

# SPECIAL ISSUE

# CELEBRATING DISTINCTIONS

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### Welcome to Issue 15 of Nature Group eNews.

I hadn't expected to be sending out another edition of eNews before the Summer. However, the successes of members of the Nature Group at the recent Natural History Distinctions Assessment was such good news that I felt a special Celebratory issue was in order.

I'm sure you will want to join with me in congratulating these members on their achievements.

I hope you will enjoy reading their accounts of the thought and work that they put into their panels and how they achieved their goal of an RPS Distinction.

If you are working towards an RPS Distinction in Natural History yourself, be it at Fellowship or Associate level, this issue is sure to be of great interest to you.

Whatever your aspirations, feast your eyes on some truly mouth-watering images in this special issue of eNews.

Good news in this issue from our Programme Co-ordinator, Ann Miles FRPS, that Field Meetings will be able to go ahead this summer. There are also details of new on-line talks you can book.

The next issue of eNews will be in June. Until then, stay cautious and stay safe.

Bye for now.



Dawn Osborn FRPS,  
eNews Editor

# Working towards a Fellowship Distinction

by Martin Vaughn FRPS

I gained my ARPS in 2013 on the theme of 'Wildlife of the National Forest', with a panel of five birds, five flowers and five insects. I work better when I have something to aim for, so I decided to have a long term goal of achieving my Fellowship.

I knew that it was bird photography that made my heart sing more than anything else, but I had been told it was a difficult challenge as lots of people presented panels of birds and the pass rate with these was low. To find 20 distinctive images would not be easy. Nevertheless I was determined to start down the road and see how far I could get.

I chose the theme of 'Birds of the National Forest'. The National Forest is a new forest being planted around the area where I live. I thought that if I worked my local patch I could really get to know the nearby reserves, how the light worked, what species were around at what time of the year and most importantly, the ease of returning until I got the images I was hoping for. A radius of 5 miles around my home gave me access to about eight reserves, local lakes or wooded areas.

I embarked on a succession of projects. A ladder and my tripod up a tree adjacent to a Nuthatch's nest; a scaffold tower with a hide on top to capture Great Spotted Woodpeckers; fighting through undergrowth to the edge of a local lake where I could hide behind grasses and watch Great Crested Grebes from nest building, through chicks hatching, to becoming independent. A longer term project was feeding local Buzzards with road kill. They discovered the food quite quickly and were visiting daily. However, whenever I went in the hide, they wouldn't come down. It took a long time to figure out whether it was just coincidence or whether they knew I was there. Rebuilding my hide did the trick and I was able to capture the images I wanted. A Tawny Owl was visiting most nights to finish off the Buzzards' food. Following some quick lessons on camera trapping and overcoming my fears of leaving my camera gear in the wild and having it stolen, I managed to obtain my Tawny photographs.

I had been supplying images of my work to the National Forest company to use in their literature and also to the County Wildlife Trust. This gave me enough credence to be granted permission to put a small hide at the edge of

THE **RPS**  
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## FELLOWSHIP Presentation Layout Version for 14th April 2021



01 (new)



02 (original)



03 (original)



04 (new)



05 (reworked)



06 (new)



07 (new)



08 (reworked)



09 (original)



10 (new)



11 (original)



12 (reworked)



13 (original)



14 (original)



15 (reworked)



16 (original)



17 (original)



18 (original)



19 (new)



20 (original)



1. Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*



2. Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*



3. Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*

one of their lakes on a local reserve. This enabled water level shots of Snipe, Green Sandpiper, Water Rail and other water birds.

It took three Autumns to get images that I was happy with. Waiting for mornings with suitable light and low wind speed to get good reflections - and hoping the birds would show on that day required patience and perseverance!

After approximately five years I was starting to build a bank of images that seemed to be possible. I had perhaps fifty, so I printed out 4 by 6 inch photos of these and began to see how they might become a panel. They seemed to fall quite naturally into three rows. The upper row had blue backgrounds of sky or water. The



4. Black-headed Gull - *Larus ridibundus*



5. Snipe - *Gallinago gallinago*



6. Blackbird - *Turdus merula*



7. Blue Tit - *Parus caeruleus*





9. Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*



10. Red Crested Pochard - *Netta rufina*



11. Coal Tit - *Parus ater*



12. Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

middle row had browns or tree bark whilst the bottom row had dark green backgrounds from vegetation or it's reflection.

The next hurdle was to find out if these images were anywhere near the standard required? I had been told (maybe incorrectly) that you were only allowed one advisory day at 'F' level - so I didn't want to waste it if I was nowhere near. Then I heard about the on line advisory service. I sent twenty five images off for comments and was encouraged by the feedback I received. Some images were too static and needed to be changed, but the majority were of a suitable standard.

Having changed the images as suggested, the next step was to apply for an advisory day. I travelled to Bristol and felt quite pleased when my panel went up - but any pride was short lived as the advisor found multiple images which weren't critically sharp. One of the other assessors for a different genre was obviously surprised

and came, peered intently and said "they look alright to me" - to which the response was "well it's a good job you aren't on the nature panel" !!

In anticipation of being able to either sharpen the soft images, or find new ones, I applied for the Assessment in April 2020. My prints were sent to Bristol a few days



8. Treecreeper - *Certhia familiaris*



13. Nuthatch - *Sitta europea*



14. Goldcrest - *Regulus regulus*



16. Water Rail - *Rallus aquaticus*



17. Coot - *Fulica atra*



18. Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*



15. Great Crested Grebe - *Podiceps cristatus*



## Statement of Intent

### Birds of the National Forest

I live in the heart of the National Forest. Over the last 25 years, old mining sites and opencast coal and clay workings have been transformed into woodland by the planting of 8 million trees. The woodland cover has increased from 1% to 27%. New lakes have been established and wildlife has moved back into the area in abundance.

My panel intends to show some of the birds of this new Forest. All the species have been photographed within a 5 mile radius of my home.

I have shown differing aspects of behaviour such as hunting, feeding, singing, flying, alighting, preening and swimming. Because of its behavioural importance I have also shown several small species at the nest or with young, despite offering a very shallow depth of field and a 'less clean' background than is currently fashionable.



19. Tawny Owl - *Strix aluco*



20. Buzzard - *Buteo buteo*

before lock-down began, so I had to wait until September before they were assessed. I wasn't too surprised to get the "We regret" e-mail, because I knew there had been imperfections in several of my images. The better news was that there were lots of strong prints, I could re-submit, and only four images were picked out as being below standard.

I immediately re-applied for April 2021 and set to work to find some replacements. This was more awkward as they had to fit with the existing colour scheme of the panel. Three of the four replacements needed blue backgrounds and there were many weeks without blue skies!

Very helpful was a one to one on-line portfolio review about a month before the assessment. This confirmed my replacement images as stronger - but these then showed up two different images as relatively weak! Did I go for the assessment or delay? Apart from another £80 fee and a bruised ego there didn't seem to be much to lose by going ahead. I found a replacement for one of the two 'downgraded' images and kept my fingers tightly crossed.

The assessment was somewhat nerve wracking as panel members on line queried the sharpness of images with the print expert present in RPS House. He also commented on some bronzing on the wing tips of one of the images.

I was bracing myself for the Chairman to begin "We regret", but instead he started with "Despite". Never has the word despite sounded so sweet, especially when it was followed up with "we are delighted to say ...." !!

I have learned so much on the journey, that even if I hadn't achieved my "F" it would still have been worthwhile trying. Passing was the icing on the cake.

"Thank you" to all those assessors who gave voluntarily of their time to guide me along the road.

# The 'Hoppers of Costa Rica'

by Ann Healey FRPS

My Royal Photographic Society distinctions journey started in 2008, a year after joining my first camera club. With encouragement from club mentors, I decided to try for my Licentiate and was delighted to be successful. I waited several years before going for my Associateship. Two unsuccessful attempts, in Spring and Autumn 2014, with different insect panels, left me so disillusioned, it was another two years before I tried again. This time, I went with a mixed panel of Costa Rican wildlife and finally achieved success in September 2016.



Ultimately, the choice was between insects photographed in the rain forest at night and Homoptera - leafhoppers, treehoppers, planthoppers, sharpshooters and cicadas. The 'Hoppers of Costa Rica' are amongst the most colourful and interesting in the world. I spent many hours on my Costa Rica trips photographing them. A challenge for any photographer, being extremely elusive and tiny, ranging in size from around 3mm to 8mm, the exception being cicadas which are between 2-5cm. Putting together a Fellowship-standard panel was not going to be easy.



Frankly, I thought Associate level would be the most I could achieve but in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, I plucked up courage and decided to apply for my Fellowship. Deciding on the topic was not hard: Costa Rican wildlife is so diverse that my initial idea was to have a general wildlife panel but I channelled my thoughts towards my favourite genre - insects. I knew the images would have to be superior to those that got me my Associateship so with that in mind, I sorted through thousands of photographs in Lightroom before processing a sizeable shortlist of images and putting together a cohesive panel. However, the more I looked at this, the more I started to consider honing it down even further.

My first job was to go through all my RAW images again. The photographs had been taken in a variety of conditions – sun, cloud, rain, at night – and each species had their own individual challenge.







When it came to post processing, I used Adobe Camera RAW and Photoshop CC, allowing me to make numerous selective adjustments. Most images I took were taken in sunlight or with flash to bring out the shadows from difficult-to-reach areas of their bodies, creating highlights which were hard to control. I removed distracting small blemishes while ensuring the subject matter was as technically perfect as possible. I played with layouts on the PC and printed the images myself on A4 lustre paper, my preferred finish and the optimum print size for me.

Once I had decided on the final 21, I mounted the prints flush with the top of the mount, to display the finished panel in portrait orientation. I printed the Statement of Intent, which I kept informative but concise, the

Identification List, labels, populated the layouts and packaged everything up before delivering my submission to Bristol for the September 2020 assessment.

On the afternoon of Assessment Day, I received an email from Ben Fox, Senior Distinctions Assistant, informing me I had been unsuccessful. However, the assessors had found merit and potential in my panel and offered me a resubmission. The feedback highlighted the defects they had found – some images were







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soft, slightly over-sharpened or showed too much evidence of flash. For my resubmission, I reworked two, correcting the over-sharpening on one and reducing the evidence of flash on the other, and totally replaced seven images based on the assessors' feedback and my own judgement, obviously making sure the new prints were flawless.



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Sending the print box to Bristol via courier proved a complete nightmare and the box ended up coming back to me at home. It was a shambolic experience but fortunately I had time to drive my panel to the RPS, personally handing it over to Ben for safekeeping.

I was so fearful of failure, I couldn't face watching the reassessment and when the email from Ben arrived shortly after the event, informing me of my success, I was so shocked, I broke down in tears, taking about an hour to compose myself! To have attained the honour of Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society is an accolade I could never have dreamt of achieving and to accomplish this with a subject so dear to my heart made it even more meaningful.



12



14



15



16



17



19



20



21

I run an Awards & Distinctions Special Interest Group for my club. I would advise anyone thinking about trying for an RPS distinction to go for it: it involves a great deal of work but the satisfaction of success is unparalleled. At whatever level, make sure you take advice: attend an Advisory Day if you can and try to find a mentor with the relevant experience. I wish you the very best of luck.



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## Statement of Intent

### Hoppers of Costa Rica

In my world, small is beautiful and to me there is nothing more challenging or fascinating than the world of insects. Costa Rica was the chosen location for this collection of leafhoppers, treehoppers, froghoppers, planthoppers and sharpshooters. These tiny creatures, typically measuring 3-12 mm, prefer to hide in the shadows of the cloud and rain forests, to watch your every movement from a position where they can leap away, often disappearing before you even get a chance to focus on them, never to be seen again.

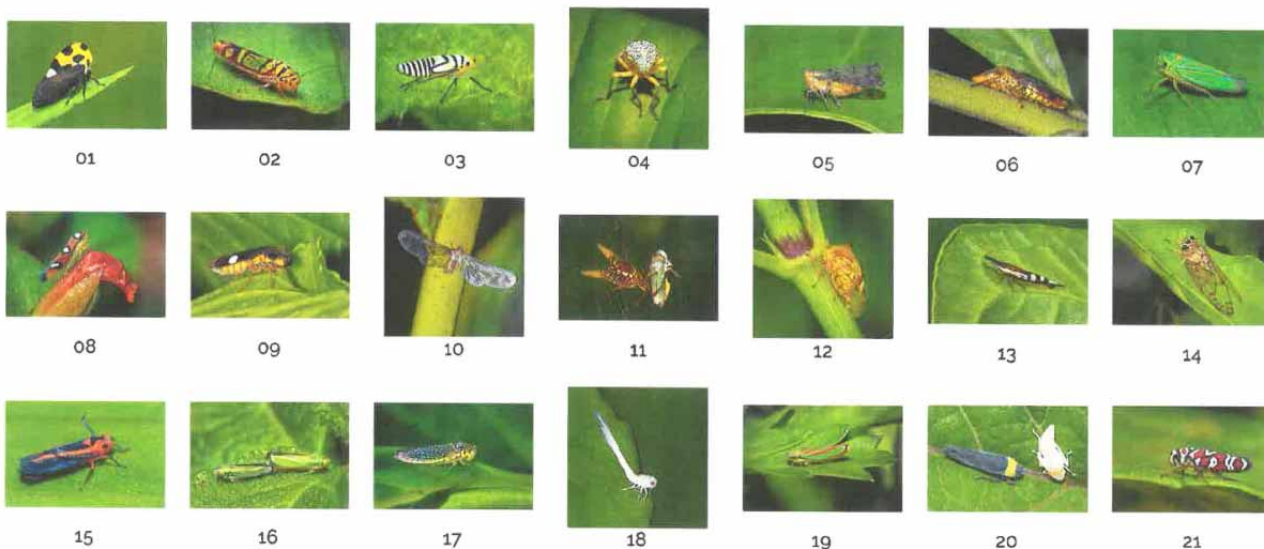
The aim of my panel is to showcase, through my macro lens, the wonder of these intricately designed, beautifully patterned and notoriously shy creatures.



# Natural History FRPS Panel

## Hoppers of Costa Rica

### Presentation Layout



### Species Identification List

- |     |                                    |                                      |
|-----|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Mexican Treehopper                 | <i>Membracis mexicana</i>            |
| 2.  | Sharpshooter                       | <i>Dilobopterus instratus</i>        |
| 3.  | Leafhopper Nymph                   | <i>Agrosoma placetis</i>             |
| 4.  | Large Cyrtodisca Sharpshooter      | <i>Cyrtodisca major</i>              |
| 5.  | Net-winged Planthopper             | <i>Biolleyana costalis</i>           |
| 6.  | Orange-headed Redwing Sharpshooter | <i>Homaldisca indefensa</i>          |
| 7.  | Sharpshooter                       | <i>Chlorogonalia coeruleovittata</i> |
| 8.  | Leafhopper                         | <i>Erythrogononia areolata</i>       |
| 9.  | Broad-headed Sharpshooter          | <i>Oncometopia orbona</i>            |
| 10. | Derbid Planthopper                 | <i>Mysidia mississippiensis</i>      |
| 11. | Micrathena Spider                  | <i>Micrathena sagittata</i>          |
|     | with Green Lantana Sharpshooter    | <i>Oncometopia clarior</i> prey      |
| 12. | Buffalo Treehopper                 | <i>Ceresa concinna</i>               |
| 13. | Seed-mimicking Treehopper          | <i>Polyglypta</i> sp.                |
| 14. | Cicada                             | <i>Proarna sallei</i>                |
| 15. | Leafhopper                         | <i>Gillonella ampulla</i>            |
| 16. | Mating Leafhoppers                 | <i>Cicadella viridis</i>             |
| 17. | Sharpshooter                       | <i>Macugonalia cavifrons</i>         |
| 18. | Nogodinid Planthopper Nymph        | <i>f. Nogodinae</i>                  |
| 19. | Leafhopper                         | <i>Graphocephala versuta</i>         |
| 20. | Collared Sharpshooter with Nymph   | <i>Barbinolla costaricensis</i>      |
| 21. | Leafhopper                         | <i>Agrosoma placetis</i>             |

# FRPS on a Common Theme

by Darron Matthews FRPS

Since gaining an ARPS back in 2015, my next target was to gain an FRPS. I knew it was going to be a big step up and that everything including exposure and composition, amongst other things, would need to be taken into consideration. Print and mounting quality would have to be at their best with the panel of images sitting in perfect harmony.

So how was I going to achieve this? For starters, it helps to be inspired by other nature loving photographers - for me, one of those was Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS. I started to see his work at many BPE (British Photographic Exhibitions), picking up many awards along the way. It was Gianpiero's work that really inspired me to continue with my quest. I knew it was not going to happen overnight and that I would need a variety of subjects if I were to succeed. Entering exhibitions, including the annual RPS Nature Group exhibition, gives you a feel for the sort of images that might have a chance to succeed in a panel.







Image stacking was used with a couple of the images. The pair of Common Blues (image 14) being a prime example. This image gained me the Nature Group's Gold Medal for Best Print of the 2019 Exhibition. The damselfly was fine as a single image, but the grass stem was leaning towards the lens and going out of focus. I ended up with about five images to get the whole of the grass in focus. I feel this is an important part of my photography. I try to keep not only the subject in focus but also the perch it's on. However, there are exceptions to keeping the whole subject in focus. A dragonfly's wing might fall out of focus, due to the lack of depth of field (DOF). In these cases, be sure to keep its whole body in focus. I see so many images of damselfly and dragons where the tail end is going slightly soft.

I very rarely use a tripod, but on odd occasions I might use a monopod to help me reduce camera shake. In this panel, all images were taken with natural light except for the two inflight shots, where everything was controlled using infrared laser beams. The beams triggered four flash guns and a high-speed shutter that was fixed to the front of my macro lens. With this set up, the camera must be set to bulb mode and the subjects must break the beams for the image to be taken. The Carder Bee was also featured in this year's (2021) RSPB Nature Calendar, winning me a pair of binoculars.





There are times when a little bit of luck comes your way. The Small Red Damselflies in image 2 was one such occasion. I had already spotted a pair of them in flight and was waiting for them to settle. When they finally landed and I was framing up the image, a third damsel landed on them. After taking four quick shots, it flew away again. When I looked at the rear screen, I knew I had grabbed something special. This image also won me a prize in the RSPB 'Natures Home' magazine.

When I am in the field, I always carry a pair of small scissors. Many times I have an image framed up and then find there is a distraction like a bright grass stem. Being careful not to disturb the subject, a minor bit of gardening can remove unwanted distractions.



Once I had gathered enough images for a panel, I decided to get some advice, and where better to get the right advice than at a Distinctions Advisory Day. The RPS Nature Group had organised such a day but due to the pandemic there were a few date changes and eventually the Advisory Day was done via Zoom. I received advice from Mick Durham, Chair of the RPS Nature Distinctions Panel Team. The Advisory Day was a massive help. I was advised to beware of unwanted distractions and bright subjects that stood out from others in the panel. It was also suggested that I should avoid repetitive images. I had included three subjects in flight, one had to be omitted. The RPS Nature







Group also ran a number of online lectures and tuition work-shops. I found them very useful and picked up several tips along the way.

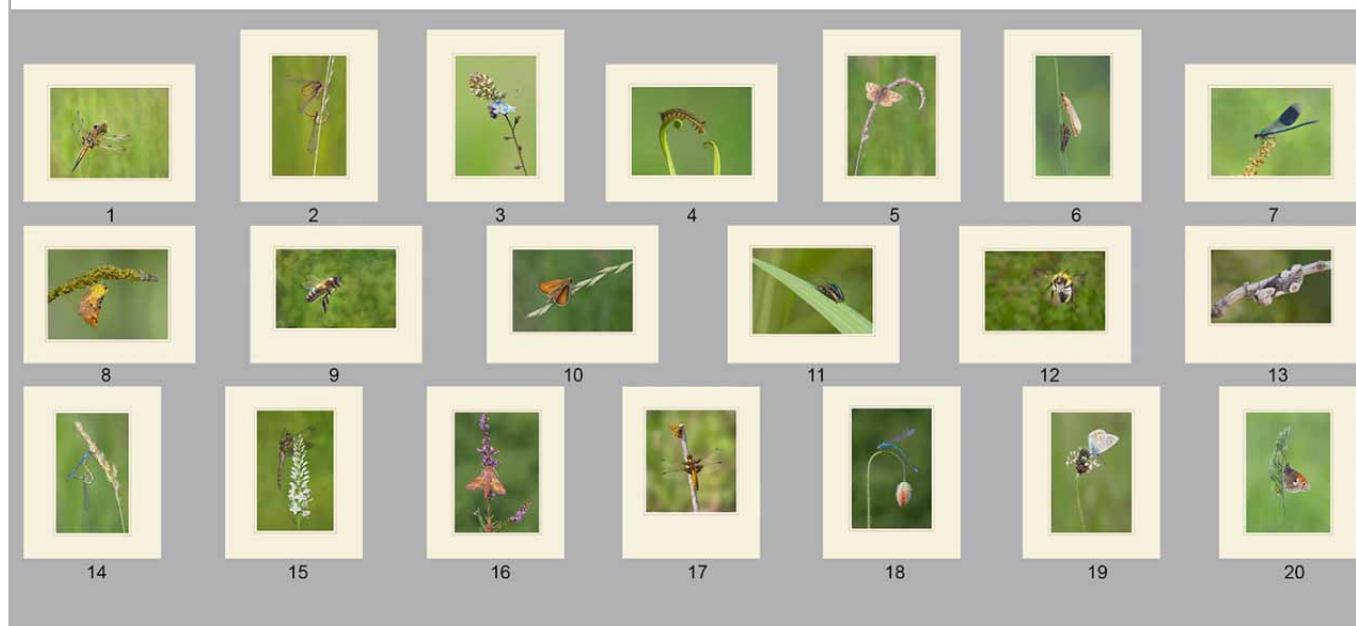
Following the advice given at the Advisory Day, I replaced four of the images, toned down a distraction in another and booked my assessment.

The wait was over, the assessment day was upon me. Apparently this was a first time in many years that FRPS applicants could see their work being assessed. Due to the pandemic, it was all done via Zoom.

There were twelve ARPS panels assessed in the morning and five FRPS panels in the afternoon - mine being last. Finally, my panel was up. The comments from the Assessors were very pleasing. I recall Kevin Elsbey saying that it was an ultra-distinctive, virtuoso panel and screamed quality. If I was not confident before, I was now. Shortly after, the chair asked for the scores to be submitted and it was then that I received the acknowledgment that I had achieved my Fellowship distinction.



## Fellowship Presentation Layout



## Statement of Intent

### How Common are our Common Insects?

When in the field, on my knees recording an image, I frequently get asked by passers-by, "what are you doing? In reply, "Taking a picture of this", whilst pointing to an insect in the grasses. Looking with a blank face, "I've never seen one of those before." And as if by magic, they start looking into the grasses themselves.

Have I just opened someone's eyes? Will they ever walk through these fields blindfolded again? Perhaps not.

It just goes to show, so many of us are wrapped up in our own little world, just too blind to see what really is below our feet.

I'd like to show with my panel a variety of subjects that are common, but not to everyone, and found almost anywhere. From insects in flight to resting and reproducing.

Is 'Common' becoming a name and not a meaning?

## Species List

### Top Row

- |                                       |                                 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Female Four Spotted Chaser         | <i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i> |
| 2. Three Small Red Damselflies        | <i>Ceragrion tenellum</i>       |
| 3. Male Orange Tip Butterfly          | <i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>   |
| 4. Drinker Moth Caterpillar           | <i>Euthrix potatoria</i>        |
| 5. Male Dingy Skipper                 | <i>Erynnis tages</i>            |
| 6. Emerged Male Blue Tailed Damselfly | <i>Ischnura elegans</i>         |
| 7. Male Banded Demoiselle             | <i>Calopteryx splendens</i>     |

### Middle Row

- |                                  |                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 8. Canary-shouldered Thorn Moth  | <i>Ennomos alniaria</i>      |
| 9. Honey Bee in Flight           | <i>Apis</i>                  |
| 10. Male Small Skipper Butterfly | <i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i> |
| 11. Ground Beetles Paired        | <i>Carabidae</i>             |
| 12. Common Carder Bee in Flight  | <i>Bombus pascuorum</i>      |
| 13. Peach Blossom Moth           | <i>Thyatira batis</i>        |

### Bottom Row

- |                                      |                              |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 14. Common Blue Damselflies Paired   | <i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i> |
| 15. Female Common Darter             | <i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>  |
| 16. Small Elephant Hawk Moth         | <i>Deilephila porcellus</i>  |
| 17. Male Large Skipper               | <i>Ochlodes sylvanus,</i>    |
| & Female Broad Bodied Chaser         | <i>Libellula depressa</i>    |
| 18. Male Azure Blue Damselfly        | <i>Coenagrion puella</i>     |
| 19. Male Common Blue Butterfly & Bug | <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>    |
| 20. Male Small Heath Butterfly       | <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i> |



# FRPS Distinction – A Time For courage?

by Julia Wainwright FRPS

Photography distinctions are not for everyone but personally I find they provide motivation to improve my photography, offer challenge and a focus and ensure I commit time to my hobby.

Back in 2015, when I achieved my ARPS in Natural History Photography, the idea of working towards an FRPS seemed a distant dream. Over the next few years my focus shifted to PAGB awards which have quite a different set of criteria. In parallel with this, two FRPS panel ideas began to formulate in my mind, one around Raptors with Prey and the other Predators of Africa and I worked on building those portfolios at every opportunity.

In 2020 the pandemic meant planned trips to photograph Raptors were not possible and, as my existing pool of images had insufficient variety, that option was eliminated. Over several years and more than 10 weeks of photo-graphic safaris, I had accumulated around 20,000 big cat images suitable for the Predators of Africa idea but it is not just about having a large pool of images. What was the story I wanted to tell, what was my 'Statement of Intent' (SOI)?

I had been formulating ideas for my SOI for some time and wanted it to be about more than just predation, I wanted to tell the story of the predators I had seen in

Africa - a story of survival, family bonds and interactions. It was at that point I realised that 20 or 21 images is quite a small number when you are trying to tell a story about multiple species, so I decided to concentrate on a single species.

With my choice narrowed to either lions or cheetahs was my idea even feasible? Some trusted photography friends even suggested that a single species study would never be acceptable for an FRPS, as there would be insufficient variety. Doubts began to surface but I pushed them to one side.

Against this backdrop I assessed my cheetah options and soon realised that sufficient variety would be a challenge with them. You rarely see adult male and female cheetahs together and they do not form prides in the way that lions do; males and females look remarkably similar and cute cheetah cubs and dramatic kills can only get you so far.

Down to my last option I waded through my thousands of lion images numerous times, identifying those that addressed the points in my draft SOI. Some choices were easy, images that had performed well in competition, whereas others were more difficult, using images that had never been seen outside my computer.

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## Fellowship Presentation Layout





Then my next challenge began to dawn on me. In wildlife photography you need to work with the available light, you are not in control of it in the way you are with studio photography. Trying to put together a cohesive yet distinctive panel of colour images with everything from early morning golden light through to rainstorms on dull days was not working. Yes, it was distinctive but unfortunately for the wrong reasons.

I studied various successful FRPS panels and pulled out the aspects that appealed to me. Soft, muted colours or monochrome stood out. In a natural history submission, your images need to reflect reality, changing the colour palette to anything other than monochrome was unlikely to be acceptable.







I selected a pool of around 100 images and did a quick conversion to monochrome to see which images worked. I then printed these off as small A7 sized prints and shuffled them around on a table until I found a layout I was happy with. I returned to my draft SOI and checked it against my panel and vice versa. Confirming that your SOI clearly explains your panel and your choices is extremely important.

It was now time to work on my monochrome conversions. I am not known for my monochrome work and in pre-covid times I would have attended a monochrome processing workshop but 2020 was not a normal year. Instead, I developed my skills through online research,







YouTube videos, webinars and scrutinising successful images from monochrome competitions.

The pandemic has changed a lot of things in the world of photography - one positive is the vast improvement in online resources being offered by the RPS Distinctions Group and the RPS Nature Group. Additionally, formal and informal online discussion groups have been set up, providing a forum to share progress and receive peer feedback in a supportive environment.

Eventually I felt ready to take advantage of the advice options available through the RPS Distinctions process and booked a 1:1 portfolio review in October 2020 and





an Advisory in November. It was well worth taking full advantage of these options. Review sessions offer the opportunity to receive feedback on whether your panel is shaping up to meet the criteria and gave me a timeline to work to, a set of fixed deadlines.

The 1:1 was extremely helpful and identified two main areas requiring further work; my monochrome conversions lacked full tonal range and my panel was borderline in terms of variety. The SOI was deemed in keeping with the panel. Several images were changed, monochromes were reprocessed and then it was time for the Advisory.

Normally at this stage prints would be assessed but, once again, lockdown thwarted plans. The advisory was held online over Zoom and only digital versions of the images could be reviewed. The feedback was very encouraging on technical competence, monochrome processing and panel layout but again more variety was called for. There was one comment made that will probably stay with me for a very long time:

*“... to attempt a panel of one species is a very courageous thing to do ... to come up with a panel in monochrome is an even braver thing to do”.*

Was I being brave or was I simply being foolish?

After the advisory I pushed ahead and applied for the April 2021 assessment, I had come too far to give up now. By this time I was beginning to feel the pressure; going through this process can consume far more time than you might envisage.

Images were changed and processed, endlessly printed and reprinted at 15"x10" on Hahnemühle Baryta FB paper (fortunately the paper was a prize in the 2019 PAGB Masters of Print, so at least I was able to save some money there). The prints were then mounted using 50x40cm White Core Single Mounts in Ice White and hand delivered to RPS House.

This time lockdown did not thwart us. The session was run over Zoom, the panel chair read out my SOI and panel members viewed and commented on digital versions of my images. The prints were then examined by a print specialist at RPS House, his role was to comment on print quality and answer questions posed by the panel. It was all run very efficiently.

The actual event was nerve racking to say the least but for me the outcome was positive and rewarding in so many ways. An experience to be recommended.

## Lions of East Africa

Common Names -	Scientific Names
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>
African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>
Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
Masai Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi</i>

## Statement of Intent

### Lions of East Africa

Lions are Africa's top predators and I have had many opportunities to observe and photograph them on several East African safaris, often tracking the same pride (close family group) over the course of different trips.

Lions spend much of their day resting and sleeping but beyond that there is the ongoing need for food, rearing future generations and simply surviving as a species.

My intent with this panel is to show of variety of aspects, such as:

- Their differing features and penetrating gaze.
- Bonds between members of a pride
- Lionesses nurturing their young
- Their power and strength, essential for bring down large prey
- A selection of close-up and in the environment images
- Use of tracing collars, vital for monitoring activity patterns in support of conservation.

The use of monochrome helped bring cohesion to the panel allowing the detail and textures to tell the story of each image.

# A Low Carbon ARPS

by **Martin Hancock ARPS**

What a journey it was from LRPS to ARPS. One thing was certain - it was a challenge. The one thing I learnt very early on was that this was not just a collection of your best/favourite fifteen images.

The importance of the Statement of Intent should not be underestimated. For me it drives passion and style and can be influenced by several factors. I have spent many years studying and working in the environmental arena and addressing climate change is undoubtedly a real emergency. As photographers, reducing our carbon footprint is a contribution we can make to addressing the problem. Local photography, through minimising travel, is one way. The other advantage of being local is that you can usually go back to the area and try again. As Chair of the RPS Environmental & Social Responsibility Committee (formally the Climate Change Working Group), I also felt I should practise what I preach!

Once the Statement is bedded down, then deciding the images required becomes the next challenge. I wanted to emphasise the fact that local photography, especially on your own patch, gives you more time to observe animal behaviour and capture the more unusual images. Many times I would come away with few, if any, good images, but invariably will have learnt something for next time. Spending time 'in the field' is a pleasure in its own right. I am a conservationist and nature lover first and a photographer second.



THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY

## Associate Presentation Layout



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I wanted to express through the panel some of the rich diversity of fauna in the UK and also some of the different photographic techniques, such as flash and high key, to demonstrate technical competence. The flash images were particularly challenging as there is no 'spray and pray' in this instance, more like patience and quality over quantity.

The structure of the panel is also important. Ensuring the relative positions and associated colour of the images was necessary to give an overall balance to the panel. Again, this takes time to work out.

It is also extremely important to seek the advice from others throughout the process. What you might think is a great image may not be totally consistent with the Statement of Intent or fit well into the panel. Let's face it, you will be biased. I would certainly recommend attending an Advisory Day, even as an Observer, and booking a 1:1 session. These sessions are invaluable. Individual images may get good marks in competitions, but that does not mean they will work in a panel of fifteen.



This panel was my second attempt and whilst very disappointed first time around, I have to say I was more than pleased with this final panel. The comments made by others were sometimes a bit hard to swallow, but these should not be viewed as criticism, but sound advice to raise the standard required.









Once the Statement of Intent and images are sorted then comes the issue of presentation. I opted for prints and opened up a whole new set of challenges - printing and mounting. I am not a post processing fanatic, in fact, I only use Lightroom - much preferring to spend my time in the field than on a keyboard. That said, exposure management and sympathetic cropping are invariably necessary. I tend to crop quite tightly since I am more interested in the animal than the surroundings, but again, this is where expert advice comes to the fore. I guess the one real advantage of the Natural History genre is that the extent of what you can do in post processing is limited

Part of the Assessment involved an almost forensic look at the images for aspects such as colour casts, over sharpening and dust spots. For prints the type of paper used and the colour and texture of the mounting board are also assessed. I would suggest not leaving this aspect of the submission to the last minute. My printer decided to call it a day some two months before the submission date. Trying to buy a new one and inks during the lockdown was yet another challenge.

It can look very daunting embarking on an ARPS and to be honest it is. It takes time and really does require that you raise your personal bar. There is lots of support out there though and the ultimate intention is to assist you to succeed. A journey well worth taking.



## Statement of Intent

### Low Carbon Wildlife Photography

Whilst it is tempting to travel overseas to photograph wildlife, this portfolio celebrates some of the rich diversity of avian, marine and terrestrial wildlife to be found in the UK and Ireland. Such local photography has become even more pertinent given the travel restrictions caused by the recent pandemic and the need to reduce our carbon footprint to help combat climate change.

Being local gave me more time to improve my field-craft and camera technique and capture some of the more interesting behaviour and characteristics of the generally elusive and fast moving fauna portrayed, particularly when feeding and flying.

Ten of the images were taken in the East of England, all close to home, so this portfolio really does represent low carbon photography. I have been fortunate to 're-wild' some seven acres of intensively cultivated land around my home and some of the images were taken there.



# Creatures of Cold Climates

## An ARPS Panel by Duncan Locke ARPS

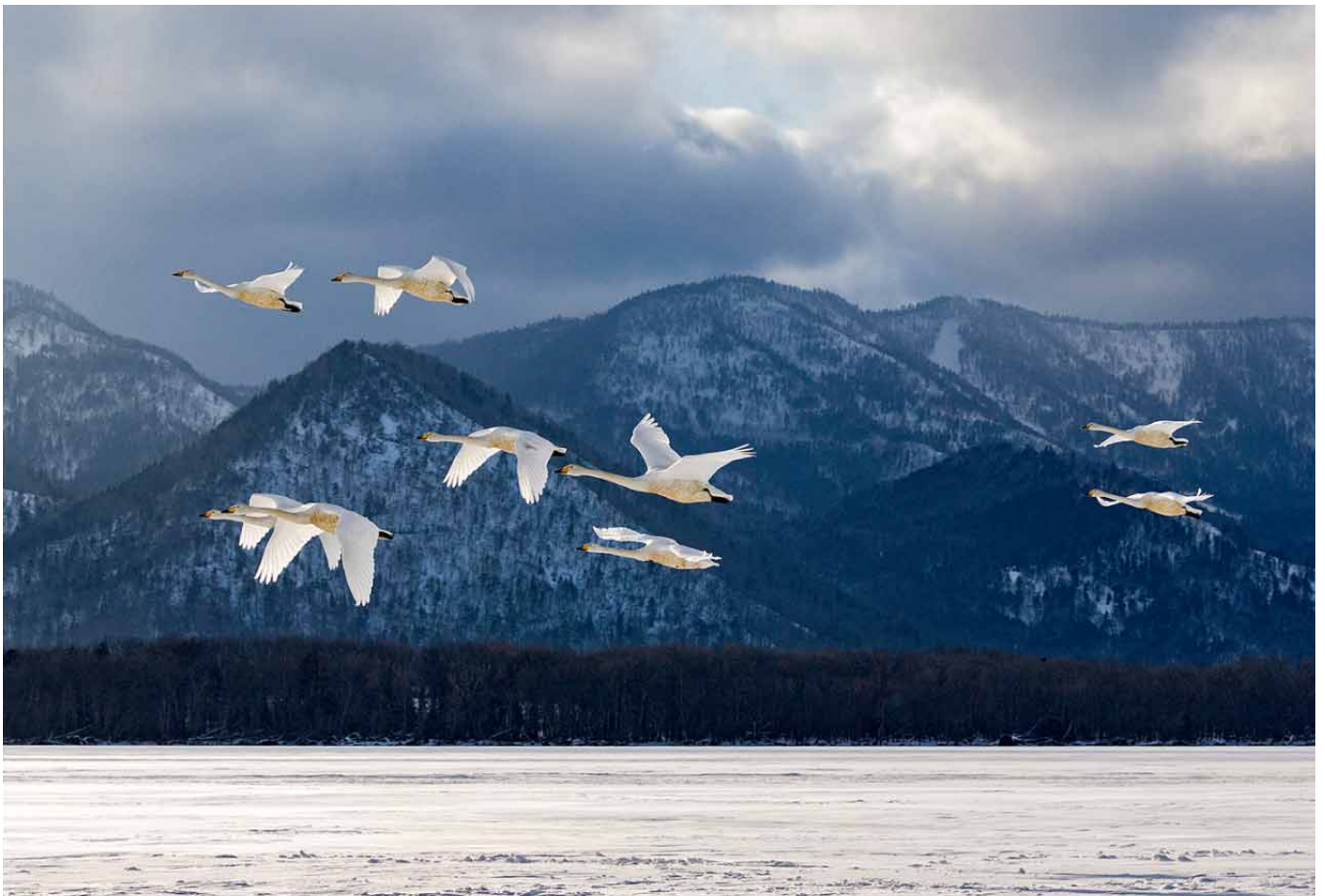
When I successfully submitted my LRPS panel in 2017, I was already starting to think about ARPS. Although I am heavily involved with the Nature Group, I don't consider myself to be just a nature photographer and even within nature I don't specialise in any particular type of subject. So I had first to answer the questions that probably face many ARPS candidates: what is my Statement of Intent and what subject matter should I choose? This combined with the difficulty at that time in finding and booking a Nature Advisory Day, resulted in quite a delay in my putting my ARPS panel together.

Having booked for the Advisory Day on the 28th November 2020, I then had to develop the theme of my panel, which was still at the ideas stage.

As I had done my most in-depth and enjoyable nature photography in cold parts of the world, I had already pretty well chosen to work on what became 'Creatures of Cold Climates'. There is something about the harsh conditions that such creatures exist in, coupled with the often wonderful and continually changing light, which really attracts me.











I had images from two visits to Svalbard and the Arctic, two winter visits to Hokkaido in Japan, and one visit to Antarctica, so I already had a large number of images (most of them not very good!) to draw on. Some of these images had done well for me in Camera Club competitions and the RPS Nature Group Exhibition, so these gave me a starting point for the panel.

Once I began to lay it out, it almost naturally fell into rows of three, five and seven images with the northern Arctic images at the top, Japan central and the southern Antarctic images at the bottom. I managed to find a mixture of birds and mammals and pairs of creatures to go in the centre of each row.

I was pleased that it was possible to submit prints for the assessment. I much prefer prints to digital images as I think that they give the viewer a much closer connection with the subject. I planned to use 500 x 400mm mounts (as used in many Camera Clubs). One thing that proved very helpful was to make mini prints that were about 1/3 full size and included the white mount to simulate what the final mounted print would look like. Four could be printed on a sheet of A3 paper. These enabled panel layouts to be tried out and adjusted on a table top prior to final selection.

The proposed panel was well received at the Advisory Day in November, with the top two rows passing unscathed. My Statement of Intent also passed unscathed. Following the advice received, I changed three images on the bottom row.



Which images am I particularly pleased with? Two on the centre row both taken in Japan. The centre image of the two Steller's Sea Eagles fighting taken from a boat and with a background of pack ice and the far right one of the Whooper Swans flying over a frozen lake in wonderful light. Two images that bring back the most memories are the Polar Bear standing on the pack ice and the Leopard Seal that had just caught an Adélie Penguin, one image in bottom right. Both were taken crouched down in a Zodiac inflatable and very close to the action. The Polar Bear was taken with a 100-400mm lens down to 180mm to fit the bear in the frame and with our excellent Arctic Guide, who was driving the boat, continually reassuring us that we were not within leaping distance. The Leopard Seal was also very close to the boat – you would be amazed how long it took it to eat the penguin – I've spared you the gory details!







Do I have Fellowship ambitions? Yes, but the subject matter is likely to be very different to my 'A' panel. Covid-19 has made international travel more difficult and there is also the issue of a carbon footprint; something that I believe will begin to affect nature photographers more and more. Taking the images in this panel required twenty flights, mostly international and including six long haul flights. Not a carbon footprint to be proud of. If or when I submit a Fellowship panel, the images will almost certainly be taken much closer to home.



#### Statement of Intent:

Having travelled a number of times to the Arctic, Antarctic and northern Japan in winter, I have developed a great respect for creatures that can survive in such cold harsh climates. I appreciate that all are well insulated against the cold, but there must be delicate balance between heat loss from their bodies and the food that they can find.

In this Panel my intention is to show marine animals and birds in their natural environment and where possible to show if they are solitary creatures or live in large groups.



### ARPS Presentation Layout



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# A Distinction between lockdowns

by André Neves ARPS

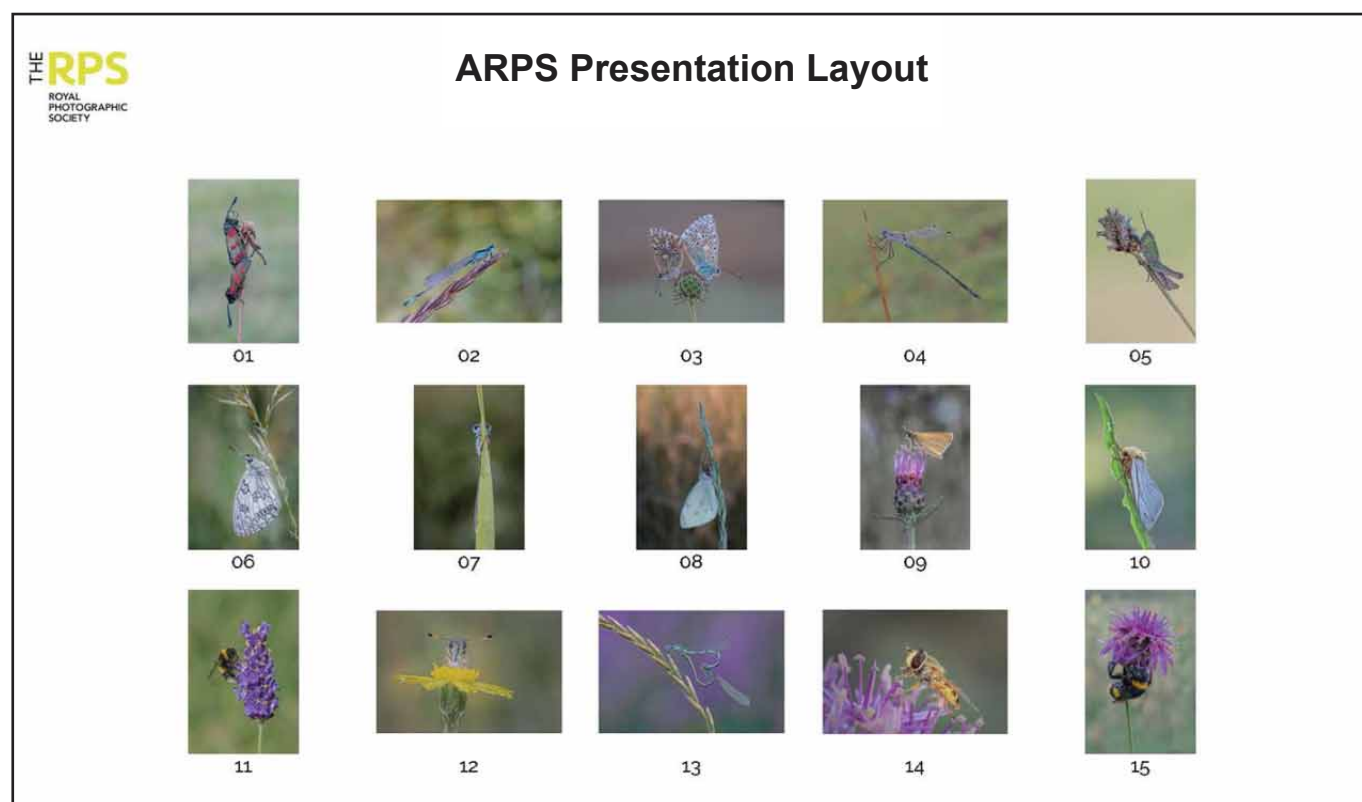
You would agree that 2020 has given us all opportunities to stand back, reflect and rethink our priorities as individuals, communities and as a society in general. In my view, our survival on this planet as a dominant, albeit vulnerable species, will increasingly rely on our ability to rethink, rebalance with nature and start re-wilding back our world!

I'm interested in insects because they form the most diverse and abundant class of animals on the planet. Over hundreds of millions or years of evolution they have managed to survive, adapt, and often thrive in virtually every ecosystem on Earth. Importantly, as the key pollinators of most of our fruit and vegetable staples, we owe some of these little creatures a great deal of gratitude! However, recent studies have shown that more than 40% of insect species are declining and a third are endangered. According to the Butterfly Conservation Society, 60% of butterfly species in the UK have declined in abundance in the last four decades. The Royal Horticultural Society have reported that some of the UK bee species, particularly those relying on specific nest sites and floral species, have shown significant declines in the last three decades.

Nevertheless, it's not all doom and gloom! In the words of Beccy Speight, the Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), it is clear that we need more mosaics of habitats on our land;

more balance, more complexity, more sharing, far less intensification, in order to let nature thrive again. It is therefore with optimistic enthusiasm, that I and others have welcomed the new system of Sustainable Farming Incentives (SFI) introduced in England this year, under which farmers will be paid for measures that help protect wildlife and habitats and not merely in proportion to their land acreage. Given time, such schemes could foster landscape recovery, lead to hedge expansion, peatland restoration and provide an incentive for the planting of new woods. There would be more trees, meadows and wetlands, giving wildlife - and insects in particular - a chance to recover!

As a lifetime admirer of natural imagery, I have been fascinated by nature and photography since my childhood years in Portugal. I started my photography journey some three decades ago by borrowing my father's reliable Nikon SLR. I loved the simplicity of the mechanics and miss the light weight of the camera body! I also recall the thrill of waiting for the prints never knowing if 'luck' had been on my side! I realise now, however, that my serious take on photography didn't start until some five years ago when I joined the Melbourn and District Photography Club, a very welcoming and cohesive community which has also been a fabulous source of photographic knowledge and inspiration! Later, some three years ago, I also joined the Cambridge Camera Club, a larger community with a rich heritage







and somehow complementary photographic interests. Over time, I have developed a strong interest in nature and macro photography. Having known of the RPS for many years, I have attended advisory days, and eventually submitted a panel of nature images. I was thrilled to be awarded my LRPS in 2019.

Eager to get out after the long lockdown of 2020 and missing the healing bliss of nature, I started to survey the local insect populations around my home and in nearby nature reserves. Joyfully waking up before dawn on many chilling mornings in late Spring and early Summer I have started to realise that the insect day starts at a slow pace but rapidly catches up as the sun





goes up in the horizon! Importantly, the differences in early morning temperature, quality of light and insect activity, between mid-May and mid-July, are astonishing! I feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity to witness first-hand, and not far from my doorstep, the richness of the biodiversity of insects near me. However, as recently stated by Sir David Attenborough, we are all suffering from 'shifting baseline syndrome', ie. our ability to forget across generations how biodiverse a natural environment should be. Had I been able to survey my local patch some 50, or even 20 years back, I would have likely witnessed a much more diverse ecosystem. Nevertheless, these small creatures have shown me that they can thrive in the smallest of habitats. From the shortest hedgerow separating a road from a monoculture field, to a small meadow conservancy between arable lands, given the smallest chance, insects will find a way to complete their annual life cycle and indirectly enrich our lives, often in more

ways than we care to notice. I'm particularly bewildered by butterflies and bees and their apparent endless energy and determination.

Towards the end of last year, I started to put together a panel of local insects, having spent months playing with the layout! I also sought advice from a very kind FRPS who commented on my images. I submitted my panel for an online assessment in April 2021 and was delighted to be presented with my ARPS in Natural History. I was very pleased and honoured. Having been inspired by other club members who, like me, are passionate about nature and conservation, I am very grateful to them for their time and support.

I recommend a thorough survey of the biodiversity of your local patch this Summer. You'll be amazed by what you can find!







## Statement of Intent

### The Hidden World of my Local Insects

The insect world forms the most diverse and rich class of animals on our planet.

My recent visits to local nature reserves, conservancies, meadows, hedgerows, and in my own garden, have demonstrated to me how local wildlife can adapt and thrive in the smallest of habitats.

I have portrayed insects living within a 30 mile radius of my home, in their natural environment and in close relationship with local flora, featuring seasonal behaviours that include feeding and mating.

This is my vision and tribute to a small world that lies hidden away and yet is very near and critical for us all.

- 01 Six-spot Burnet Moths *Zygaena filipendulae* mating
- 02 Male Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* on Meadow Oat-grass
- 03 Chalkhill Blue pair *Polyommatus coridon* at sunset on Devil's Bit Scabious
- 04 Male Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa*
- 05 Female Meadow Grasshopper *Chorthippus parallelus* on Meadow Foxtail
- 06 Male Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* on Wild Oat
- 07 Female Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*
- 08 Male Small White *Pieris rapae* on Meadow Oat Grass
- 09 Female Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola* on Common Knapweed
- 10 Male Ghost Moth *Hepialus humuli*
- 11 White-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lucorum* Worker nectaring on English Lavender
- 12 Male Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola* on Common Ragwort
- 13 Common Blue Damselflies *Enallagma cyathigerum* mating
- 14 Female Migrant Hoverfly *Eupeodes corolliae* nectaring on Star of Persia
- 15 Queen Early Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum* roosting under Greater Knapweed



# News from the Programme Coordinator

by Ann Miles FRPS

## Upcoming Zoom Events

We hope to continue Zoom events during the rest of the year but they will be less frequent over the summer period when hopefully we can all get out with our cameras

### **Wednesday June 2nd 2021 19.30pm** **Sharpening and Noise Reduction in Depth** **by Ian Wilson ARPS**

By popular request, Ian will cover sharpening and noise reduction in images using a variety of software including Lightroom, Photoshop and Topaz Plugins. The main theme of the presentation will be to apply these adjustments only where they are required. Many images, if sharpened all over, will display obvious artefacts in the backgrounds. Ian will show how to apply masks both in Photoshop and Topaz and also offer guidance as to the amount of sharpening and noise reduction that is appropriate.

Please note the change to a Wednesday evening for our summer presentations. RPS Members free; non-members £5

<https://rps.org/events/groups/nature/2021/june/sharpening-and-noise-reduction-in-depth/>

### **Wednesday July 28th 2021 19.30pm** **Nature Photography with the Olympus System** **by David Smith**

During this presentation David will speak about the options and features available for Macro photography using the Olympus OM-D mirrorless system. After a brief showing of images taken using the system, he will give a live demonstration of more specialist in camera features such as Focus Peaking, Focus stacking and use of the Olympus 60mm f2.8 Macro lens. After the Live demonstration David will speak briefly on the High Tech and Exclusive Pro Capture feature that enables photographers to capture images before pressing the shutter button. There will be an opportunity to ask any questions about David's images and the Olympus system.

<https://rps.org/events/groups/nature/2021/july/nature-photography-with-the-olympus-system-by-david-smith/>

This talk will be of interest to Olympus owners (and also to those thinking of changing to a mirror-less system) as there will be ample time to answer questions.

## Field Events

See Events box on: <https://rps.org/groups/nature>

Field Meetings have resumed with trips to Royston Heath, Paxton Pits and Wicken Fen. We hope to add more to the list but that will depend on other members offering to share their localities. Please consider sharing a visit to one of your favourite locations (contact Ann Miles: [annmiles70@gmail.com](mailto:annmiles70@gmail.com))

With the current slight relaxation of restrictions, we have been able to add a few places to those outings that were full so please check on the events page and book if places are now available on your desired Field Trip. If the outing is still full when you try to book, please email me and I will put you on the waiting list. If no place becomes available, we will try to fit in a second visit on another date.

**Wednesday 26th May**  
**Prestbury Hill, Gloucestershire**  
Butterflies etc  
Leader: Duncan Locke ARPS

**Wednesday 26th May**  
**Anglia Water Reserve at Rutland, Leicestershire**  
Leader: Peter Ward

**Wednesday 9th June**  
**Martin Down, Hampshire**  
Butterflies etc  
Leader: Duncan Locke

**Monday 14th June**  
**Strumpshaw Fen, Norfolk**  
Swallowtail Butterflies, birds and dragonflies  
Leader: Ann Miles

**Friday 2nd July**  
**RSPB Snettisham, Norfolk**  
Star species include Avocet, Bar-tailed Godwits, Knot, Redshank, Little Egret and Shelduck, plus numerous woodland birds. There are several hides that will hopefully be available to use  
Leader: Nick Bowman

**Saturday 16th July**  
**RSPB Titchwell, Norfolk**  
A wide variety of wildlife including Marsh Harriers, Bitterns, Bearded Tits, Great White Egret, woodland birds, and waders. Several hides and beach watching at rising tide is often very productive. Plenty of subjects for Macro.  
Leader: Nick Bowman



# Entries Invited\*

## National Exhibitions with Nature sections:

### Winchester National Exhibition

Digitally Projected Images only

5 Classes

Closes 30th June, 2021

[www.winphotosoc.uk](http://www.winphotosoc.uk)

### Beyond Group

Digitally Projected Images only

4 Classes

Closes July 2021

<http://beyondgroup.org.uk>

## International Photographic Salons with FIAP patronage and Nature Sections:

### 72nd Midland Salon

Digitally Projected Images only

5 Sections

Closes 26 June, 2021.

[www.midland-salon.com](http://www.midland-salon.com)

More information about FIAP (The International Federation of Photographic Art) can be found at:

<https://www.fiap.net/en>

Information for entering individual Salons with FIAP Patronage can be found at:

<https://www.myfiap.net/patronages>

*\*Members are advised to check Salon websites for rules, closing dates & entry requirements before preparing their entry as image sizes & rules may differ.*

*Covid 19 restrictions may require exhibitions to be selected using software like Zoom.*

**If you have items of photographic equipment that you no longer use or need, why not advertise them for sale in eNews?**

It costs members nothing to advertise and the advert will be read by over 800 members of the Nature Group.

**To advertise your items contact the Editor at:** [naturegroup\\_enews\\_editor@btinternet.com](mailto:naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com)

# For Sale

## LensCoat© 3Xpandable Long Lens Bag.

Holds a Canon/Nikon Pro size DSLR fitted with up to a 500mm lens with converter or 200-400mm lens. Internal dimensions: 8" x 8" x 19.75" or 23.5" or 27.75" max. Lots of useful features including folding flat for packing or storage and adjustable height for use with shorter lenses. Perfect for use in safari vehicles.



This bag has never been used and condition is as new.

Bag price new	£330.00
plus Harness	£40.00
Total cost:	£370.00

<b>For Sale</b>	<b>£225.00</b>
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## Mindshift Back Pack by Moose Peterson MP3 v2.



Used for one trip only and in great condition.

3 compartment layout holds up to 3 bodies with lenses attached plus other kit.

Large compartment dimensions:	46 x 17.3 x 17.3cm
Small compartments (each)	21.5 x 15 x 17.3cm

Price to buy new	£200.00
<b>For Sale</b>	<b>£100.00</b>

## Benro GH2 Carbon Fibre Gimbal head.

Boxed, brand new, as purchased, never used.

Price when purchased	£379.00
<b>For Sale</b>	<b>£225.00</b>

**Postage/delivery is not included in above prices.**

For more information contact Dawn Osborn:  
[naturegroup\\_enews\\_editor@btinternet.com](mailto:naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com)

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All contributions should be submitted to the Editor at: [naturegroup\\_eneews\\_editor@btinternet.com](mailto:naturegroup_eneews_editor@btinternet.com). Any item of interest to nature photographers is welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books. Copy should be submitted as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images should be supplied as flattened 8bit sRGB tif or jpg files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch. Please do not email larger images.

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## Distribution:

eNews is available to members as a download from the Nature Group Members section of the RPS website. An RPS Bulletin advising members of its availability will be emailed to Members using addresses supplied by them to the RPS Membership Department in Bristol. Please update them if you change your email address.

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by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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### President of the Society

### Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Society

### Hon. Treasurer of the Society

### Chair of the Natural History Distinctions Panel

### \* Members please note:

The Nature Group needs a new Honorary Secretary. Duncan Locke has been elected as our new Vice-Chair and cannot continue as Secretary indefinitely. A new Secretary is needed as early as possible to enable a smooth handover before Duncan steps into the role of Nature Group Chair at the AGM in April 2023.

If you have any experience in this type of role and would like to volunteer your services, or would like more information about this important role, please contact Duncan.

## Nature Group Exhibitions:

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photo-graphic societies for use in their programme. Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, E-mail: [rpsngexsec@btinternet.com](mailto:rpsngexsec@btinternet.com)

