

THE IRIS



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

Issue No. 117
Winter 2013-2014



Scarce Green Silverlines

by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS

David Osborn Phototours

Yellowstone & The Tetons

Join us next September for two weeks in the splendour of Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks.

For more information email David at: poppyland3@btinternet.com or go to www.davidosbornphotography.co.uk to view images from this and other tours.



PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

Mark Monckton ARPS

2014 Workshops:

Bluebells

Water Voles

Orchids

Butterflies

Fungi

Deer Rut

Autumn Colours



For more information visit: www.markmonckton.co.uk
or email Mark at: mark@markmonckton.co.uk

Publication information

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

Spring	Copy deadline 20th December Published early 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@btinternet.com

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

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images should be supplied on CD as sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 ppi (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Original transparencies may be submitted, however, the Editor cannot specify how long they may be away from the author.

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. However 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

Stanley L Hunt (Printers) Limited
Midland Road, Rushden.

Design & layout

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

Contents

2	Editorial
3	From the Chair
4	Speyside, one of Scotland's great Wildlife havens by Richard Revels FRPS
8	Insects of Europe, an FRPS Panel by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS
12	Kingfishers of Oman by Andrew Adams ARPS
16	Field Meeting Report - Havergate Island by David O'Neill LRPS
17	Field Meeting Report - Millers Dale by Robert Hawkesworth FRPS
18	Hobby at Wicken Fen Richard Nicoll ARPS
20	Return of the Yellowhammer by Joe Curtis ARPS
22	Field Meeting Report - Windover Hill by Graham Saxby
23	Obituary - Martin Withers FRPS by John Tinning
28	Obituary - Gordon Dixon ARPS by Heather Angel FRPS
29	From the Archives by Tony Bond FRPS
31	Field Meetings
32	Obituary - Phil Newman by Mike Lane FRPS and Gordon Holm
ibc	A Wildlife Journey by Colin Smale ARPS

Committee

Officers

Chairman: Tony Bond FRPS

Leigh, Lancs WN7 3LJ

Tel: 01942 674773 Email: anthony.bond39@btinternet.com

Secretary: Margaret Johnson LRPS

53 Mapperley Orchard, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8AH

Tel: 01159 265893 E-mail: m.jos@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Margery Maskell ARPS

Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 5DW

Email: rpsngtreasurer@virginmedia.com

Vice Chairman: Richard Revels FRPS

Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065 E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Immediate Past Chairman: John Bebbington FRPS

Langport, Somerset, TA10 9SE

Tel: 01458 253027 Email: john.bebbingtonfrps@ukonline.co.uk

Committee Members

Editor of The Iris: Dawn Osborn FRPS

Dereham, Norfolk, NR20 5LH

E-mail: iris_editor@btinternet.com

Exhibition Secretary: Kevin Maskell FRPS

Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 5DW

Email: rpsngexh1@virginmedia.com

NG Rep to Advisory Panel: David O'Neill LRPS

Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6DG

Email: david.oneill@wildhorizons.uk.com

Programme Co-ordinator: Richard Revels FRPS

Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065 E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Kevin Elsby FRPS

Aylsham, Norfolk, NR

Tel: 01263-732839 Email: wildlife@greenbee.net

John Jones ARPS

Kegworth, Derby, DE74 2FW

Tel: 01509 672125

Peter Jones ARPS

Bilthorpe, Notts, NG22 8TB

E-mail: pwjonesarps@btinternet.com

Barbara Lawton FRPS

Wolverhampton, West Midlands, WV9 5QG

E-mail: barbara.lawton@talktalk.net

Sue McGarrigle LRPS

Charlecote, Warwickshire

E-mail: sue@suemcgarrigle.co.uk

Geoff Trinder ARPS

Belton, Doncaster, DN9 1PG

Tel: 01427 872051

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

This issue, the 117th, is a special issue for me. Not only is it the 30th issue I have been responsible for but it also marks 10 years as Editor of The Iris. It has been an enjoyable experience that has enabled me to communicate with many members. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those of you who have supported me in my role as Editor by supplying me with articles and images for The Iris. Recently I was awarded the RPS Fenton Medal in recognition of the work I have done on behalf of the Nature Group - it was indeed an honour to be nominated for this award and it was a very pleasant surprise when I was notified that I was to receive it. Thank you to all of you who have emailed and telephoned to offer your congratulations.

In this issue you will find the excellent "Insects of Europe" panel by Gianpiero Ferrari which recently earned him his Fellowship. Congratulations to Gianpiero for a job well done! Richard Revels FRPS shares his experiences of photographing wildlife in Speyside, while Andrew Adams ARPS tells his story of photographing a Kingfisher in Oman. There are two short articles by Richard Nicholl ARPS and Joe Curtiss ARPS and reports from three field meetings by David O'Neill LRPS, Robert Hawkesworth FRPS and Graham Saxby. We also pay tribute to Martin Withers FRPS, Gordon Dixon ARPS and Phil Newman.

This issue also contains your copy of the Entry Form for the 2014 Nature Group Annual Exhibition. It forms the centre four pages and can be removed without 'spoiling' your copy of The Iris. The closing date for entries is 25th January. Your committee are hoping for a good entry, so please don't disappoint them - make a note in your diaries and remember to enter.

Summer is now well and truly over; autumn colour is beginning to show and the Red Deer rut is underway but the fungus don't seem to be overly enthusiastic yet. Fingers crossed for a good season. It seemed a strange summer in many ways, but I managed to do quite a lot of photography on my local patch, mostly flora and butterflies. I just need to find the time to process them now!

Last but not least, I need articles for the next issue. If you have ever thought you would like to see your work in print, this is your opportunity. Short stories are just as acceptable as longer ones. Anywhere between 500 and 2,000 words plus a selection of supporting images. So, why not relive a recent trip and write an account of it for The Iris, or if you recently achieved a Distinction please share your success with fellow members. Please contact me by email if you have an idea for an article. I would love to hear from you.



From the chair

I am sure that you are as delighted as I am to learn that Dawn has received the Fenton medal in the Society's awards for 2013. This is richly deserved for almost 20 years service to the Group. In this time Dawn has had a variety of roles such as committee member, chair, webmaster and editor of *The Iris*. Of these I regard the last as perhaps the most important. The latest membership list shows that our number has increased to 703. This membership is widely scattered over both the UK and abroad and *The Iris* has a vital part to play in communications. I have heard many people say that *The Iris* is the best Group publication and this is down to Dawn's professionalism. The Fenton medal is one of the Society's major awards and is due recognition for all that Dawn has done for the Nature Group and the Society.

By contrast I am sad to have to report the death of Gordon Dickson, a founder member of the Group. He served as chairman, committee member and for three years the editor of *The Newsletter*, the precursor of *The Iris*. He was also a highly respected mycologist as I observed in a recent book review. I was contacted by his son, Richard, in July who said that his father was now 93 years old and very frail. He asked if I wanted some very early publications by the Group. A neat binder arrived containing mainly *The Newsletter* starting with No.1 from 1976. This was followed by a second and included a brief note saying that Gordon passed away on the 1st of August and that the Nature Group was an important part of his story. The two binders cover the first ten years of the Group and now reside in our archives. I found their contents so interesting that I have written an article which you will find on page 29. There are now few of us who were around at the start of the Group. I was very pleased when Heather Angel agreed to interrupt her busy schedule and write the obituary which is also in this edition.

I have myself attended two field meetings. The first was Trevor Davenport's to Ainsdale Local Nature Reserve. Unlike last year's meeting this was blessed with excellent weather. The cold Spring resulted in subject matter different to that which Trevor had intended when he fixed the date but there was plenty to keep everyone busy. I should have gone to the Millers Dale field meeting but Robert Hawkesworth rang me a week before to say that the cold weather meant that there was nothing to photograph. However seven members turned up on the day and a few days of warmer weather resulted in some interesting subject matter. I did go to the meeting at the home of Geoff and Christine Trinder for a day of photographing controlled subjects. I know that there are mixed feelings on this type of work but provided the subjects are not put under stress and there is no attempt to pass the pictures off as wild and free I can see no objections. Even the programmes presented by David Attenborough contain a proportion of controlled filming. Paul Hobson provided harvest mice and a common toad. A falconer friend brought

a number of birds of prey and Paul and Geoff dotted some moths around the garden. If you consider controlled subjects to be easy you should try harvest mice! The real heroine of the day was Christine for her long hours in the kitchen which kept us well fed and watered. The social aspect of field meetings is as important as the photographic and the presence of members I had never seen before shows that there is a demand for this kind of event. I would like to see an account of every field meeting in *The Iris* just as they did in 1976 – 1986!

Our joint exhibition secretaries, Margery and Kevin Maskell, have been attempting to simplify the rules of the annual exhibition. Please read the entry form very carefully as mistakes cost them time and effort. The biggest change is that you will be able to enter up to 8 prints or DPI in each section with 4 As and 4 Bs. As has been noted in *The Iris* before, cute titles are spreading like a disease in both national and international exhibitions. This has never been a problem for us and the committee wishes to keep it that way. So any entry with a cute title will be disqualified. Also, no one likes to find that their prints have been damaged by others, so any prints which are considered a danger to others will also be disqualified. There are also requirements regarding mounting in order that the prints can be displayed at the Old Schoolhouse which require careful reading.

I hope that many of you have bought the exhibition CD. The Maskells and Dr. Kevin Elsby have done an excellent job in producing it. The decision to produce it in-house has been vindicated and a large loss has been transformed into a profit. The 800 or so clubs in the PAGB are a potential market which we have barely tapped. So if you are a club member why not persuade them to buy the CD? The cost is less than the expenses of a typical visiting lecturer. Or the CD can be held in reserve for the inevitable occasion in mid winter when a lecturer pulls out at short notice.

By the time you read this the fungus folk will know whether this has been a good Autumn after the disasters of 2011 and 2012. I was surprised to be invited by Natural England to repeat the waxcap survey of 2012 which I wrote up in the Spring edition. Such surveys do cost money so only the best sites from last year will be surveyed this. Someone at Natural England must be very keen to see the first SSSI designated on the strength of its fungi. There are strict conditions for this and if they are met you will be among the first to know.

There is the possibility of a joint meeting with the South East region at the WWT reserve at Arundel in April 2014. The details may not be finalised before this edition of *The Iris* goes to press so keep your eyes on Membership Matters and the Society's website nearer the time.

Tony

Speyside, one of Scotland's great Wildlife Havens.

by Richard Revels FRPS

For me there are few places in the British Isles that can match Speyside, in central Scotland, for a spell of winter or early spring wildlife photography. The Scottish islands may have far more birds in season, and the western highlands have more rugged and dramatic scenery, that also contains plenty of wildlife. However the area of Scotland centred around Aviemore and the old Caledonian Pine Forest in Speyside, has some wonderful wildlife that is very hard to beat in Britain.

Travelling to the Hebrides or Shetlands Islands involves planning and booking a ferry or flight in advance, whereas travelling to Speyside only involves jumping in a car and heading north. For me it's 500 miles that takes the best part of a day to get there, but such a trip can be either planned in advance, or be done at the last minute, as and when a window of opportunity arises. Another thing in its favour is that the weather also tends to be more settled around Speyside compared to the western and northern Islands and highlands.

So what has Speyside to offer the visiting wildlife photographer in late winter and early spring? Well there's Capercaillie, Ptarmigan, Black and Red Grouse, Crested Tits, Red Squirrel, Roe and Red Deer for starters. Where else in Britain can you see all those in a few days?

I tend to go there mostly during late winter or early spring, as this avoids the midges and the wildlife is often coming regularly to feeding stations, and the birds are likely to be at their most attractive, coming into their breeding plumage. Early in the year will certainly give you a great opportunity of getting good Red Squirrel pictures with them in their nice red winter coat and attractive ear tufts. During winter to late February or early March, Crested Tit will still be coming regularly to feeders, and will be fairly easy to photograph. During the breeding season a licence is required to photograph Crested Tits at or near their nesting site, but there are no such problems in the winter before breeding starts.

Both these species will in time find the nuts and feeders you put out to attract them, but if you don't have a week or more to wait, an alternative is to pay to go to one of several feeding stations set up by the resident wildlife photographers. You may of course be fortunate in getting accommodation where feeders are in the garden and there are no problems with guests taking pictures of the wildlife that visits. However the backdrops and settings of the feeders may not be ideal for photography.

One option is to contact one of the area's resident wildlife photographers and visit their feeding stations. Money will of course have to change hands to use these set ups, but you are virtually guaranteed that the desired wildlife will be coming regularly for their free feast, and in a good wild looking setting ideal for photography.

Ptarmigan are birds of the highest hills, and will require a considerable amount of rough walking to reach them high up in their Grampian Mountains habitat. Carrying my heavy camera equipment up a mountainside for several hours to get to them is probably beyond my capabilities now that I am in my 70's. However I did manage it some twelve years ago with good results.

During the winter Ptarmigan have white feathers to blend with the snow of their upland habitat. During late March or early April when most of the snow has gone they moult their white feathers and become mottled, which blends perfectly with the lichen covered rocky habitat. My visit was in late April and the birds were very difficult to locate, but finding a scattering of old white feathers meant that we were in the right area. After about two hours of searching a courting pair was found, and some nice pictures taken of these quite trusting birds. This was particularly pleasing as when back at the car park a couple of birders enquired if we had seen any Ptarmigan. They apparently had been searching for them for two days in that same general area without seeing any at all. That was back in the days when

film was king, so I was unable to show them on the camera screen what they had missed!

Both Black Grouse and Capercaillie are normally quite shy birds and are protected at their lekking sites during the spring to avoid disturbance by visitors. The very shy Black Grouse may however be photographed from certain permanent hides set up by resident wildlife photographers. Again money will have to change hands to use these hides, and you will be taken there in the dark, well before the birds arrive at dawn, and you will have to stay in the hide until the birds leave the lek several hours later. To see Black Cocks displaying in early morning light was one of the most magical moments of my wildlife photography and one I will remember forever.

Occasionally a rogue cock Capercaillie will set up a territory away from the normal lek, and will attack anyone or anything that comes close. These rogue birds will even chase off females of their species. I was fortunate in going to Forest Lodge area when 'Mad Henry' was there during the mid 1990's. Seeing someone being chased by rogue Capper cock was quite amusing, and while he was displaying before launching an attack can give you some good photo opportunities. However when this turkey-sized bird turned its attentions to me, it was not so amusing! I had to try to fend him off with my tripod legs, not so easy when you have a heavy 500 mm lens attached! A colleague came to my rescue using a long forked stick to keep the bird at bay while we retreated. I did get some very nice pictures, so it was all very worth while and certainly a very memorable encounter.

Red Grouse are much easier, inhabiting the lower heather moorlands in Speyside and quite widely across Britain. They are often quite bold during late winter and early spring when the cocks are displaying and competing with each other to impress the hens.

Driving around the remote roads early in the morning can result in finding some good wildlife close to the road and within camera range; so it pays to keep your long lens handy. The shy Roe Deer can present picture opportunities from the car, but your chance of getting a shot of them often disappears in an instant when you pull up and switch the car engine off. I find it better to keep the car ticking over and let the image stabiliser and a fast shutter speed cope with any vibration problems. Usually they look up but don't bolt if the engine is left running, so enabling a shot or two to be taken.





Black Cock Grouse



Cock Capercaillie



Cock Ptarmigan



Red Grouse

Some birds also present photo opportunities from the car window, particularly in places like the Scottish Wildlife Park near Kingussie. These are wild birds that live in or fly into the park to feed or breed, they are very accustomed to cars stopping and people taking pictures and are completely at ease when long lenses appear out of the windows.

Last March I visited Speyside for a week with NG members Stan Saunders ARPS and Roger Hance FRPS. Beside getting many good pictures around the general Speyside area, we also visited the Scottish Wildlife park, not to photograph the caged animals and birds, but to drive around the one and a half mile track where wild birds come to feed, and later in the spring to breed. While there we took some good pictures of Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Crows as they prodded the snow covered hillside for food, and I managed some nice Snipe pictures from the car window.

My pictures here of Black Grouse, Crested Tits, Ptarmigan and Deer were taken on earlier visits to the area. Each visit I make to Speyside provides me with a range of different wildlife pictures, with usually a different species or two to add to my library.

Help from resident wildlife photographers like Neil McIntyre and Pete Cairns will greatly increase your chances of success. They will of course charge for their services should you want to go out with them, or use their established feeding stations and hides. Given time you can get most of these creatures without their help, but when time in Speyside is restricted it may be better to part with some cash and get results straight away - the choice is yours.

There are many B & B's in the area. We stayed at Speybank Guesthouse and found it to be excellent and ideal for our needs. The owner offered us the option of a flexible breakfast time, to fit in with our schedule, if we required it.

All pictures © Richard Revels FRPS
www.richardrevelsphotography.com

Useful contacts.

Neil McIntyre. Tel. 01479 810545.
Email: neil@neilmcintyre.sol.co.uk
www.neilmcintyre.com

Pete Cairnes. Tel. 01540 651352.
Email: info@northshots.com
www.northshots.com

Speybank Guesthouse,
Mrs Christine Orr.
Tel. 01479 810055
Email: christine@speybank.com

Black Cock Grouse.

I arrived at the hide well before dawn. It was some time before the first cock arrived, soon followed by two others that displayed for about 2 hours. From being almost too dark to see the birds, the light improved to give lovely lighting when the sun came up. An unforgettable event for me. Mid April 2003.

Cock Capercaillie.

This rogue Capercaillie displaying in Forest Lodge in the old Caledonian Pine Forest. It attacked anyone and anything that came into his territory, sending several people to hospital with injuries. Great fun but dangerous! Late May in the mid 1990's.

Cock Ptarmigan

It's a long hard walk up to Ptarmigan habitat, in the high peaks of the Cairngorms. Ptarmigan can almost disappear when they crouch down among the lichen covered rocks. Mid April 2003.

Red Grouse.

The Red Grouse is by far the easiest of the Grouse to photograph. It inhabits Heather Moorlands across Britain and is common around Speyside. They will sometimes come quite close. Late March 2013.

Crested Tit.

Several of these birds came regularly to a feeder hung in a small Pine tree. Using my 500 mm f4L IS lens and a 1.4 extender I was able to get nice shots as they came for their free meal. Late January 2010.

Red Squirrels

I got some lovely shots of these native Red Squirrels at Neil McIntyre's feeding station, but money will have to change hands if you want to go there. Late March 2013.



Crested Tit



Red Squirrel



Red Squirrel

Insects of Europe - an FRPS Panel

by Gianpiero Ferrari



May Chafer taking off



Leptura rubra



Stag Beetles confrontation

My interest with insects goes back a long time. It began during a holiday back to my native village in the mountains of Northern Italy, on a family day out, high up in the mountain meadows. While my family and I were having a picnic amongst the glorious Alpine flora that surrounded us, I began to notice that the land was alive with hundreds of butterflies. At that moment a Parnassius Apollo settled on a flower next to me and I couldn't resist taking a closer look at this stunning insect busily feeding on a flower head. Why it landed there, so close to me, on such an uninteresting flower, I will never know, but from the moment it glided away continuing its journey I was hooked. Anyone who knows the Apollo can appreciate my wonder at how stunning it looks. To me it is still the most beautiful butterfly in the world.

My old Canon FTB now had a new role. Instead of family pictures it now had to capture butterflies, later followed by Moths, then flowers and other insects. Slowly over the coming years I updated my equipment and took many pictures of insects and flowers but mostly they were for records. I never took photography very seriously. It was just a very entertaining hobby.

In the early ninety's I went to see one of Martin Withers FRPS presentations on African wildlife. All those spectacular, clean and crisp images of life on the Savannah had a big impact on my photography. Martin had an almost superhuman eye for composition. In those photos he presented he was able to capture the essence of the creatures in their habitat. He was a true artist with a camera. I was then, and always will be, in awe of his work, however at the time all I could think was "I have to start improving my photography".

Martin lived only 3 miles away from my home, so after meeting we soon became very good friends. Initially Martin was more a mentor from whom I learned a lot. With Martin as my teacher, my subjects extended to include birds, mammals and fungi, amongst other things, but more importantly I learned to pay more attention to details like composition, background and light conditions. As Martin was fond of saying 'quality is more important than quantity'. During this time, my photography must have had improved, because Martin suggested I join the RPS. Two years later I successfully applied for my ARPS with a mixed panel of Birds, Butterflies, Moths, Fungi and Orchids. At this point I had intended to stop. My ambitions had been achieved even more than I had originally expected myself.

Following my retirement, and with more time on my hands, photography was becoming more and more important to me. Until this time most of my holidays had been taken in Europe but now I started travelling further afield with my closest friends Martin Withers and John Tinning, visiting Africa, USA and Australia. It was during this last trip to Australia that Martin began to suffer from ill health. On his return he was subsequently diagnosed with Motor-Neurone disease. He deteriorated very quickly, becoming very frail and house bound. Thankfully his friendship and advice never stopped.

One of his last requests of me was to apply for my Fellowship. Not really considering my work to be anywhere near the standard of someone like him, my reply was, as you can imagine, "You must be joking." (with a few expletives). However he insisted, telling me that I had a special feeling with insects and numerous good pictures and I should apply with an insect panel. Still unsure whether I was up to it, he gave me the condition that I either do it now while he still had energy and time to help, or I



Camberwell Beauty feeding on ripened figs



Darwin's Heath on Bladder Campion



Map Butterfly feeding on Forget-me-not



Small Skipper - mating pair



Feathered Thorn Moth



Spanish Moon Moth



Eurranthia plummistaria

do it by myself later. It was an opportunity too good to refuse and with that final push and further encouragement from John I began digging through my archives of pictures.

From the many photos in my records (it was here I was reminded of Martin's words about quality not quantity), I selected one hundred of my favourite pictures. A mix of butterflies, moths, beetles, spiders, grasshoppers, dragonflies, wasps. Martin straight away reduced them to fifty. The next step was to further reduce the selection. But how? They were all my favourite pictures and I could not decide between one or another. So I enlisted the help of John, who also helped me to compose my statement of intent for the panel. From the fifty, John, Martin and myself selected our best twenty, and compared which were the most popular amongst us. To do this we had to really analyse the photo in its minute details: sharpness, realistic colour and composition. After this process, I ended up with the magic number of 35 pictures. Not much progress after all.

Next I researched previous submissions, to see what could be learned. The results were discouraging. There were only a handful of successful insect panels in the ARPS, but nothing recent for a Fellowship. It seems most FRPS successes coming from birds, mammals or mixed panels.

Still not convinced an insect panel will be strong enough for a Fellowship, I decided to send my selections to Richard Revel to see if my pictures were up to the FRPS standard. Richard gave me sound advice saying my work was good enough and included very interesting subject matter. This was as much as he could advise without prejudicing his position. The rest was up to me, which pictures I would choose and how I compose the panel.

Finally I decided on 30 pictures and printed them. Using these, I started to put together the best combination for a successful panel moving the pictures around like a jigsaw puzzle, aiming to follow the statement of intent, discarding the ones that did not fit and again enlisting advice from the Dynamic Duo of Martin and John. Reluctantly I even had to discard the photo of the love of my life, the Apollo.

My final panel was put together with a variety of insects showing behaviour, colours, matings and

camouflage in their habitat. With my final 20 pictures chosen, framed and completed, it was only now that I felt proud with the results of my work whether it got me the Fellowship or not.

Unfortunately I could not attend the assessment day due to family commitments. However on the following day I received a phone call from Martin. The words he used were "Congratulation you are now a photographer with a capital F"

All I can suggest to any photographer who would like to try for a Fellowship distinction, is do not be afraid to ask for advice. The pictures for the panel are yours but advice is priceless. It's the best thing you will ever get for free.

My success is, in part, thanks to the help and advice from my good friends. But without Martin's motivation, encouragement and request, it would never have happened. I dedicate my Fellowship to his memory.

More of Gianpiero's images can be seen on the back cover of this issue.

Statement of Intent

The images in my panel are intended to illustrate the exquisite beauty of the European insect fauna and some aspects of its fascinating behaviour. Even within this comparatively small selection of twenty species, insects display a huge variety of different forms, colours and life cycles. Insects have evolved many complex adaptations to their habitat: they make use of their form and colour to attract and win mates, camouflage themselves, utilise warning colouration to frighten away enemies and deflect potential attacks away from vulnerable areas of their bodies. Many species have become very specialized, relying on particular plants for their food or reproductive cycle. I have tried to include within my submission examples of some of the most aesthetically pleasing insects, actively engaged in interesting natural behaviour, where they would normally occur.

Insects of Europe by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS : Hanging Plan



N. 1



N. 2



N.3



N.4



N.5



N.6



N.7



N.8



N.9



N.10



N.11



N.12



N.13



N.14



N.15



N.16



N.17



N.18



N.19



N.20

Kingfishers of Oman

by Andrew Adams ARPS



The Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) is a common winter migrant to the mangrove creeks and rocky coastline of Northern Oman. Whilst some early individuals arrive by the end of August it is not until the end of October that peak numbers are present with regular sightings in Qurm Natural Park and the rocky outcrops and manmade coastal defences circling the ancient harbor of Muttrah lying behind the historic old city of Muscat - the home of the ancient tales of Sindbad. Muttrah Harbor, a port of call for all of the cruise ships that sail the Arabian Gulf, and home to one of the largest and arguably oldest souks in the region. For those not interested in the commercialised facets of this ancient port I can recommend beating a path away from the commercial center, souk and coffee shops of the harbor. Escape the bustling harbor center and it is here, as you walk the marble and granite pathways that lead you around the promenade where, especially at low tide, views of Whimbrel ferreting out small crabs and strange looking fish from the small pools left at low tide, various tern and gull species hawking over the shallows, tiny Striated Herons, almost invisible against the rocks exposed at low tide and Kingfishers, where their perceived colourations vary from sapphire blue to emerald green depending on the light can be seen.

In summer 2007 Oman was hit by the devastating cyclone Gonu with the coastal areas in and around Muscat the worst effected with many offices, shops and houses destroyed. The reason for the severity of the damage was twofold. One, high winds causing a tidal surge and secondly, the sheer volume of water that ran from the Western Al Hajar mountains which dominate the sky line to the South west of Muscat. Mountains which reach over 10,000 feet at their highest peaks and are regularly covered with snow during the winter months when the temperatures at sea level are still in the high 20s.

Anybody familiar with desert terrain geography will know that wadi's are, for the most, part barren dry river beds which criss-cross the arid rocky desert landscape with some 100 meters wide. Muscat has several of these wadis and it was these, coupled with the early urban development planning which led to the dramatic floods experienced in the Muscat Municipality in June 2007. The expressways and coastal road networks having undergone dramatic construction over the preceding 30 years had inadvertently created a series of manmade dams preventing the natural flow of water through the wadi's and out to the open sea.

During typical rainy weather the water volumes are relatively benign and the wadi's cope with the usual seasonal rainfall volumes. However, Gonu unleashed such high volumes of water during a 36 hour period that the wadi's were unable to keep up with the run-off from the mountains. The wadi's backed up and many parts of Muscat were submerged under mud and water. Thankfully adequate warnings were given and the human toll was relatively minor with much of the population being able to seek refuge on higher ground or with friends and family inland. Satellite imagery of the cyclonic weather front captured at its peak can be seen via a Google search of 'Gonu Muscat'.

What is the relevance of a cyclone that occurred in 2007 to the ornithologist or photographer wishing to see Kingfishers in Muscat? The redevelopment that followed Gonu has been driven by the need to ensure any repeat cyclone will not lead to the same level of damage caused in 2007. To this effect roads have been lifted, wadi beds enlarged and storm surge channels created to ensure flood surges can escape to the sea.

One such project is near the busy bustling town of Ruwi. The project has had a pleasantly surprising effect on the normally dry wadi flowing through the commercial centre of Qurm and out through the mangrove swamps of Qurm Natural park to the Arabian Gulf. Water which previously flowed underground is now routed via the surface of the wadi. A short underground section allows passage under an existing small road and exits 100 meters upstream and into a further surface channel. The redirection of water via the surface has caused the regeneration of wetland and reed beds further into the tidal range of the largely inaccessible mangrove swamp areas and has created a habitat where the kingfishers can be observed. Previously views were restricted to the all too familiar sight of the sapphire blue bullet whistling by. Whilst the original channel is still mostly tidal, the new manmade channel is now continuously fed by water from the original underground source and remains crystal clear and full of fish whatever the state of the tide. Here, and along the rejuvenated reed beds down-stream some of the best views of the kingfishers are to be had.

One of the peculiarities of certain species of the migrant birds which visit Oman during the cooler winter months is that they are almost entirely female birds - Marsh Harrier and Kingfisher are typical of this trait. The Kingfisher is also extremely territorial, fiercely driving off any other Kingfisher who happens to enter its territory.





Qurm Natural Park, with its mix of dry barren desert scrub, flat tidal mangrove swamp, manicured lawns and flowerbeds is a favourite spot of mine for photography and bird watching. Strangely, for a park, it is largely deserted during the day with the Omanis preferring to visit late in the afternoon and evening, thus leaving the photographer largely undisturbed to wait quietly, observe and photograph.

It was during one such visit in February of this year (2013) that I first saw the female Kingfisher perched in the reed beds just downstream from the channel that had been excavated towards the end of 2012. A channel that was criss crossed with cables and pipes previously buried underground and that, whilst I would find out made ideal perches for the kingfisher, were hardly the natural perches a photographer would prefer for his or her subjects.

Seeing a Kingfisher in Qurm park wasn't a new experience for me. I'd seen many over the past 6 years here in Oman. But, like most people's sighting of this gloriously charismatic bird, they were typical of the blue streak flying low and fast over the waters surface with the characteristic whistle first alerting the observer to its fast disappearing presence.

With March rapidly approaching I knew that I had a limited time to photograph the Kingfisher. Work commitments restricted my time to weekends only and by mid to late April she would most likely have begun her migration to cooler climes, not to return again until the following October. For the next six weeks I would spend every weekend morning in Qurm Park in my attempts to photograph her. Arriving just before first light, around 6am, and generally leaving by 10am as a combination of ever increasing harsh light and rising temperatures made it neither practicable or enjoyable for photography.

My initial attempts at capturing suitable images of her were at best clumsy and in the short time available to photograph her I rapidly learned a lot about fieldcraft and, more importantly, the patience required to photograph Kingfishers.

The reed beds that cover the far side of the channel are dense in places and the opportunities for uncluttered photographs very limited. I found the precision spot AF mode of the Canon 7D invaluable in attempting to lock focus on the Kingfisher in these reed beds although I preferred the generally smoother files of the Canon 1D Mark IV at some of the high ISO's I found necessary. This was especially true during those times when, even in Oman where light isn't generally an issue, the Kingfisher had a habit of hiding away under darker overhangs of the channel bank.

Without the benefit of a hide, strategically placed perches or weeks of baiting with captive fish in a tank below the perch (each to their own but not something I agree with) my initial attempts at photographing the Kingfisher were, to say the least, fraught. Here was a bird, smaller than a Starling, capable of sensing all around and able, it would seem, to play games with me if I got too close. The familiar whistle and streak of blue as she flew off when I attempted to creep closer seemed like she was mocking me and my efforts to photograph her. I quickly realised that any successful attempts to photograph her would have to be on her terms. After all, this was her territory, and I was the guest. I had no choice but to pick a position and wait in the hope she would come to me rather than me trying to get near to her.

There were two areas of accessible channel that gave the best opportunities for more 'intimate' shots. The excavated channel, complete with its exposed cables and pipes, and a point approximately 100 meters downstream with extensive but relatively open reed bed on the opposite bank. Between these two points was another area of reed bed but so overgrown on both sides that any realistic chance of photographic opportunities was all but impossible. The direction of the rising sun limited the amount of shooting positions available and I while I was in no doubt that any shots taken from the excavated channel, would offer the best views of her, I was acutely aware that they would be likely to include things like pipes and cables. It was almost a certainty she would use these as suitable perches and there was little I could do to improve this photographically imperfect environment. The pipes and cables were fixed and I wasn't willing to find out if any still had 240 volts running through them in my attempt to get cleaner pictures. Whilst these were not the most environmentally aesthetic of perches or background clutter for pictures I felt they clearly showed a bird adapting to exploit the opportunities presented. Personally I make no apologies here. The pictures shown are as they were captured, warts and all. This is a wild bird shown in its adopted and cluttered manmade environment. I have made no attempt to crop or clone out elements that would improve the general ambiance and desirability of the Kingfisher images. The images presented are of a bird making the most of the resources and opportunities presented in its quest for survival.

My time spent with this gorgeous bird was very limited. Some days I would visit just to watch her frustratingly out of range. On other days my patience



Field Meeting Report

Havergate Island RSPB Reserve

We were unfortunate with the weather on this year's field trips to Havergate Island - the second trip was cancelled by the RSPB because high winds and drifting snow on the island made it too dangerous to



land the boat safely. I believe most of us were quite relieved under the circumstances. However, the first trip did go ahead and twelve of us set forth in the pouring rain to try and photograph soggy and bedraggled hares on the island.

Our experience on the field trips of the last two years has taught us that the most likely place to see the hares is around the gorse bushes near the volunteer huts and we ventured there to each pick our spot and wait for the hares to make an appearance. There were more bin liners present than hares, as these were needed to protect our kit from the weather but our patience was rewarded with several hares that made appearances during the day including a male and female on the path where the male was attempting mate guarding. This is when a male settles near a female to wait for her to become receptive to his advances.

Havergate Island is managed as a haven for coastal birds and has breeding populations of Oystercatcher, Redshank, Common and Sandwich Tern. Havergate also has a healthy population of Hares that are encouraged to thrive as part of the natural diversity of the nature reserve and they have become relatively confiding for such a timid species. Although still a wild population, the island location keeps the hares free from many of the dangers they would face in open countryside and the presence of the RSPB volunteers has ensured that they have become accustomed to the presence of people.

This event is likely to be an annual fixture for the Nature Group calendar and details of the first date planned for 2014 are below, with an option on other dates if we have the demand.

Proposed Date: Saturday 8th March 2014

Meeting place: Orford Quay
(Pay & Display car park - estimated cost £4.50)

Boat departs 10:00 hrs

Boat Returns: 15:00 hrs

Availability The boat takes 12, although a second boat is feasible.

Cost: £17

Required Stout Shoes, Waterproofs, Packed Lunch

Leader: David O'Neill

Tel: 01189 585430

Millers' Dale Field Meeting Report

by Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Wednesday 19th of June and a fine dry day welcomed nine intrepid Nature Group members to this delightful area of the Peak District.

The old Railway Station of Millers' Dale is now a centre for the National Park and one of the long and wide platforms has been converted into a botanical area celebrating many of the flowers of the 'White Peak', that is the limestone area. Jacob's Ladder (*Polemonium caeruleum*) was flowering well in its lovely blue spires in drifts amongst the grasses, it occurs in its white form as well. It can still be found in one or two of the Dales, but the sites are now protected in enclosures. We searched unsuccessfully for Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) but this late season must have delayed its appearance. In fact on our recce of the area a week previously there was no sign of the Jacob's Ladder either.

A slow meander along the bed of the old railway line revealed lots of early spring flowers. On the path to the Station Quarry we discovered a much abraded Green Arches moth, one wing badly damaged but the other still with a considerable green colouring. This gave us scope for more photography, as did the many infant White-lipped Snails (*Cepaea hortensis*).

The main floor of the quarry was disappointing from a botanical point of view simply due to the lateness of the season, a few Common Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia*) were noted but no signs at all of the Fragrant Orchids (*Gymnadenia conopsea*). A point worth noting was the extreme dryness of the area, many of the limestone boulders are normally rich with the growth of mosses, but such growths were completely dry in fact dropping off the rocks. I have to say, having visited the quarry and the area many times over the years, I have never seen it looking like it before.

It was getting close to lunch-time, so a slow meander back to the railway station and the picnic tables was called for.

After lunch we divided into two parties, one left with my good friend John Jones ARPS, to 'trek' up to Millers' Dale Top Quarry, up past the old Lime Kilns and then up the steep path to bring you out on the floor of the quarry beneath the old face. It is a good hunting ground for orchids especially 'Bees', often with somewhat aberrant lip markings, probably due to minerals in the ground. Once more there were no

signs of any, lateness no doubt. There were however many Common Spotted and a profitable time was spent photographing them, with John able to give some valuable and practical advice; reflectors, white balance, angle of approach, exposure compensation, and so on, which was gratefully appreciated.

I took the 'easy option' and led the other party along the railway track south eastwards in the general direction of Monsal Dale. Here we found an aberrant Common Spotted Orchid the flower completely white and the leaves with no red spots, obviously no anthocyanin pigment present. We found quite a few with no spotting on the leaves, but only one with white flowers and no spotting. It has to be said that it was a rather frail looking plant!

Back at base, over ice-cream cornets, those new to the area expressed their great delight with it and I would like to add my thanks to those members who supported the meeting and especially to John Jones ARPS who always gives me great encouragement and support.



Jacob's Ladder



Hobby at Wicken Fen

by Richard Nicoll ARPS

The Hobby *Falco subuteo*, (<http://bk1.bto.org/birdfacts/results/bob3100.htm>) is a spectacular aerial predator hunting both insects and other birds such as swallows and swifts. They migrate from their African wintering grounds arriving back in the UK around or shortly after the Cuckoos and Warblers. Snatching insects out of mid-air with their talons and eating them on the wing. I first encountered them in the spring/autumn of 2011 at the RSPB's Lakenheath Fen Reserve in Suffolk - over 60 in the air at once have been reported there during May. However, the Hobbies always seemed to be too far away or too high up in the sky to get any reasonable images and my attempts at photographing them resulted in very poor images.

The cool and wet spring conditions of 2012 produced far better opportunities for getting close to the subjects. The low temperatures meant that when there was an eruption of Mayflies they would be very sluggish (sometimes not even taking off) and remaining close to the ground. This, combined with the particular geography of the National Trust's Wicken Fen around Wicken Lode (in effect a narrow man made water course running between two rows of not very tall trees) allowed a much closer view of their hunting behaviour.

At least 12 Hobbies were seen at any one time hunting up and down the lode - the most anyone had seen at the one time at Wicken Fen according to Prof. Nick Davies who has been visiting Wicken to study Cuckoos for the last 30 years. The Hobbies would swoop from side to side landing in the trees when they wanted a rest. Black-headed Gulls were competing with the Hobbies to snatch the insects out of the air in their beaks. I had in my mind some of the images that I would like to capture but could I get any that do justice to this natural spectacle?

I waited in a suitable spot on most afternoons for a few weeks (the Hobbies seemed to be more active then as more insects were flying in the warmer air) Using my bag hide as camouflage, often the Hobbies would fly past so close that I could have touched them. There were quite a few other folk around but maybe due to needing to fuel up after

their long migration they seemed to be less wary of humans than I would have expected.

Trying to capture such fast moving subjects flying so close was not easy and it took many attempts to get something worthy of the subject. Could I get any decent images of these incredibly acrobatic hunters? I will let others decide on that.



Return of the Yellowhammer.

by Joe Curtis ARPS

Our home is in the area of North County Dublin known as Fingal. The region derives its name from the Gaelic words 'Fine Gall' meaning 'land of the fair haired stranger' in reference to the Vikings who settled in the area from the 8th century onwards.

Mixed farming was the order of the day in our region; somewhat surprising for an area only 14 miles from Dublin Airport. My wife and I have lived all our lives here. As children the Corncrake and Cuckoo were birds we heard all the Spring and into early Summer. A sight and sound of a bygone time, I'm afraid.

In the 1980's it was common to see a flock of up to forty Yellowhammers in our area; however, gradually during the period between 1990 and 2005 the flocks became greatly diminished until even seeing single birds was becoming a rare event. House and Tree Sparrows, once so abundant, became less and less numerous. I cannot give a definite reason for the loss of these once common birds, however many believed it to be related to changing agricultural practice.

In the mid 2000's there was a subtle change in farming practice and a significant swing to the growing of cereals took place. Large areas are now exclusively used for Wheat and Barley. Tree plantations are also noticeably more plentiful. This change to the local growing tradition was to bring about a dramatic impact on our local bird population, at least as I see it.

Some species became less visible but the numbers of Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, House Sparrow and Tree Sparrow again began to increase, and quite dramatically. When they became once more established as garden visitors, particularly during the Winter and early Spring, they offered marvellous photographic opportunities

and I tried to make full use of the possibilities offered. A somewhat ramshackle hide was erected in our garden and many days were spent there recording the beauty of our avian visitors.

We should not have favourite birds I suppose, but it was hard not to single out the stunningly coloured Yellowhammer from its more drab relations. The vivid colours of the male Chaffinch comes just a short step behind in the beauty stakes.

Using the hide and a series of props, well sprinkled with various seeds, allows photography to be carried out without disturbing the birds. I feel it is crucial to remember these feeding stations are life and death places for the birds but just places where we enjoy our hobby.

One of the downsides to a garden feeding station is the fact the birds of prey soon learn that a free meal for them might also be on offer. It goes with the territory, I'm afraid.

A few of my 'garden shots' accompany this article - I hope you enjoy them.



Sparrowhawk with Blue Tit

Yellowhammer



Chaffinch



Yellowhammer



Tree Sparrow



Cock House Sparrow



Windover Hill Field Meeting Report

by Graham Saxby



Grayling mating



Six-spot Burnet Moths feeding



Chalkhill Blue on Scabious

The South Downs is a lovely area. I had visited parts and walked some of the South Downs Way previously but I had never visited to photograph nature.

Doug Neve organised the Field Day on Windover Hill, with Grayling butterflies as the main interest. There were about eight of us, a good mix of RPS and Eastbourne Camera Club members.

As it was my first butterfly Field Day I was unsure what equipment I would need and I usually end up carrying far too much. The weather forecast was for a hot, sunny day and so I followed the KISS principle as there was a long steady climb up the hill. I carried an SLR, macro lens, an extension tube and a polarising filter. Doug provided excellent, detailed instructions to find the car park on the South Downs way, from which there was a forty minute walk up the hill to the site.

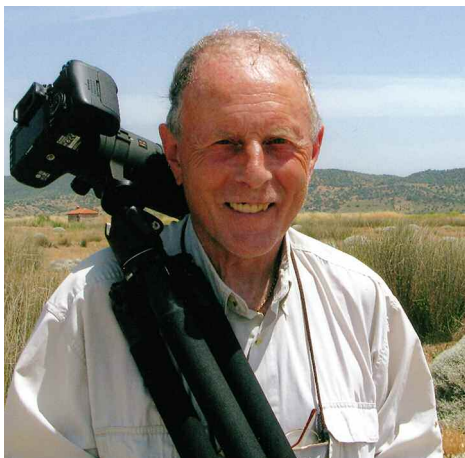
The walk took slightly longer than anticipated due to the proliferation of insects on the edges of the South Downs Way. An abundance of Chalkhill Blues gave excellent opportunities to photograph both males and females as well as mating pairs. Red-tailed and White-tailed or Buff-tailed bumblebees were also observed making full use of the wild flowers.

On reaching the summit we found large numbers of Six Spot Burnet Moth, many wildflowers, tiny day flying moths, spiders and grasshoppers which offered plenty of scope for developing my macro skills.

Grayling are incredibly well camouflaged, hiding in hollows covered with small pieces of white chalk and brown vegetation. They are easiest to find by walking carefully, following them when they take flight and then photographing them as they land in the chalk hollows. They tend to keep low to the ground and often glide downhill to their next refuge. The trick is being quick enough to capture the double spots on their wings, without putting them to flight. These extra markings are only visible for a second or two after landing. I only managed the single spots. These also disappear as the Grayling fold their wings and take position facing the sun. Next time, for Grayling, I would carry a bean bag. A tripod (or monopod) would have been useful for other insects and wild flowers.

It was great day and thanks to Doug for organising it. I gained knowledge of a new site with a range of species and had enjoyed the company and advice of a number of like-minded photographers. I look forward to my next Field Day and will certainly be offering to run one myself in the future.

Obituary



Martin Withers FRPS

1946-2013

The world of natural history photography lost one of its best-known and most eminent members when Martin Withers passed away peacefully with his wife Sally and daughter Amy by his side on June 15th, 2013. With typical stoicism and bravery, he fought a courageous battle against Parkinson's and Motor Neurone Disease to the very end.

Martin was born in the Anstey Lane area of Leicester on March 13th, 1946, the younger son of Ben and Margaret Withers. Martin and his older brother, Barry, enjoyed a happy childhood, roaming the fields and paths around their home, and it was here that Martin's life-long love of nature and the outdoors first began. He was educated at Alderman Richard Hallam Primary School and later Beaumont Leys Secondary Modern School. Sport and other schoolboy pursuits were much higher priorities than academic work and he would later joke that he had never passed an examination in his life. Aged 15, he left school at Easter, 1961, and was apprenticed as a printer with the local firm of Oldham and Manton in the Woodgate area of the city.

At the conclusion of his 6 year apprenticeship in 1967, Martin went abroad for the first time to spend 6 months rock-climbing and mountaineering in the

Alps and Dolomites. The mountains held an allure, which Martin found hard to resist and he would return at frequent intervals to fulfil this new and exciting passion. On September 8th, 1968, one of the most formative experiences of Martin's life took place. His climbing partner plunged over 200 feet from the face that they were attempting to scale, somersaulted twice and belly-flopped onto a precarious ledge above a 400 feet sheer drop. Martin managed to climb down to his injured friend and, having splinted his injured leg, he lowered him down the sheer face by rope. Once safely at the bottom of the cliff, Martin then half-carried and half-dragged the injured man for 4 hours to their parked vehicle, a Bedford Dormobile, which had been custom built for the Duke of Bedford. They were very short of ready cash and stored their 'scrumped' food in the bath that was located under the front seat. In the village at the head of the valley, they were able to obtain directions to the nearest hospital and the injured man was able to receive expert medical attention. Without Martin's courageous perseverance and bravery the accident might well have had a much more tragic outcome. Luckily Martin's friend had escaped serious injury and, although his knee was placed in plaster, the pair were able to continue



their adventures. They had little or no money, but finally made it to Geneva, where Martin obtained employment proof-reading documents for the United Nations. His friend made a full recovery and his plaster was eventually removed by Martin, using a pair of pliers! The pair finally arrived home in Leicester on Christmas Eve, 1968. Martin was later to refer to this as an essential part of his education at "the university of life".

Martin went back to work as a printer for 6 months, but in mid-1969 he was drawn back to the Swiss mountains and he returned alone to Geneva for the climbing season, coming home to Leicester to work again during the winter. In 1970, now accompanied by Sally, Martin made a grand tour of Switzerland and Italy, visiting Geneva, the Cote D'Azur, the Riviera, Pisa, Rome, Naples, Venice and the Dolomites, returning home through the Black Forest and Calais. That autumn, Martin found employment as a printer with the company of Taylor and Bloxham and it was there that he met his close friend and business partner to be, Barry Hanslip. Together they set up an in-house photo-lithography unit, which quickly became extremely successful and highly profitable. They immediately recognised the huge potential of this development, served out their notice with their

employers and set up in partnership together. They had not chosen their moment carefully. The young company of Hanslip and Withers was launched during the Miners' Strike in 1973: times could hardly have been more challenging; however, building much of their own equipment and making use of all Martin's contacts in the sporting world, the partnership moved into premises of its own in Wordsworth Street and slowly began to make headway. The solicitors used to draw up the documentation were Hickling and Frith. Ron Hickling was already a distinguished ornithologist, later to become President of the BTO, and he and Martin quickly established a lifelong friendship. Martin was to assist Ron with the transcription of the diaries of the early Leicestershire naturalist, James Harley, and the maps and illustrations in 'The Birds of Leicestershire'. Hanslip and Withers was a happy and successful partnership, which lasted until Barry's sudden and completely unexpected death in October 1979. After that, Martin was to run the business by himself. His skill as an entrepreneur enabled him to secure a contract to produce and print the brochures for National Holidays and this was the mainstay of the company's business until Martin began to retire and pursue his photographic and artistic interests even more avidly in the 1990's.



On May 11th, 1974, Martin and Sally were married. For the next 40 years, the Martin and Sally Withers partnership, for that it surely was, remained at the very heart of natural history photography in this country. Their homes in Birstall, and later Mountsorrel, were always hospitable and welcoming places, where naturalists and natural history photographers were made to feel at home. With the support of Sally and his daughter Amy, to whom he was equally devoted, Martin always somehow found the time to work at everything much longer and harder than most. Together they were a formidable partnership, happy and deeply committed to each other forever. Sally was the keystone of his life and he loved her dearly. Theirs was a deeply happy marriage.

In 1977, Martin and Sally fulfilled a long-cherished ambition to visit the African continent and see its wonderful wildlife. Their three week photographic safari to Kenya was led by the doyen of British natural history photographers, Eric Hosking, who was accompanied by his wife, Dorothy. The two couples quickly became firm friends, later visited each other frequently after their return and so began an association between the two families that still exists to this day. Martin was inspired by what he had seen in Africa and returned full of a burning desire to pursue natural history photography to the very best of his ability. With his close friend, Chris Measures, he had already begun to experiment with taking pictures of the birds to be found around the gravel pits near his home in Birstall. They had found the nests of many species, erected hides and slowly acquired the basic knowledge, techniques and skills demanded by this new pursuit. Now, with the inspiration of his African experience behind him, Martin began to hone his skills and produce high quality photographic work, with the determination and passion that he brought to everything he tackled.

In 1979, Martin saw an article about the Zoological Photographic Club, the world's oldest natural history photographic society established in June, 1899, and he wrote to the then Secretary, Donald Platt, for further details. The result was a reply from his old friend and mentor, Eric Hosking, inviting him and Sally to attend the ZPC Convention at Leeds later that same year. Eric asked Martin to bring along a selection of his recent work. So, in September 1979, Martin was elected to membership of the ZPC and he was to remain a member until his death 34 years later. The ZPC was always very central to Martin's life. When Donald Platt stepped down as



Barn Owl



White-throated Bee-eater display



Grey Partridge



Fox cubs

Secretary in 1982, Martin was asked to assume his responsibilities and he remained as Secretary for an unprecedented period of almost 30 years, until he stepped down in 2011. He was proud to serve as President of the Club in 1998-99. Throughout the long period of his membership, he submitted prints of a superb and unrivalled standard into the monthly portfolios. He became a master photographer and a print-maker of the very highest quality.

The other major strand in his photographic development was the Royal Photographic Society. Martin joined "The Royal" in the late 1980's and achieved the much coveted distinction of his Fellowship in nature photography in 1990. The following year he was elected to the RPS Nature Group Distinctions panel, on which he was to serve for a period of 10 years, for 6 of which he was Chairman. His service to his fellow photographers was to extend further: he was to serve terms as Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the RPS Nature Group. Whilst carrying the heavy burdens that his roles in the RPS and the ZPC entailed, Martin also found time to organise the Joint Conventions for Nature Photographers at Brooksby College in

Leicestershire. These biennial conventions brought together members from across the entire spectrum of natural history photographic societies and helped to forge the excellent relationships which exist between them today. Despite these heavy loads, which would have broken many lesser mortals, Martin continued to produce work of the very highest standard. His talent and dedication were richly rewarded. He was to go on to become the winner of four RPS Nature Group Gold Medals for the excellence of his natural history prints; only one other person had ever won more. His massive contribution to photography was formally recognised by the RPS Nature Group when, in 1990 he became the first recipient of their special Silver Medal. He was to remain a well respected judge and selector until the onset of his final illness.

Photography became ever-more important to Martin and during the 1990's his business activities were to assume a less significant role in his life. In 1990, David Hosking asked Martin to lead a photo-tour to Tanzania for Hosking Tours. The two men were already close friends through the family association and Martin was invited to join the company as a co-

Ring-tailed Lemurs



director. For the next 20 years, Martin and David were to enjoy a close, happy, working relationship and Martin was to lead more than 100 tours, taking clients to every continent with the exception of Antarctica. Africa was always a special place for Martin and he was to return there over and over again on more than fifty occasions, adding 11 countries to his visited list. His portfolio of African images was quite outstanding. The high quality of the service offered by the company was rewarded with customer loyalty and many clients returned again and again, many becoming close friends. As a result of their considerable experience and expertise, David and Martin were soon to be asked to write and illustrate several guides to African wildlife. This series of books was extremely successful and still is in print to the present day.

For all his prodigious gifts and talents, Martin was the most grounded and down-to-earth man. He knew where he came from and he never forgot his origins. Leicestershire was his home. He loved his wife, his daughter, his family, his native county and Leicester City with a burning passion. Few photographers have covered vice-county 55 (Leicestershire and Rutland) so assiduously over the last 40 years in the pursuit of subjects on which to focus their lenses. With his close group of friends alongside, he was always just as happy photographing barn owls and grey partridge in his home county as he was in Africa. Martin was also a talented artist and he very much enjoyed sketching, painting water-colours and, to an increasing extent in more recent times, painting in oils. His home was the quiet centre of his life to which he turned for refreshment away from the turmoil of the busy world.

One day not long ago, he quietly said to me that, looking back on his life, he wouldn't change much. And then, as a pensive after-thought, he said, "You know, perhaps it would have been nice to have seen the Grizzlies catching salmon at Knights Inlet." He was deeply satisfied and happy with his lot: a proud Man of Leicester and a citizen of the world.

John Tinning



Rabbit



Common Cockchafer in flight

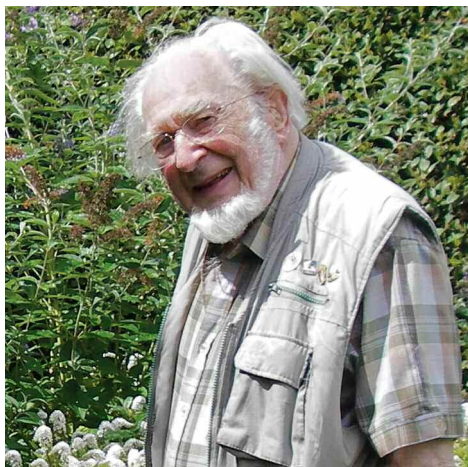


Verreaux's Sifaka dancing

Obituary

Gordon Dickson, BChD, FDS, DOrth, RCS, ARPS

15 April 1920 – 1 August 2013



Gordon lived life to the full. He trained as a dentist, wrote 'Orthodontics in General Practice' and co-authored 'An Atlas of Removable Appliances', becoming President of the (then) British Society of Orthodontics in the mid 1970's. He took up photography at an early age and developed his own prints. He made his own enlarger and an early portable electronic flash powered by large capacitors and a lead acid accumulator. He enjoyed wood carving, developed a great passion for gardening, and an interest in fly-fishing; true to form, Gordon made his own split-cane rods.

From his childhood, Gordon appreciated the natural world. Shortly after the Nature Group was formed, he became a member and was an enthusiastic participant on field trips, during which he combined his passion for photography and his love for wildlife. This was how I met Gordon. We enjoyed many field trips to the New Forest – especially searching for fungi. In later years, Gordon became very knowledgeable and co-wrote Fungi of the New Forest as well as serving on the Council of the British Mycological Society.

In September 1977, Gordon, his wife Joy, Martin and I, together with our five-month old son Giles, spent a splendid week in the Dordogne. Typical of Gordon, he built a car cot that fitted perfectly between Martin and me in the back seat of his Volvo. We stayed in an old farmhouse, which was a haven for the Tube-web

Spider *Segestria florentina*. The spiders emerged at night from holes in old beams at the entrance of their tube with impressive radiating trip lines – much to Gordon's delight (who by then had developed an interest in spiders). Each night we dined at a different restaurant, where Gordon could indulge his love for good food and wines. On one unforgettable night we were treated to an eight-course meal at a chateau – with a different wine for each course – where the owner loved to dine well, but could afford to do this only if his guests contributed to the meal!

After the Nature Group had held several day field trips, Gordon volunteered to organise our first field week, knowing that Foxlease (the activity centre of Girlguiding UK) near Lyndhurst would provide easy access to the New Forest. Early May is an ideal time to visit the Forest because the old beech trees are leafing out and from 12-18 May 1978, a total of 24 NG members – including one lady all the way from California – gathered here in Hampshire. As can be seen from the photo opposite, virtually everyone turned up with a Benbo tripod – without which in those days no self-respecting nature photographer would dream of venturing out into the field.

Later, Gordon became even more involved with the running of the NG, taking on board the Editorship of the Newsletter from issue 20 (autumn 1982) to issue 28 (spring 1984), becoming Vice-Chairman in 1985 and Chairman in 1988/9. He proposed the introduction of an award in recognition of exceptional service to the Nature Group to be known as the Nature Group Silver Medal.

Gordon was one of those rare people who not only excelled in his profession, but also somehow managed to make time to develop and pursue his multifarious interests to a remarkable degree. He hankered to have a go at gliding and at the age of 86 he jumped off a mountain in the Dolomites with a para-glider. His daughter tells me that digital photography never captivated Gordon in the same way as film and he used his digital camera mainly for holiday snaps. He was still photographing on his last fungus foray the year before he died.

Heather Angel FRPS

From the Archives-the First Ten Years.

by Tony Bond FRPS

Gordon Dickson was a founder member of the Group in 1976 and played a large part in establishing what we have now. In July, 2013, I was approached by his son, Richard, who asked if I would like some early publications for our archive which is maintained by our secretary, Margaret Johnson, as his father was now very frail. I did not know what to expect but as such items are easily lost I readily agreed. What arrived was a neat binder with items in chronological order. They were mainly the Newsletter, the forerunner of The Iris and also programmes for field weeks. Attached was a note saying that the group was an important part of his 'story'. This was soon followed by a second binder with a note giving the sad news that Gordon had passed away on the 1st of August at the age of 93. Together they give a fascinating history of the Group from 1976 to 1986.

The very first Newsletter consisted of four pages of A4 edited by Howard Ginn and dated March, 1976. It records that 34 people met at the Society's house, presumably South Audley Street, on the 29th. of January, 1976, following a request for expressions of interest in the Journal from Heather Angel. The meeting was chaired by Kenneth Warr, then secretary of the Society. A committee was elected and they soon arranged a

programme of seven field meetings and two indoor meetings. The first field meeting was at Monks Wood in May, 1976. There was a list of 43 members, their addresses and interests.

The next Newsletter in the binder is No.10 of 1978. Heather Angel was now the editor and the format was A3. This records that the Group's exhibition was held at the Society's house in June, 1978. Of 109 prints submitted, probably mainly monochrome, 44 were accepted. 203 slides were submitted of which 86 were accepted. All 6 stereoscopic slides from one member were accepted. And no, this was not Pat Whitehouse as she was one of the selectors. In later years there were concerns about low numbers of print entries and the 1982 exhibition was for slides only. However, prints returned in 1983. A correspondent of the time complained of the lack of variety, with subject matter being mainly botanical plus some fungi, birds at the nest and copulating insects.

A comprehensive programme of events was quickly established. Field meetings averaged 18 per year with a field week and residential weekends. There were also lectures which were held mainly in London but they did not survive the Society's move to Bath. Events were normally followed by an account in the

Page 26: Gordon Dickson ARPS
© Diana Miller

Right: Gordon Dickson photographing in Denny Wood on the 1978 NG field course, with Andrew Henley, Barry Candy and Dianne (?).
© Tony Heath ARPS



Newsletter - something I would like to see revived. The write-ups sometimes revealed that all did not always go to plan. In 1979 our chairman, Andy Callow, led a field meeting attended by only one member and his wife. Perhaps the pouring rain was responsible. This caused the meeting to be abandoned at 2.30p.m. without an exposure being made. One week later Andy suffered badly stung knees from waist-high nettles no doubt in pursuit of insects. In July he attended a field meeting in Wyre Forest led by Tony Wharton and made 40 exposures before realising that his film was not being transported. Well, all us old 'uns have all been there!

The Newsletter continued to develop under Heather's editorship. The annual number of issues was reduced to three starting with issue No.18 to reduce postage costs (sounds familiar) but editions became larger. The familiar NG logo designed by James Fenton appeared and still looks good today. Edition No.19 of Spring, 1981 was the last edited by Heather and Gordon Dickson took over. Some things never change. In edition No.20 Gordon complained about the difficulty in obtaining an up to date membership list from Bath. Some members were failing to receive the Newsletter as a result. By 1981 membership stood at around 500. The number had increased to 969 by 1984 with members in 36 countries plus two with BFPO addresses.

Two regular items in the Newsletters of that time were 'Where to Stay on Location' and 'Inventors Corner'. The first arose from an account of a field weekend on the Farne Islands and Bass rock. For the latter we stayed in North Berwick with the delightful Mrs. Jean Anderson. You must remember that this was before the days of Travelodge. You not only got superb accommodation for £4 per night but also a hot line to Fred Marr the boatman as his son was married to Mrs. Anderson's daughter. This soon became a home-from-home for members of the Group visiting Bass Rock.

'Inventors' Corner' described the various weird and wonderful devices made by members in the days before you could buy all sorts of junk on the internet. Most of these were brackets for hanging two or three flashguns from a camera for insect photography in the days of Kodachrome 25. Andy Callow described a pot diffuser which was like a translucent lens hood with a cut-out at the bottom for getting really close. Other popular devices were for separating, pulling apart or stabilising plants and

most involved clothes pegs which was good news for those who made them due to the number lost around the countryside. A novel plant clamp was based on a Y section fishing rod rest. It was very versatile as it could also be used as a flash gun support, a Lastolite reflector support or windbreak. E.K. Thompson took this D.I.Y. activity to its logical conclusion by making his own camera. This had a 8.5 inch Perfac lens with a silent Luc shutter and I can vouch for the fact that the monochrome prints taken with it were superb.

The name Benbo started to appear in the early 80s. However, a friend of Heather Angel warned that even a Benbo cannot survive being sat upon by a hippo. The very bent Benbo was given a decent burial in Zambia. Heather advocated sleeping with your Benbo to prevent this happening but this sounds a bit drastic to me. An alternative support, the Combi-Stat, made the Benbo look simple and cost £100.

Heather left the Group committee in 1983 and became president of the Society the following year. The Group was well represented in Council at that time because Gordon Dickson was also a member. Edwin Egelstaff became editor of the Newsletter with edition No.29 of Summer, 1984. He noted that it was taking longer than planned to computerise the membership records at Bath.

There was some dissatisfaction with the quality of the printing and this resulted in a change of printer. This was taken a stage further with edition No.34 of Spring, 1986. Edwin Egelstaff handed the edited copy to Martin Withers who had his own printing business at that time. Martin did the rest including distribution. The changes resulted in much favourable comment. This was taken a stage further in edition No.36 with a redesigned front cover and the introduction of colour. The very first colour illustrations with page number as the criterion were of badger cubs by Martin. I suppose that having done so much Martin deserved the honour. The Newsletter had started to look much more like the Iris although the change of name was yet to come.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

The Nature Group needs members to host Field Meetings

I should like to say a big 'Thank You' to all the 2013 Nature Group Field Meetings leaders. 2013 was a difficult year with the weather playing havoc with some of the field meetings. The vagaries of the British weather is something we all have to cope with from time to time and hopefully the weather will be kinder to us in 2014

I would also like to thank all those members who attended a field meeting and ask that more members try to attend, especially if there is one being held in your region. If there have been no field meetings in your area you can rectify this situation by offering to lead one.

Please consider hosting a field meeting in your region of the country. No special knowledge is necessary, just a familiarity of the area and the subjects of interest to be found there. Leaders are not expected to instruct in photography, be experts at identification or be experienced naturalists. A genuine interest in nature and a desire to meet and share ideas with like minded individuals are the main criteria.

If you are familiar with a suitable location with interesting wildlife, a nature reserve, wetland or woodland near to you, please volunteer to host a Field Meeting. Field Meetings can be held on any date to suit you - they do not need to be held at a weekend and weekday meetings are very popular with retired Nature Group members.

Besides being an opportunity to photograph good wildlife, meetings are great for meeting other members and making new friends.

Please complete the form below and forward it to me, Richard Revels FRPS, or email the details. If you are unsure about the suitability of your venue, please contact me, I will be pleased to discuss your idea for a Field Meeting with you.

Richard Revels FRPS
73 London Road
Biggleswade, Bedfordshire
SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065
E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

RPS Nature Group - Field Meeting 2014

Please return this form before 31st January 2013

Location

Additional information

Meeting Place

Grid Reference

Leader

Name

Day & date

Address

Cost (eg car parking)

Subjects of interest

Items to bring:

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

☐ Stout Shoes

☐ Wellingtons

☐ Waterproofs

☐ Packed Lunch

Tel:

E mail:

Obituary

Philip Newman 1954 - 2013

Born in 1954 in South Wales, Philip Newman was one of twin brothers raised in the village of Caerphilly just north of Cardiff. His interest in birds began at an early age on the moors and fields near his home but Phil was 22 years of age before he started to take a keen interest in photography.

He graduated in Geology from Bristol University and began a career in the oil industry. In the early 80's he moved to Kilmalcolm, Scotland and joined the famous Paisley Colour Slide Club where he learned about composition, lighting and the importance of paying attention to detail. The quality of his photographic work was quickly recognised.

Phil moved to Halliburton and then Banchory, Aberdeenshire and his bird photography continued to develop with many trips to local sites around Aberdeen, the Ythan Estuary being a firm favourite. He met a number of other serious bird photographers at this time and in 1989 he joined the Zoological Photographic Club (ZPC). This society was founded in early 1899, its members all enthusiastic wildlife photographers. Phil was a very active member and was the current President when he died. He was also a member of the Nature Photographers' Portfolio (NPP) a group with an almost equally long established history. These two societies allowed Phil to share his interests with like minded photographers across the U.K. He joined the Royal Photographic Society and earned his Fellowship with a panel of pictures of birds in action.

In 1999 he made his first trip abroad to take bird photographs with a visit to Florida. It made a big impact on him. For the first time he had day

after day of perfect photographic weather, a big change from Scotland, and an endless supply of approachable birds that did not need use of a hide to be photographed. Now hooked on foreign travel he quickly organised a second trip to Florida followed by others to Bosque del Apache, Lesvos, Bharatpur in India, Namibia, Oman, Gambia and Alaska.

Phil was an easy man to be with, never too cold, too hot, too hungry or too tired to do anything other than seek the next picture and always enthusiastic. He was an excellent photographer who knew his subject well. He had that special talent that can't be taught or given; an instinct to be in the right place at the right time. He was particularly keen on photographing birds in action, especially flight and no one did it better. Although he did not try to make a living from his photography, his work was represented by several photographic agencies and appeared frequently in books and magazines.

A great follower of Glamorgan County Cricket Club and almost as keen a supporter of the England team but when it came to Rugby Phil would only support Wales.

Although he had been ill for almost a year he had thought his problems were behind him and was looking forward to more trips abroad and getting out in the field. His death was sudden and unexpected and a great shock to all who knew him. Wildlife photography has lost one of the best.

He leaves his wife Debbie, children Claire, Richard and Sarah and five grandchildren.

Mike Lane and Gordon Holm

Continued from page 15

would be rewarded with her landing literally just a few meters away, albeit for just a few seconds. In this short period of time I learned a lot, not least of which was that the photography was on her terms.

At the time of writing it is now the end of the first week in September 2013. I visited the park yesterday but as yet there is no sign of the kingfisher's return but I did see three Golden Orioles. A bird that visits Oman for just two to three weeks in September on its migration South and a sure sign the Kingfishers will

be coming back soon. Much as many people herald the arrival of spring in the UK with the arrival of the Swallows, here, in Oman, I listen out for the unmistakable whistle telling me that the sapphire bullet is about to hurtle past.

This winter I hope to have the opportunity to spend time with her and that she will once again allow me to learn and photograph more about her life in the short time she spends on this very small stretch of water here in Muscat.

A Wildlife Journey.

by Colin Smale ARPS

"There was enough there for a book". That was the comment that sparked these 4 volumes called 'A Wildlife Journey'.

I had just finished a talk on wildlife photography at a local photographic society and a budding enthusiast fired off the usual questions to me and his comment sparked off a task that took me two years to complete.

I have been giving talks on wildlife photography since 1972 and over those years have been asked broadly the same questions.

"How do I find the wildlife?"

"How do I get close?"

"What gear do I need?"

Pretty standard questions really and of course these are only some of many. I often wondered to myself "no one ever asks...such and such a thing". The reason some questions are never asked is because the novice doesn't know what he/she doesn't know therefore the question cannot be asked.

Over the next few weeks I jotted down lots of subjects, chapter ideas etc. While I was out and about, either using a hide or in some other way taking wildlife images, I became aware of so many more items that were 'book worthy' and so, over the following two years I carried a separate note-book with me and jotted down lots more hints, tips, do's and don'ts that I could not possibly have collated by simply sitting down and trying to remember.

My own wildlife journey began when I was about five years of age. My father and I were on some kind of a country walk and I suddenly found myself being whisked up into the air and suspended over a low hawthorn bush. "Look down son" he said. I looked down and there, right beneath me was the nest of a Song Thrush containing four sky-blue spotted eggs. It seems to me that my wildlife journey began right there and then.

What has sparked your passion for wildlife photography? What has your own journey been like up to now?

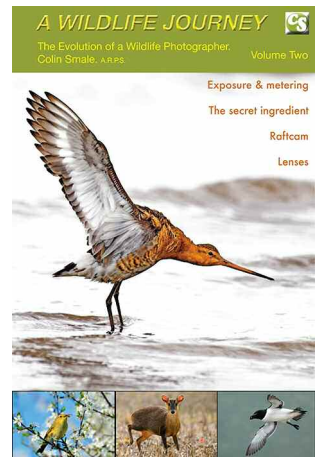
Wildlife photography takes us to fantastic places and shows us so many beautiful things, things we otherwise may never have seen. The journey has many twists and turns, paths and pitfalls. I hope that somewhere within these volumes I have flagged up the pitfalls for you because they are surely there, somewhere. Pin sharp images, lens micro-adjustment, hides, ghillie suits, camo nets, fine tuning your camera as if it were an F1 racing car for flight photography, light, exposure etc etc etc.

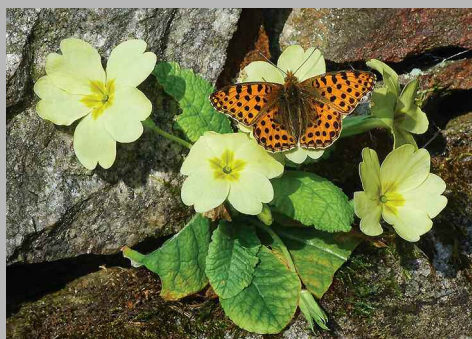
My first encounter abroad was a visit to Spain in 1972. One early dawn on the lightening Costa Brava sand dunes of the Med with my camera found me with a revolver in my face held by a very confused Guardia Civil - after surviving that things were bound to get better! Hopefully your wildlife journey will not have had such a frightful beginning!



Editor's Note:

Previews of Colin's four volumes can be seen at: www.fotolincs.com and purchased at only £1.99 per volume.





Images from Gianpiero Ferrari's Fellowship Panel

Top: Red Assassin Bug

Above: Queen of Spain Fritillary

Below: Pale Prominent Moth camouflage

Top right: Narrow-bordered 5 Spot Burnet

Bottom right: Small White mating pair

