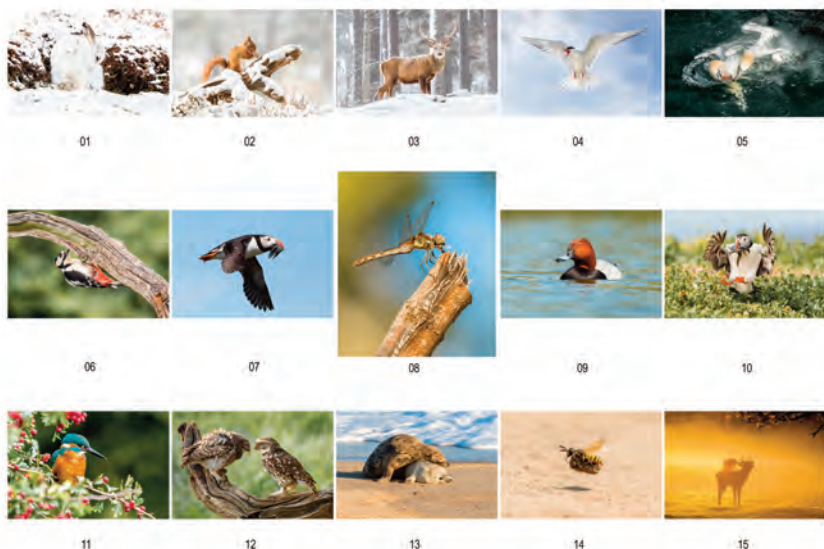
Simon Jenkins ARPS

I was awarded my LRPS in November 2014, and I enjoyed the challenge, the attention to detail and discipline needed to achieve it. I knew I wanted to go for my ARPS within a few years. I previously entered an ARPS print panel under the Applied category, with some night time shots of aircraft, buses and trains, but I failed quite badly. In hindsight I am glad I did, as Nature Photography is what I am most passionate about, and I believe that shone through in my accepted Natural History ARPS. My statement of Intent described my passion for British Nature (not that I am not envious of people's trips to Iceland, the Falkland Islands and other places, I do not really have the time or the money to do it), and how I like to be at eye level with the subject. But more importantly to me, that all Wildlife can be beautiful and interesting, and that the rarity or exoticness of the subject is not what makes one subject or image better than another. That is what drives me. I love my panel, and I love the subjects I have photographed, and how their environment, shape and form are beautiful, at least to me.

My panel is based on a cold to hot theme, at least in terms of colour, and the requirement to be

cohesive. While selecting images for my panel, and making various iterations, I realised that the subjects I enjoy the most are snowy images, and coastal wildlife. Living just north of London, I do not have these opportunities on my doorstep really. But in terms of cohesion, and to show that I can do other things too, I included the Great Spotted Woodpecker, the Female Common Darter, the Pochard duck, the Kingfisher and the Red deer, which are all local. The Beewolf Wasp I photographed up at RSPB Minsmere, so some distance from me, but I try and photograph them every year because they are one of a few insects that really fascinate me. To see a Wasp catching, paralyzing and then transporting a Honeybee back to their own personal burrow, which they filled in as they departed, is quite amazing to me. What I also like is that the Beewolf Wasp image was taken with a Canon 100-400 Mk II lens, with a 1.4 tele-converter attached, but people tend to think it was a Macro lens shot.

In terms of panel selection, that was difficult. Not all images on their own would be Salon/Exhibition images where you need something amazing with impact. Some in a club competition might even be





Male Common Pochard Duck (*Aythya ferina*).



Kingfisher in the berries (*Alcedo atthis*)



Atlantic Grey Seals (*Halichoerus grypus*)



Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*)



Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*).



Female Common Darter Dragonfly



Mountain Hare (*Lepus timidus*)



Red Squirrel in the snow (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*)



Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

called record shots. That's where the skill needed to achieve an ARPS I think is different to the skill needed for other distinctions.

I did get some advice from a friend of a friend, someone respected for their nature images, as well as other genres. I won't name that person, as I haven't sought their permission, and they might be flooded with ARPS Nature distinction requests for help. I am however very grateful for the time that person gave. There are advisors and advisory days at the RPS, I would strongly recommend listening to their advice.

After dusting myself down after my initial failure, I was over the moon to have had a success panel accepted, and it was well worth the time and effort.



European BeeWolf Wasp (*Philanthus Triangulum*) with Honeybee prey.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

My panel shows my passion for British Nature. The images which I have chosen, show a mixture of species in their natural habitat.

Where I can, I like to be very low down on the ground, at eye level with the subject, so the foreground can be used to frame the subject and place the focus on the subject appropriately.

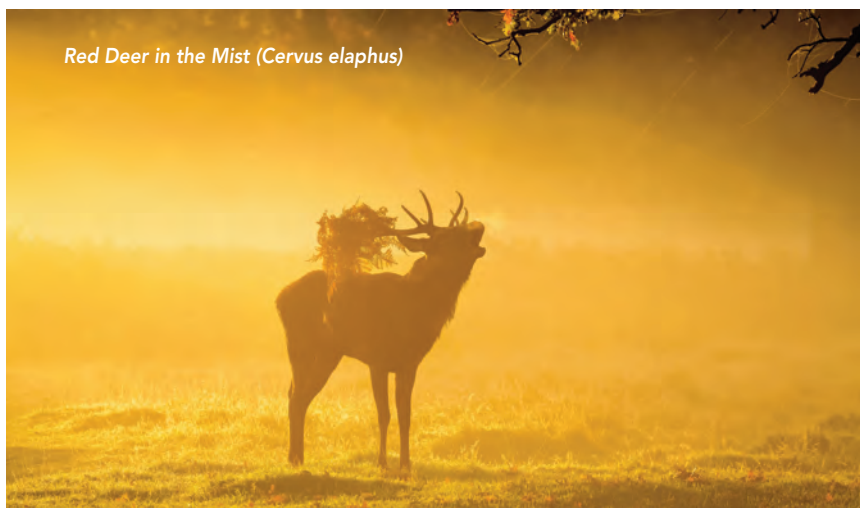
I passionately believe that all Wildlife can be beautiful and interesting, and that the rarity or exoticness of the subject isn't what makes one subject or image better than another.



Greater-spotted Woodpecker



Little Owls Feeding (Athene noctua)



Red Deer in the Mist (Cervus elaphus)

IN SEARCH OF TIGERS

Liz Cutting ARPS



Whether I am looking locally or on a wildlife photography trip abroad, for the most part I tend to seek places that seem to have an interesting range of wildlife rather than target any one particular species. There are however a few exceptions and one of those was Tiger. It's just one of those things that I felt I must see before I depart this earth. Many trips in search of Tigers are timed for March/April; everywhere is very dry and so the vegetation is rather sparse and Tigers are easier to spot, plus they are more likely to be found at water holes because of the searing heat. I don't deal with heat that well and anyway I thought that if I did actually get to see any, at least in November, the vegetation would be a nicer backdrop and the whole experience would be more pleasant. So it was that I booked an 11 day trip with 'Natures Images' to Bandhavgarh National Park in November 2017.

We stayed in Tala (Madhya Pradesh) for 8 nights. The accommodation was simple but clean and comfortable, the hospitality was warm and the food was excellent. Our hosts were Satyen and his English wife Kay. Satyen was also our guide on the 16 drives we had in the Park, though he and the English tour leaders rotated round the three jeeps the group used. Satyen has been researching and working with Tigers for decades so he knows a thing or two about finding

them and Kay is also very knowledgeable. Nevertheless Tigers are hard work especially in November when there is still plenty of vegetation but part of the fascination is being caught up in the excitement of looking for pugmarks, listening for alarm calls and for growls of Tigers.

The daily routine was basically leave the 'Camp' at about 5.30 am (tea/coffee and biscuits were available) and head for the Park, returning about 11.15 am for a lovely brunch (the best vegetable samosas imaginable, lots of fresh fruit grown on the premises and omelette or scrambled eggs). Then we would leave again at about 2.30 pm for another session, returning after sunset to shower and have dinner (almost always a variety of vegetarian curries). On the drives in search of Tiger, stops to photograph anything else were infrequent so as not to miss possible Tiger sightings; this was a little frustrating but can you imagine the greater frustration of missing a Tiger because you had stopped to photograph some deer? There was the possibility of trying to photograph some birds and butterflies in the gardens where we were staying after brunch though inevitably that was in the midday sun.

It was several days before we actually saw a Tiger so we already knew it wasn't going to be easy but on

our third full day, and our sixth drive, we hit lucky. Another jeep was stopped on the track looking into the vegetation – they had heard and just caught a glimpse of Tigers. It turned out that 'Xena' had provided a kill just near the track for her three (20 month old) cubs; there were a few growls because they were getting towards being independent and were each trying to assert their authority over each other. Peering into the greenery I was able to see two of the cubs; it was my first ever Tiger sighting and I was 'over the moon'. Perhaps surprisingly I was the only person out of our group of seven who had not previously seen a Tiger. One of the other ladies was on her 14th tiger trip!

Within 5-10 minutes lots more jeeps had arrived. Two of the Cubs came out in the open near the track ahead of us, but by then it was impossible to see much of them because of the number of jeeps that had parked up the track - there is a lot of luck involved in getting good views. They both decided to just lie down on the track but they were facing away from us. A number of the jeeps decided to pay what Satyen described as 'the big gamble' and drive several miles round the track in the opposite direction to approach the recumbent Tiger cubs from the other side. That was a double bonus for us – firstly enough jeeps played the gamble and left, so we were able to manoeuvre our way to the front, nearer the Cubs and secondly because one of the jeeps then approached the Cubs from the other side rather too fast, they got up and walked towards us, affording great views and decent photo opportunities.

When the dust had settled two of our group's three jeeps drove slowly along the track; everyone else seemed to have vanished elsewhere. We stopped about 50 metres apart suspecting a Tiger close by. Xena, mother of the three Cubs earlier encountered walked into view and eventually towards us. We were expecting her to cross the track between our two jeeps but she decided to change direction slightly and walked almost straight at the other jeep and then up the track beyond them. We had good views but the people in the other jeep had Xena head on just a few metres away. It was a special few minutes, enhanced by the absence of any frenzy from other jeeps.

Over the course of the eight days and 16 drives in the Park, we saw another three Tigers, making a total of seven sightings. They were all great to see even though they didn't perhaps quite provide the same photo opportunity as Xena and her Cubs.

We found time to stop for a few minutes now and again and at least get some record shots of some of the wildlife in the Park. The Giant Wood Spider and the



Lemon Pansy



Macaques



Sambar



Wild Boar

two tiny Indian Scops Owls only delayed our Tiger search for a couple of minutes. Langurs were everywhere and we eventually got some photos whilst waiting for a Tiger (which did not materialise on that occasion). I eventually managed to get images of some of the other quadrupeds in the Park. We had a lovely encounter with half a dozen Jackals; they had obviously smelt the remains of a Tiger kill from a few days before that was now noticeably pony even to us!

The birds and butterflies where we stayed were a challenge in the contrasty light but I was keen to get a little bit of the wider wildlife picture as well as the Tigers. As might be expected, there are some very colourful and attractive species. I am sure a return trip to the area just to look for and photograph other wildlife could be hugely rewarding but there are so many things to do and places to go.

Tourism is extremely important to the Tiger conservation programme and provides livelihoods for guides, drivers, jeep owners as well as those offering accommodation. There still remain however many years after the Indian Government's 'Project Tiger' initiative, many difficulties including conflicts with some Indian villagers. The Tigers need more habitat but land is a precious commodity. Lots of excellent work has been and is being done to protect Tigers in India but the future is uncertain, as with many conservation projects, in the wider context of pressure on land and global climate change.

Common Grass Yellow





Langur



Tiger Cub



Giant Wood Spider



Two Tiger Cubs - my first ever Tigers



Oriental White-eye



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher



Tiger- Xena



IN SEARCH OF THE RAREST BIRD IN THE WORLD

Kevin Elsby FRPS

As a young teenager starting my birdwatching career in the 1970s, I became interested in learning about the variety of bird life on the planet. I got to know, for example, that the largest bird in the world was the Ostrich; that the bird with the longest wingspan was an Albatross and that the smallest bird in the world was the Bee Hummingbird.

One of the other facts I learnt at an early stage was that the rarest bird in the world was a Kestrel, specifically the Mauritius Kestrel. In 1974 this species was down to 4 known individuals. It was literally on the verge of extinction.

At that time, a major effort was undertaken to try and rescue this bird from its seemingly imminent demise. It looked likely to go the way of the Dodo, another Mauritius bird, into the annals of history. Over the course of the 40 odd years since then, conservation efforts have brought about an increase in the population of this endemic bird to more than 400 individuals.

The remote Indian Ocean islands have witnessed a litany of devastation of their wildlife at the hand of man since the time when they were originally discovered and populated several hundred years ago. In addition, the release of alien species either intentionally or accidentally have also accounted for the loss of many species on these islands. The Dodo and the Aldabran tortoise are two notable examples.

When I was offered the opportunity to speak on wildlife on a cruise calling at Mauritius, I had no hesitation in accepting. In addition to Mauritius, the cruise also visited several other difficult to get to and equally remote destinations in the Indian Ocean, each of which have their own special birds and wildlife, and which, like the Mauritius Kestrel, occur nowhere else on earth.

My wife and I joined the ship in Mauritius, and as we tend to do on such cruises, we used the local infrastructure to explore sites in the ports of call to try and see as much local wildlife as possible. We hired a taxi for the first day, before the cruise began, and managed to visit a remote site on the island where the Kestrel is still surviving. We saw a pair which were nesting, and the male repeatedly brought prey to the female. Although looking very similar to European Kestrel, make no mistake, this was a bird you cannot find anywhere else on the planet. In addition, we also saw another very rare endemic bird of Mauritius, the Pink Pigeon which had also been brought back from the point of extinction. About the size of a Wood Pigeon, it really did look pink – at least on the breast.

Although there is not huge diversity of species on these islands, there are many endemic species to be seen and photographed. Whilst on Mauritius, I was also able to see Mauritius Bulbul, and Mauritius

Fody (a species the size of a Greenfinch, but with a bright red upper chest, and which is now more or less confined to a tiny islet of the South East of Mauritius).

From Mauritius, the cruise next called in at Mahe in the Seychelles. Victoria, the capital, the Seychelles Blue Pigeon was present in the centre of the town. In the local botanic garden there were some plants of the Coco De Mer, a palm tree which has the largest seed on earth. It too is extremely rare and threatened with extinction.

Hiring a taxi, we visited a small estuary to the west of Victoria, and managed to find some Crab Plovers, a very distinctive wader which I hadn't seen since my first trip to Kenya in 1982. I was able to get some shots including some of it catching and eating a crab. There was support from other waders including Greenshank, Greater Sand Plover and a very obliging Whimbrel which was also eating a crab.

I often use the services of a website called Birding Pals when travelling independently. I will write an article about this organisation for the electronic version.

Next day we were in Praslin Island in the Seychelles. I had contacted a guide via Birding Pals, several weeks before my trip, who had agreed to guide us around the tiny islet of Cousin, which is a birdwatchers and photographers dream. This tiny island has several of the endemic Seychelles species on it, which cannot be found on the mainland, such as Seychelles Warbler (rather skulking, non-descript, and very difficult to photograph) Seychelles Kestrel, Seychelles Bulbul, and Seychelles Magpie Robin (another species with very low numbers). I was able to see all of these, whilst surrounded by thousands of nesting seabirds, including the spectacular White-tailed Tropicbird, Lesser Noddy, and the utterly delightful White Tern and the White-tailed Tropic Bird, pictured above left.

My wife and I had a thoroughly enjoyable time on the island and once again we benefited from using Birding Pals.

The cruise then moved south westwards to the Comoros Islands, lying between the mainland of Africa and Madagascar. We visited the island of Mayotte in the group and here, there was another suite of endemics to enjoy. Once again we hired a taxi, and tracked down several of these, including Mayotte Sunbird and Mayotte White-eye.

From here, we next visited Madagascar. We had two different visits, and during our time here we managed to see a good selection of Madagascan birds as well as three species of Lemur, including a nocturnal one, which the taxonomists are still



Madagascar Turtle Dove, Mahe, Seychelles



Crab Plover and crab, Mahe, Seychelles

Opposite: White-tailed Tropicbird, Cousin, Seychelles



Coco de Mer, Victoria, Seychelles



Oustalet's Chameleon, Madagascar



Lesser Noddy, Cousin, Seychelles



Mauritius Fody, Ile aux Aigrettes, Mauritius



Seychelles Blue Pigeon, Mahe, Seychelles

debating (it is likely to have been a Gray's Sportive Lemur, which has an entire world range of less than 60 km²). In addition Chameleons were an added attraction. We saw one of the smallest in the world, the Northern Leaf Chameleon, at just over an inch long. The Panther Chameleon, by comparison is enormous, at over 12 inches long.

Last stop on the cruise before returning to Mauritius was the island of Reunion. This also has its own endemic species, including Reunion Stonechat, Reunion Bulbul and Reunion Olive White-eye. The island is truly spectacular, with mountains reaching to over 10,000 feet, clothed in vegetation. After a day exploring the island, we sailed back to Mauritius for our return 13 hour flight after a very enjoyable trip, which added many new species to my bird list, including lots of birds endemic to these remote islands.

November is in the rainy season in this part of the Indian Ocean and so one has to be prepared for this and to keep photographic equipment dry. Cruising is not for everyone, and it certainly has its frustrations for the naturalist – you are rarely in one place long enough. However, as in this case, there are significant positives. You usually get to visit a selection of destinations on your trip, and you always return to the comfort of your floating hotel at the end of a tiring, exciting day.



Mauritius Kestrel, Mauritius



WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS OF NAMIBIA

Conor Molloy ARPS

There is so much more to Namibia than its extensive wildlife. Until we started exploring the possibilities of visiting the country I had never heard of the Fish River Canyon, Kolmanskop or Sossusvlei, yet they were all outstanding photographic attractions. Having hired a 4x4, in total we drove 4500km over three weeks, most of the time at slow speed on rutted, gravel tracks. The driving was mostly very boring as it was mile after mile of the same roadside view with little variation and often on roads that were just straight for about 50km at a time without a bend in sight.

For the southern part of the country the wildlife is fairly scarce as its mostly inhospitable dry desert with not much in the way of food to sustain animals and birds. It was not until we got to Walvis Bay on the coast that the birdlife kicked in. The huge salt lagoons were home to many waders including lots of Sanderlings, Sandpipers and Turnstones. They were walking on the many salt crystals which gave an impression of a snow scene. There was also a large colony of Greater Flamingo feeding closer to the shore. Further up the coastline there is Cape Cross near the

Skeleton Coast where the population of Fur Seals can reach peaks of 100,000. Its quite incredible to just open the door of your car and immediately be surrounded by hundreds of seals playing around in the car park. The stench that greets you is just as incredible. A boardwalk brings you much closer to the seals on the rugged beach, they stretch out as far as the eye can see continuously heading out to sea for food and returning again on the high waves to seemingly get battered on the huge rocks. They really seem quite oblivious to the presence of humans and present quite a photographic challenge as there are so many of them - where do you point the camera? Like most things you have to be patient, watch their behaviour and decide for yourself where the workable composition lies.

As we got nearer to Etosha National Park the wildlife began to reveal itself with more abundance. Luckily the Ongava lodge we stayed at on arrival in Etosha was just outside the Park and had its own small safari grounds. This included a watering hole with an extensive photographers hide almost at eye level and it was floodlit at night. We stayed here for

Agama Lizard



two nights and I think I spent most of that time in the hide! At night the White and Black Rhino would come to drink whilst during the day I encountered Hyena, Zebra, Springbok, Kudu, Water Buck and Kori Bustards come to drink.

The bigger attraction was the Red-billed Quelea's, there were around 5000 of them in the trees around the water hole. I have never seen that many of a single species of bird in one small place. Every two minutes all of them would leave the trees and descend on the water hole producing a loud whirring sound with their wings, then after a short drink they would whirr back to the trees in a repeated pattern that went on throughout the day. Just like I mentioned with the huge numbers of fur seals, it can be hard to work out exactly what type of shot you want to get of these Quelea's as its impossible to focus on only one.

Etosha was quite a different 'safari' experience. Having been to the Kruger and Serengeti where you are driven by an experienced ranger in an adapted vehicle, here it is all self-drive. You pick up a map of the park which identifies the water holes and you work out a route for the day. It was always quite a comfort factor when on safari, to be accompanied by a Ranger with knowledge of the area and the behaviour of the animals, so it felt a bit more remote and independent to be by ourselves. The only rule seemed to be - don't get out of your vehicle under any circumstances - and you have a phone number to call if you get vehicle problems.

Unfortunately they close the park as the hours of darkness approach, so you have to be out of there just when it seems that the animals will begin to congregate in good numbers at the water holes. Nevertheless, we had good encounters with Black-backed Jackals roaming the open fields, a family of Ostrich chicks happily parading down the street, numerous types of Antelope, Giraffe, Zebra and Elephant on our visits to the various water holes. It pays to take it slow as there are all sorts of bird life wandering in the low grass at the side of the road - Double-banded Courser and Temminck's Courser, Northern Black Korhaan, Hornbills and Crowned Plovers to name but a few. My



Black-backed Jackal



Baby Ostriches going for a stroll



Black shouldered Kite

'star' bird was the beautiful Black-shouldered Kite which stayed perched in a far off tree just long enough to get my focusing spot on him and click the shutter.

There is of course always the possibility of an exceptional spot in these wonderfully rich wildlife areas and my favourite was coming across a Verreaux's Eagle Owl resting on the branches of a nearby tree. It was quite a difficult spot as it was well hidden and very still but it seemed contented to sit there and let us observe. Whilst I was able to get some photos of it, they do suffer from that annoying thing called 'habitat' where the branches conspire to make a cluttered and distracting background ruining the picture completely.

In total there are 690 species of birds recorded in Namibia of which 110 species are endemic - found nowhere else in the world. As this was not a bird 'photography' nor bird watching holiday I only saw a small fraction of them, around 70, and of those 50 were photographed acceptably.

Having driven all the way through the park we exited at another camp on the outskirts for a further two night stay and here encountered one of my favourite small birds - the Crimson-breasted Shrike. Much earlier in the visit I had seen the bright red flash in the distance and hoped I would get a chance to take a close up picture at some stage but we never saw another one until setting up in this camp where it came to a nearby tree for a very short time and allowed me to gradually inch closer to get the shot before flying off never to be seen again. That vivid red breast is quite a stand-out marking.

Breakfast at this camp was a highly entertaining affair with sixty plus Rosy-faced Lovebirds in the tree a short distance away. Food would have to wait as I returned to the room to get my camera gear and spent the next hour watching their behaviour and getting some good close-ups of Lovebirds doing what they do best - showing affection. They were in no rush to head off so it was a real patient photography treat to start the day. It was not long before we were joined by another colourful chap - the male Agama Lizard with its wonderful orange head and blue body, he was a bit easier to



Rosy faced Lovebirds



Crimson breasted shrike

photograph as he sat motionless for a few seconds at a time trying to search out some of the smaller insects.

These brief encounters with the local wildlife of Namibia were but part of a wider tour of the country to take in other experiences including a crash landing hot air balloon ride over Sossusvlei, a near miss with a sidewinder snake in Kolmanskop and breakfast with a habituated Springbok that just sat

with us at our table while we ate. The sort of things that make Africa such a prized destination.

If you are not a worrier I would certainly recommend the freedom of just hiring your own vehicle and heading off for the camps and lodges of a pre-planned route. Yes, the roads can be bad in places and there is always the risk of punctures as well as the only petrol station in town having no petrol ! But, I am not a worrier and enjoyed the entire journey exploring this marvellous country.



Fur seals at Cape Cross



Verreaux's Eagle Owl



Double banded Courser



Sanderling at Walvis Bay



Flock of Red billed Quelea's



Kori Bustards drinking



CLUB ROOKIE TO RPS-DISTINGUISHED PHOTOGRAPHER: MY ARPS STORY

David Brown ARPS

As a teenager in the 1960s, being small and non-sporting at school, I had become conditioned to avoid competition. Instead, I dreamt of becoming a wildlife photographer. Through hard labour in Scunthorpe steel works over school holidays I acquired a 400mm preset-diaphragm manual focus lens for my Exa SLR. Alas, after running off many film rolls on my first outing then getting the best few shots enlarged at Boots with disappointing results, I quickly discovered that this game was way beyond my pocket. I became an academic zoologist. Then in 2011, owning a digital compact camera and approaching retirement, I joined Gosforth Camera Club. I entered one print into each of

2 competitions: 'Nature' and 'Solitude'. The first was Highly Commended, and the other won Second Place! Beginner's luck, but for me it was a lightbulb moment: here was something I could do! A long-latent competitive monster arose within me. The judge was wonderfully expert and inspirational, and held ARPS – so whatever that entailed, I wanted one of those! I invested in a second-hand 400mm f2.8 lens and complimentary kit, and became a 'Nikon Man'. Thus my retirement challenge began.

I discovered the local hides and reserves in Northumberland and Durham. Having previously thought myself a naturalist, I had my first lessons in

Hanging Plan

Waders of Northumberland

David Brown





Greenshank

Opposite: Redshank



Avocet chick

STATEMENT OF INTENT

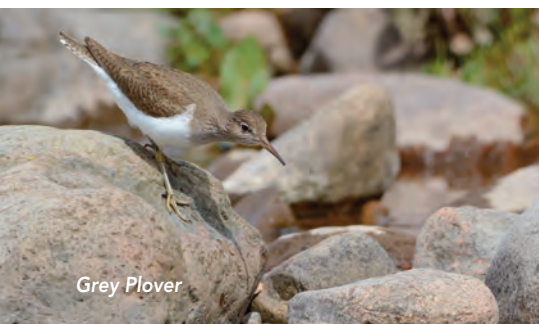
As a wildlife enthusiast my 'home patch' is the beautiful Northumberland Coast and hinterland. Its sandy, rocky and muddy shores, brackish pools, meadows and marshes are frequented by a wide range of birdlife. My favourites are the waders: their social habits, foraging adaptations, sometimes frenetic feeding behaviour (as in Sanderling) and superb camouflage (for example Snipe), make them a delight to study and photograph. My panel comprises 13 different species of waders which, except for image 2 (Avocet chick), were photographed outside the summer tourist season. From September to March their numbers and variety increase greatly, as inland nesters move to the coast and combine with birds migrating from Scandinavia and high Arctic breeding grounds. Most species occur in flocks, whereas a few including Grey Phalarope show only as rare single birds on passage. I aim to illustrate their diversity and behaviour across a range of coastal habitats.



Turnstone



Grey Phalarope



Grey Plover



Redshanks

humility when I met real experts in those hides and within my club. The more I learned from them the more enthusiastic I became. But arrogance was to stand in my way when it came to handling judges advice: "Of course it's sharp, I wouldn't have entered it if it wasn't!" I came to realise that hides were valuable for certain types of image and species, but the real challenge and opportunity lay in observing and photographing wildlife out in the field and preferably alone. I became drawn to the beautiful Northumberland coast, fell in love with photographing waders and other seabirds, learned to work favourite locations from South to North with the light behind me, to work with the tides, to follow advance weather forecasts, to avoid the excessive contrast of harsh midday light and also the very first light where there is no reflection off wet sand to reveal feather detail in a bird's underside; and also to avoid the main dog-walking times!

Following a local Federation 'Celebrating Distinctions' evening where I met successful LRPS and ARPS photographers and examined closely their panels, I decided to go straight to ARPS in Natural History as I felt I was too narrow and specialised to put together a wide range of portraits, street scenes, landscapes and creatives such as seemed the basis of most LRPS panels; whereas I could envisage an extended panel of waders more easily. I attended as an observer a Nature Group Advisory Day in Foxton (March 2016) where for the first time I began to appreciate what the RPS considered 'critical sharpness'. I put together a panel plus spares on my waders and participated in an Advisory Day at Amersham (January 2017), where I was told that it would not pass as it failed to meet the required 'variation'. Fifteen different species was not enough when they were mostly portraits in similar poses. Did I not have flying shots, group shots, more images showing behaviour? I was already enrolled for an assessment in March 2017 but hurriedly hunted around and made changes which I hoped would suffice.

At Bath my panel failed, yet was a positive turning point. I was not criticised for variety; but I failed to achieve critical sharpness on many images; group images (as in a flying flock) need to have every bird sharp; mostly my birds were too large in the frame: small birds do not need to be larger than life-sized, and look better with more environment shown. My panel was not helped by having been [commercially] printed on matt paper: a lustre or pearl would have lifted them. I returned very dejected, but was pleased when I received the detailed email feedback where I



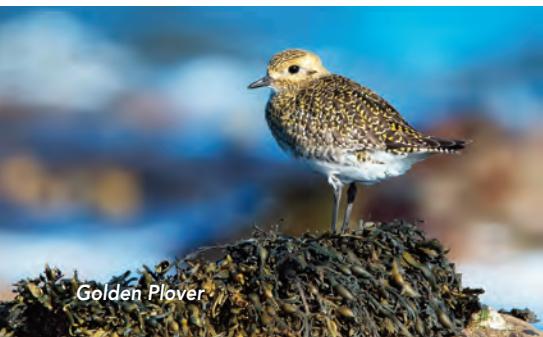
Purple Sandpiper



Sanderlings



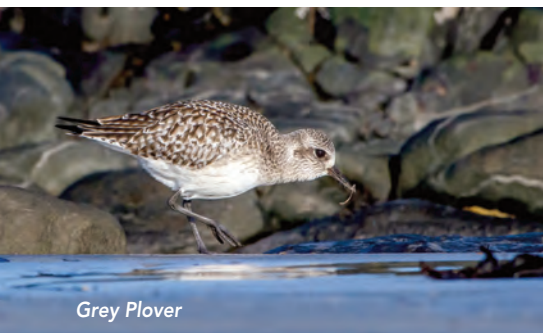
Curlew



Golden Plover



Dunlin



Grey Plover



Snipe

discovered I had been offered a 'Resubmission' which had to be within 18 months. The adjudicators noted that I had demonstrated appropriate field skills and had a good eye for a picture, and thought my basic idea was sound and interesting, so they wished to encourage me. It was my wife, who had long told me my images were not sharp enough, who persuaded me that if I followed their advice to the letter then I would make it very difficult for them to fail me a second time.

I resolved to get into home printing, and a friend in my club gave me a masterclass in how to do it. He also had a far better screen than mine. I realised I was handicapped for post-processing, so firstly I upgraded the screen to a Dell Ultrasharp 27. Wow, what a difference! Now I could far better assess critical sharpness in my raw files and see noise being created as I used sharpening tools. After reprocessing I retained only four of my original 15 images, found sharper originals from earlier shoots and spent time on location reshooting many more. During this time I was fortunate to photograph a fight between two redshanks; and I obtained my final image, the isolated golden plover shot, on rocks near Whitley Bay after waiting for the main 1000-strong flock to depart, only to find I was cut off by rising tide and had to escape up a seawall via a vertical rusty iron ladder with 7kg of kit slung on my back!

My reassessment in Bath on 4th September 2018 was successful. It commenced with the chairman explaining to the audience what a reassessment involved. My feedback letter from my first assessment was read out followed by my updated statement of intent. Both adjudicators and chairman were keen to emphasise how the feedback had been exactly followed, and encouraged others to do the same.

If I may offer just one piece of advice from my experience, it is this: if a judge who has gained an RPS distinction tells you that your images fail to reach a critical level of sharpness, then you had better believe them!



Sanderlings & Dunlin

The Nature Group invites members to host Field Meetings

Hello Everyone

On behalf of the RPS Nature Group, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who hosted and supported one of the Nature Group meetings during the course of 2018. Whether it was the residential courses, the technique days or the field meetings.

It is the time of year when I make an appeal for members to lead field meetings. At the Chairman's day which we recently held, Duncan Locke kindly prepared a questionnaire asking members who attended, what they would like from the Nature Group. The most popular response was field meetings. However, these can only take place if members are willing and prepared to host such events.

RPS Nature Group Field Meetings have always been an integral part of the Nature Group's activities, as they give members the opportunity to meet other natural history photographers, to exchange ideas, as well as an opportunity to visit sites of natural history interest, which they would not normally access.

I am therefore making an appeal for members to consider becoming a host for a field meeting. If you visit a site, with interesting subjects to photograph, please consider becoming a leader – you will not be expected to instruct others about photographic techniques or be an expert at identifying all the wildlife subjects.

As many members of the Nature Group are retired, mid-week meetings are often very well attended.

If you are interested and need more information, please contact me as soon as possible, or complete the form overleaf.

To ensure that we have sufficient time to advertise the field meetings please get in touch no later than 31 March 2019.

Barbara E Lawton, FRPS, DPAGB

Email: rpsngprog@talktalk.net

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Barbara Lawton

Field meeting proposal 2019

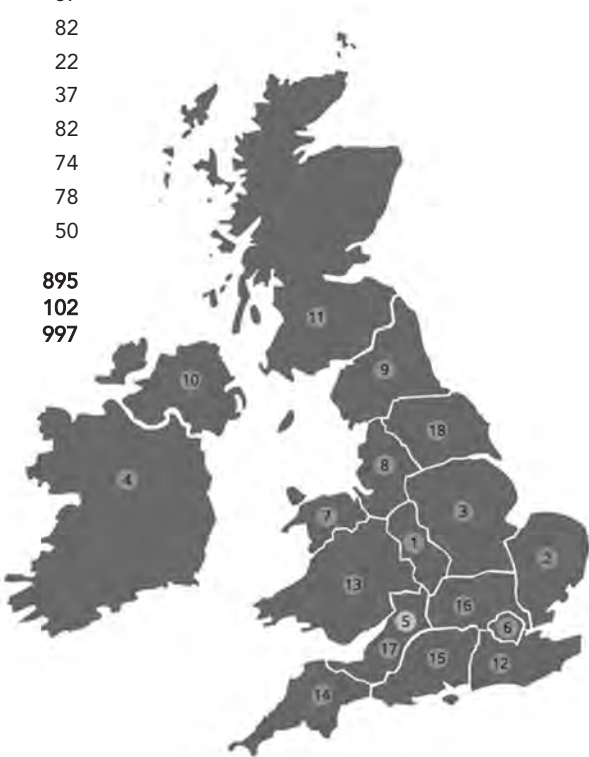
Your Name and Address
Telephone
Email:
Site Location
Subjects of Interest
Meeting Place
Grid Ref/Post Code
Additional Information
Day and Date
Time
Cost: (eg Car Parking Fees)

Please return to Barbara Lawton rpsngprog@talktalk.net by 31 March

Membership Statistics

Shown below are Nature Group members per RPS region as at January 2019 (and Januray 2018) together with othere statistics.

Regions	Jan 2019	Jan 2018	Distinctions	Jan 2019	Jan 2018
1 Central	67	71	Honorary FRPS	4	4
2 East Anglia	84	82	FRPS	71	79
3 East Midlands	47	52	ARPS	241	232
4 Eire	8	9	LRPS	208	216
6 London	75	88	No Distinctions	400	466
7 North Wales	9	10			
8 North Western	54	68			
9 Northern	29	30			
10 Northern Ireland	5	3			
11 Scotland	50	57			
12 South Eastern	90	82			
13 South Wales	22	22			
14 South Western	36	37			
15 Southern	81	82			
16 Thames Valley	63	74			
17 Western	67	78			
18 Yorkshire	50	50			
			Total	924	997
Total UK	837	895			
Overseas	87	102			
Total Membership	924	997			



These statistics are prepared from data by the RPS Membership Department

Map courtesy of the RPS website

RPS Nature Group Residential Field Meeting
Slapton Ley Field Centre

Slapton, Kingsbridge, Devon. TQ7 2QP

2nd – 5th August 2019

Leader: James Foad LRPS



This highly successful Residential Field Weekend will run again in 2019.

The cost is £210 per person single / £200 per person shared occupancy for three nights.

Prices include full board, packed lunch, accommodation and VAT at 20%.

Deposit will be required upon booking to secure your place.

All rooms are en-suite.

We will have the use of the centre's 16 seat Mini bus for which there will be a small extra charge per mile.

Main subjects of interest: Late summer flowers, insects and birds.

Moth Trap may run some nights.

I will take bookings when this appears in the Winter edition of The Iris

For further detail and to book please contact: James Foad LRPS
Email: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com Phone: 07834 810430