

THE IRIS

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS
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THE RPS
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY



Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2025



Above: Gold Medal Print - White-fronted Bee Eater with catch by Jeremy Richards ARPS
*also joint winner of the June 2024 Monthly Competition.

Below: Gold Medal PDI - Black-crowned Night Heron by Sue Critchlow ARPS



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- Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send typed or hand written copy.
- Digitally captured photographic images to support your article (whether vertical or horizontal) supplied as 8bit tif or jpg files, 216mm (2555 pixels) on the longest edge, at 300 pixels per inch, quality 12, file size approx 5 MB. Please send images via WeTransfer.
- If your image is selected for use on the cover of The Iris you will be asked to supply a larger file.
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Cover Image:



Great Spotted Woodpecker –
Dendrocopos major
by Christine Holt ARPS



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Nature Group Exhibitions

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme.
Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above.

Editorial

As I compose this, my last Editorial, Spring is definitely in the air. A pair of Great Tits have begun nest building in one of our boxes and lots of other species are busy singing, displaying, etc., and I've seen frogs mating in my back yard. The Blackthorn are heavy with blossom and Primroses are adorning the hedgerows here in Norfolk. It's amazing how just a few days of sunshine and warmth can create such changes to our environment.

Sadly I have to report on the passing of our friend and Past Chairman, Richard Revels FRPS. Richard has been a great supporter of The Iris for many years, contributing many interesting articles accompanied with excellent images. Just a week before he passed away I received another article from him and it is included in this issue.

In the days when my brother David and I led photo-tours, Richard travelled with us many times - among them Florida, the Canadian Rockies and the Falkland Islands. He told me recently how much he was enjoying my series of articles about the Islands and its wildlife and the memories they recalled. An Obituary is included in this issue.

Other items in this issue include a successful Associate Panel by our Membership Secretary, Christine Holt ARPS, the Gold Medal images from our Annual Exhibition and also the winning images from the Monthly Competition, plus Pt V of my Falklands piece.

My apologies to Tim Cossins. His ARPS Distinction was omitted in the previous issue. Unfortunately he did not include it in the article. It's difficult to remember the names of everyone who has gained a Distinction and the Editor does not have access to the membership list to check, therefore I would request that everyone who sends an article to The Iris, should include their distinction letters after their name to ensure that they receive the accreditation they have earned.

Finally, to everyone who has contributed to The Iris during my time as it's Editor, 'Thank you' for your support over the past 22 years. I've very much enjoyed being Editor - it has been a pleasure to read your stories and see your images. I'm sorry to be retiring but it really is time that someone else took over. To whoever that is, I extend my best wishes and hope they enjoy it as much as I have.

Dawn Osborn FRPS - Editor



From the Chair

I'm writing this on the Spring Equinox, the first day of astronomical spring and the weather in the UK is superb. Long may it last and hopefully provide a better summer than 2024 for wildlife photography in the UK. Group Members continue to enjoy their nature photography and produce great images such as those entered into our Monthly Competition; these are an inspiration to all Members, so please keep them coming in.

Websites:

Over 330 Members are now registered on the Nature Group website. It remains an excellent place for us to advertise Events, provide Group news, run the Monthly Competition, host Galleries of Members' images and to show the accepted images from our Annual Exhibition.

Greg Lovett, our Group Secretary, has developed the Lightbox section of the website to provide constructive critique of Members' images, particularly for those working towards an ARPS. If you are a Member doing just this, then do contact Greg and get involved. Look at the recent successful panels in the Galleries section of the website to see the current standard.

RPS Developments:

The RPS has implemented a charge on each Special Interest Group (SIG) for the services it provides to that Group. This charge is just over £3 of your £18 Annual Nature Group Subscription. The SIGs and Regions are working hard to ensure that the RPS delivers the services that we are being asked to pay for. The Nature Group Committee is discussing the effect of this charge on our finances and will report at our Spring Meeting.

I understand that discussions are taking place with a potential buyer for RPS House and Dan Jones, the CEO will be leaving shortly - his replacement is being recruited. Services provided to the NG by the RPS should continue despite changes, but improvements may be delayed.

Group Membership:

I am very pleased to report that the Group membership is slowly increasing. As of the 18th March 2025, the Group had 980 Members. Elsewhere in this issue you will find a membership breakdown as of the 1st January 2025; this shows an overall increase of 30 Members during 2024. Sadly there were also losses. This issue contains an Obituary for Richard Revels FRPS, a superb photographer and former Chair of the Nature Group. He will be sadly missed.

The Iris Magazine:

I sent an e-mail to all Group Members on the 18th December 2024 outlining the challenges faced by the Group in 2025. As expected, I received a range of views on the future format of The Iris.

First off, I received nothing but praise for the quality of The Iris. 17 Members shared their thoughts on the future format/frequency. The majority preferred to stick with the status quo: three paper issues each year and they were prepared to pay more to cover the increasing costs. Only one Member thought that if the costs were an issue the magazine should go digital. Of those who expressed an opinion on the high cost of sending paper magazines overseas, most thought that Overseas Members should either pay more or be asked to read the magazine digitally. What do you think?

Field Meetings, Workshops & Residential Weekend:

This year we plan to run an excellent programme of UK Field Meetings, but as in past years we will struggle to cover as much of the country as we would like. We would very much like to hear from Members prepared to organise a Field Meeting in their local area.

As I wrote in the last issue of The Iris, I'm very keen to build up a programme of workshops to help members develop their nature photography skills. Please let me have any ideas for topics and venues.

Preston Montford Field Studies Centre near Shrewsbury is booked for Friday 6th to Monday 9th June for our 2025 Residential Weekend. As I write, 12 Members have booked, but there are still a few places left. Contact me if you are interested.

Committee Elections and Spring Meeting:

Historically, the Group Committee has served for two years before standing for re-election. This is an election year and you should have received an e-mail in early February stating that the present Committee were all prepared to continue, but any Member who wished to stand for election needed register their intention. No Member has registered their interest and so the present Committee will continue.

Distinctions:

Congratulations to Christine Holt and all who earned a Distinction at the Autumn Assessments.

Enjoy your Nature Photography



My Changing Garden Wildlife.

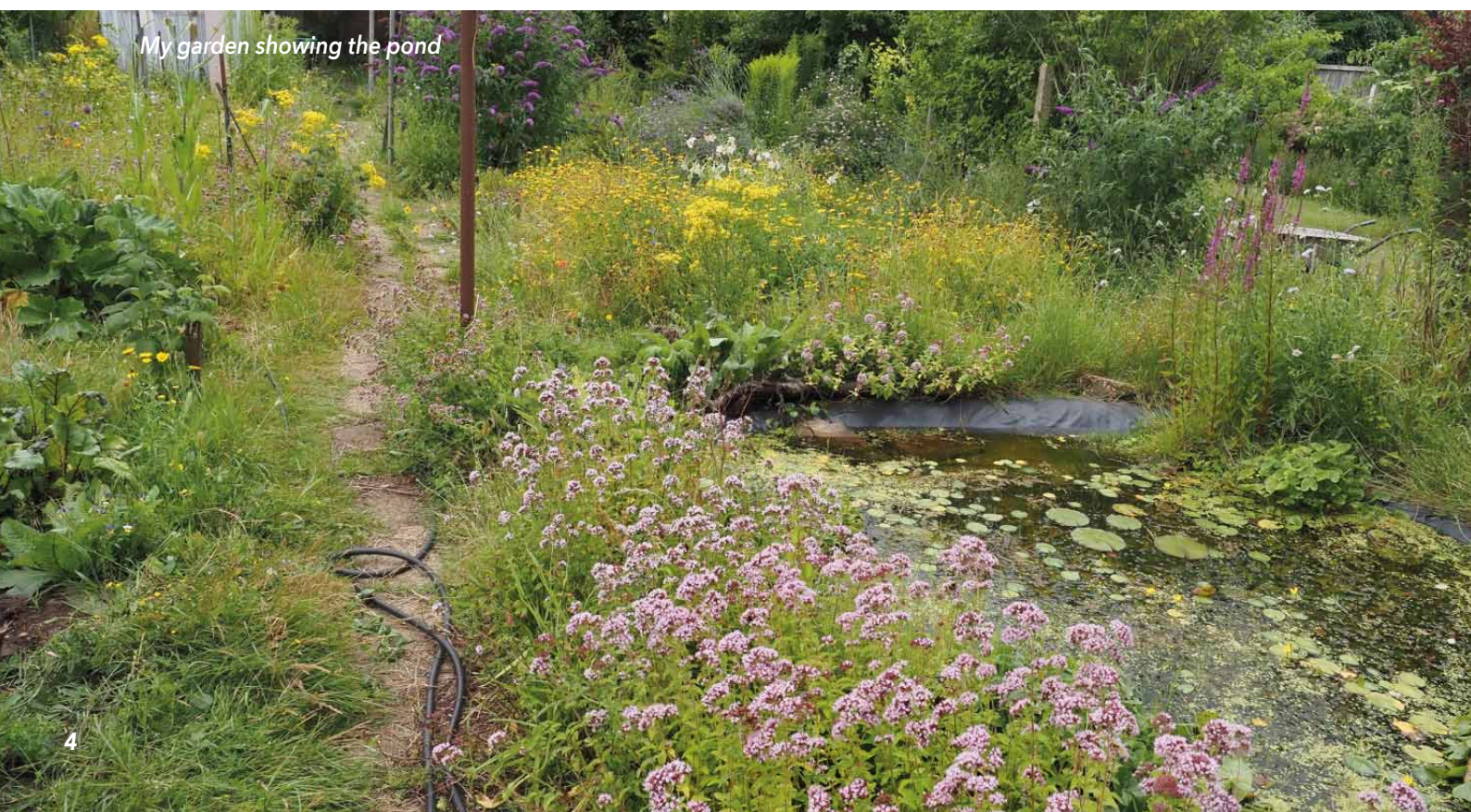
by Richard Revels FRPS

Both the abundance and the range of different species of wildlife that I find in both my garden and in other nearby places has changed considerably over the past 50 or so years. Of course even common insects will fluctuate from year to year, something they have always done and which is most likely dictated by the weather conditions. Much more worrying than individual species varying in numbers, is the general reduction of total numbers of wildlife around now compared to a few decades ago. Going back further to my school years of the mid-1950's many insects and other invertebrate numbers were considerably higher then compared to recent years. Wildlife numbers have and will always fluctuate a little from year to year, but numbers usually bounce back after a poor year or two. However, at the present time recovery doesn't seem to be happening as much as it did in the past, with many wild creatures both in my garden and in the nearby countryside having declined alarmingly during the past few years, and especially during the wet dull weather of 2024.

In part it may also be the result of us humans abusing the countryside, like trying to keep everywhere over tidy; and another major factor is that global warming is producing a more volatile climate, other factors also playing more minor parts.

While the environment of most habitats are out of our control there's one place we do have control of; our gardens. I have always had at least part of my garden managed for attracting wildlife, particularly butterflies and moths which were my main interest for many years. For a wildlife photographer it is a huge advantage having your own wildlife garden, as it's convenient and can be quickly accessed to check if something new or interesting has arrived. Another benefit is that resident birds will know that you pose no threat to them, so will often stay around to be photographed when you are in your garden. Also you can set up 'props' for birds and insects to settle on, which can be arranged/changed as you wish. Over the years my garden has become more a mini wildflower meadow with a small space for growing a few vegetables for cooking, now it's become one of the best places locally to find a range of different wildlife species, particularly butterflies and dragonflies, with several species breeding there each year. Until fairly recently birds have done well in my garden and several other local people also have bird-feeders in their gardens, so most local birds find my area an ideal home.

My main bird feeding station is located next to my garden hide and set up to attract birds for photography as and when I want. This worked well until a couple of



My garden showing the pond

years ago. Disaster struck when Avian Flu spread from a Turkey farm about six miles away in the nearby countryside. It took about 6 months to arrive in my garden, but when it did it devastated the local wild bird population. During the early summer of 2022 I found three Blackbirds and a Robin dead in my garden within a few days of each other; two neighbours told me that they had also found several dead birds in their gardens. This disease ended up killing virtually all the local birds in my area with the exception of the Wood Pigeons, which after an initial large reduction in numbers managed to recover to near their former numbers a year or so later; as did Carrion Crows, Jackdaws and Magpies albeit a little while later. Regrettably the smaller birds did not recover so well. Robins, Dunnocks, Blackbirds, Song Thrush, Wrens, Starlings, House Sparrows and various Finch and Tit species are still only rarely seen.

In winter, visiting birds include Waxwings, Redwings and Fieldfares but have always very variable in my area, numbers varying greatly from year to year. To attract them I planted several species of berry bearing trees and bushes in my garden, with others growing in the gardens of several neighbours, so if and when these birds arrived there would usually be berries for them to feed on providing the local Blackbirds had not already eaten them. In cold and snowy weather I also put out apples, loved by the Thrush species and these have produced some nice pictures for me over the years.



Red Admiral on Buddleia



Fieldfare



Great Tit in flight



Spotted Flycatcher

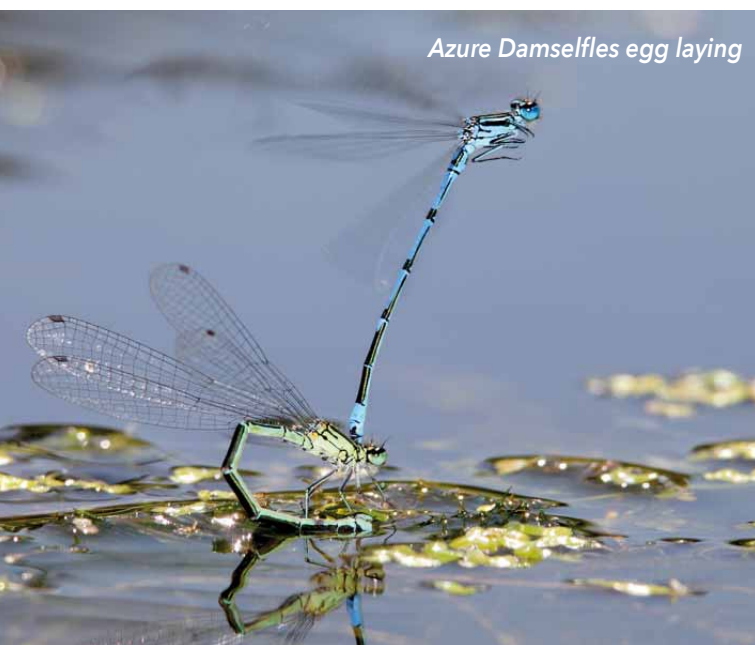


Common Frogs spawning

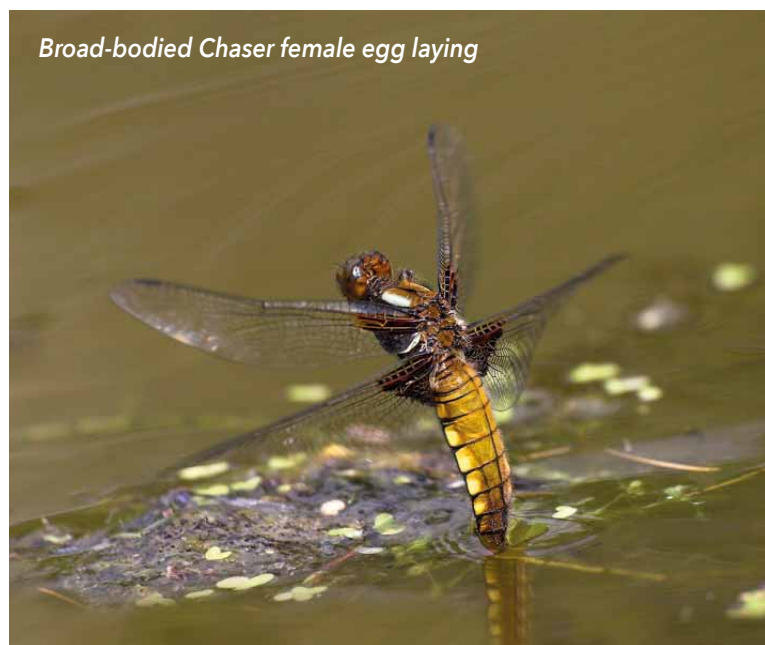


Common Frog and spawn

A garden pond that does not contain fish will be a big attraction to a wide range of wildlife, with birds coming to drink and bathe as well as many different insects including Dragon and Damselflies. Amphibians come to breed there each year. Frog numbers have dropped from a peak of well over a hundred and fifty to only around fifty in recent years. My wildlife ponds have provided me with many nice pictures. Creatures visiting my two ponds range in size from only one or two mm long, like Cyclops and Daphnia; to amphibians and Herons. Several Damselflies and Dragonfly species breed in the ponds as well as other predatory bugs and beetles. One essential for every pond is an escape route for any small mammals, birds or other creatures that may be unfortunate enough to fall in and are unable to crawl up the slippery plastic pond liner. To aid escape I have placed several logs and small



Azure Damselflies egg laying



Broad-bodied Chaser female egg laying

concrete paving slabs, partly submerged in the water. Most years the logs around the pond's margins are used for egg-laying by Southern Hawker Dragonflies. A word of warning about garden ponds is that they may not be suitable for all gardens unless they are well fenced off to prevent small children falling in and possibly drowning.

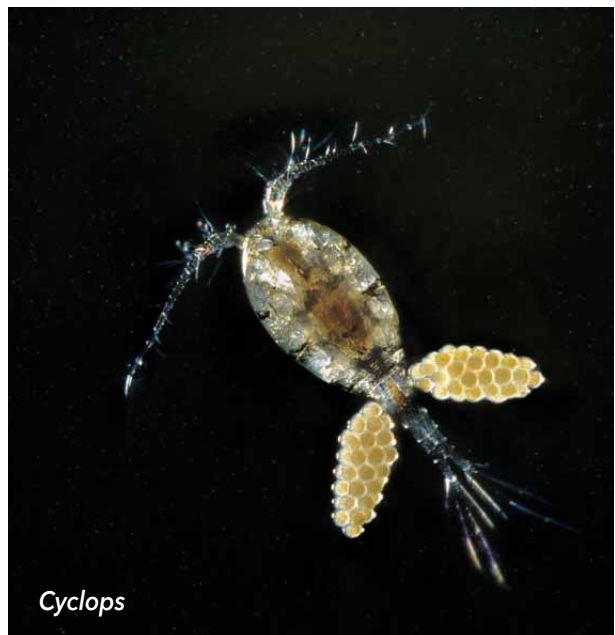
My flowery area of the garden often looks rather untidy, being more a small informal wild flower meadow that contains a mixture of mostly native wild flowers and patches of Creeping-bent Grass. Flowering plants will provide nectar and pollen to any visiting insects, with flowering starting in early spring and continuing throughout the summer into autumn. Although it can look a bit of a mess at times, and needs some attention from me from time to time to prevent just a few plant species completely dominating and taking over.

My garden has attracted a wide range of different wildlife species, as will any similarly sized garden, however a small or medium sized garden is not normally large enough to maintain a permanent colony of most creatures. What it can do though is provide food and water for any visiting wildlife, while also giving Nature Group members the opportunity to take pictures of those visitors. Having wildlife coming into the garden means I can quickly grab my camera and start taking pictures should I see something interesting happening. You will also be giving wildlife a helping hand to survive.

Ever since my school days I have been interested in insects and other 'creepy-crawlies' and I would often find and collect a few caterpillars and take them home to raise them through to adults. Over the years I have reared from eggs or larva to their adult form many species of butterfly and moths enabling photography of their life cycles and providing me with images for my



Water Scorpion bug



Cyclops



Southern Hawker egg laying



Small Tortoiseshell on Sedum



Hornet Hoverfly on Buddleia

photo library. When taking wild larvae home I soon learned that many other creatures depended on them for their own life cycles, often finding that parasitic wasps or flies would emerge from the larvae or pupae instead of the butterfly or moth I was expecting. Some species that were once common fifty plus years ago are now seldom seen; these include several very showy species of Hawkmoths.

The abundance of many butterflies has decreased over the years. Regretably, the once common Small Tortoiseshell butterfly that was frequently plentiful in my garden is hardly seen locally now. One year during the late summer of 1987 they were almost swarming on the Sedum flowers (see picture), but in recent years there have hardly be any visiting my flowers. On the plus side some species have become more common, with Britain's third largest butterfly the Silver-washed Fritillary having moved back into some local woodlands after several decades of absence. I have seen several in my garden in recent years and I have seen remarkably good numbers of Gatekeeper butterflies in the past decade with between 25 and 30 nectaring on Marjoram and other flowers during the summer months.

Many years ago I set Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* bushes in my garden, these now attract several egg laying female Brimstone butterflies, with a few usually completing their life cycles on them. On the down side,



Hummingbird Hawkmoth feeding on Buddleia



Ivy Bee on Ivy flower



Holly Blue female

numbers of Wasps, Bees, Beetles, Aphids and other Bugs have recently been extremely poor, particularly during 2024. That is most probably due to the very dull and wet weather in spring/early summer. However the Ivy Bees *Colletes hederæ* that only arrived in Britain during the last decade or so are now seen in very good numbers with many visiting the Ivy flowers during August and September. These bees nest in burrows below well mowed lawns, which several of my neighbours have.

The species of wildlife that will visit your garden will depend on where you live and the habitats nearby, so if you live near a Scottish Loch it will be different to what comes in the centre of a large town in southern England; if you live next to woodland, or if you are surrounded by intensive farming. But wherever you live there will undoubtedly be some interesting creatures.



Holly Blue butterfly Parasitoid wasp newly hatched and sitting on pupa.



Brimstone just hatched from pupa



Privet Hawk Moth larva on Privet



Raspberry Clearwing in flight



Gatekeepers mating

As photographers of the natural world, Nature Group members can and should photograph the wide variety of nature subjects that are still all around us regardless of their size, as smaller creatures are as interesting and spectacular as the more familiar larger species of wildlife. Some small creatures may be a bit more challenging for some and new techniques may have to be learned; but facing new challenges is how we all advance our skills. Many creatures that are of a good size can be photo-graphed using fairly standard modern camera equipment, but for extreme close-ups the best results will come using specialist equipment made for the job.

Our gardens can create a place where wildlife can survive, and of course the creatures are coming to you, so no travelling is involved, and it's easy and quick to check what's around. If any NG member is looking for a theme to create a set of pictures for an RPS Distinction attempt, your garden could provide all the pictures required

Those of you who have not yet tried extreme close-up photography should give it a go. You may find it challenging at first but it will open your eyes to a fascinating new world of many 'mini creatures'.

Asparagus Beetles mating





Wasp Spider



Parent Bug standing guard over young



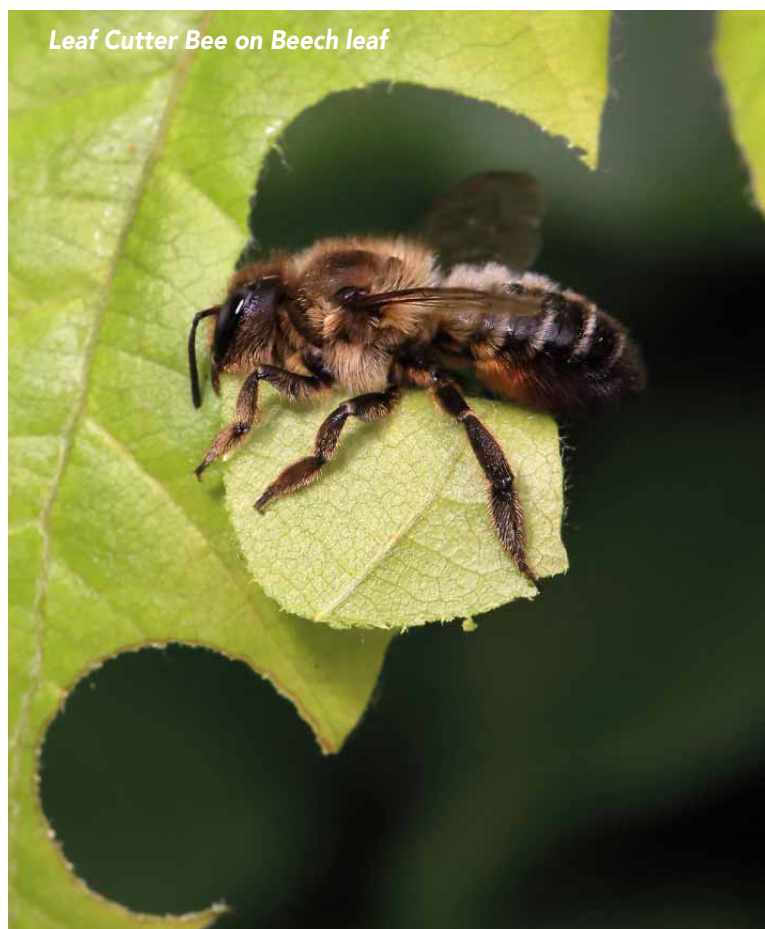
Holly Blue Butterfly egg laying on Ivy



Long-winged Conehead Cricket egg laying in post in my garden



Zebra Spider waiting for prey



Leaf Cutter Bee on Beech leaf

Obituary

Richard Revels FRES., FRPS.

It is with great sadness that I have to report the loss of Richard Revels, former Chair and a very much valued Member of the Nature Group, who died on the 12th December 2024 in Bedford Hospital, aged 83.

Richard was an expert Nature Photographer helped by his detailed knowledge of the natural world. As well as being a Fellow of the RPS (FRPS) he was a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society (FRES), awarded for his work on breeding rare variations of butterfly species. His Biggleswade garden was a true nature lover's paradise.

Richard did an enormous amount of work for the RPS. He was a member of the Nature Group Committee from 2011 until 2019 and had already contributed greatly to the Group's activities before he joined the Committee. He spent eight years as a member of the RPS Nature Distinctions Assessment Panel and was also a prolific author with few issues of *The Iris* being published without an article from Richard. He travelled widely and was always keen to share information and images from his travels with a wider audience. He co-authored a number of books including *'Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire'* and *'Bedfordshire - our changing habitats and wildlife: A photographic record'*.

I joined the Nature Group Committee in January 2016, when Richard was Chair. From my personal point of view, he was very supportive and professional as Group Chair. Perhaps it was wise not to disagree with him as I discovered when researching for this obituary, that he was also a black belt at Judo!

He will be greatly missed.

Duncan Locke ARPS
Nature Group Chair



Images:

Above: Richard on location at Venice Rookery, Florida

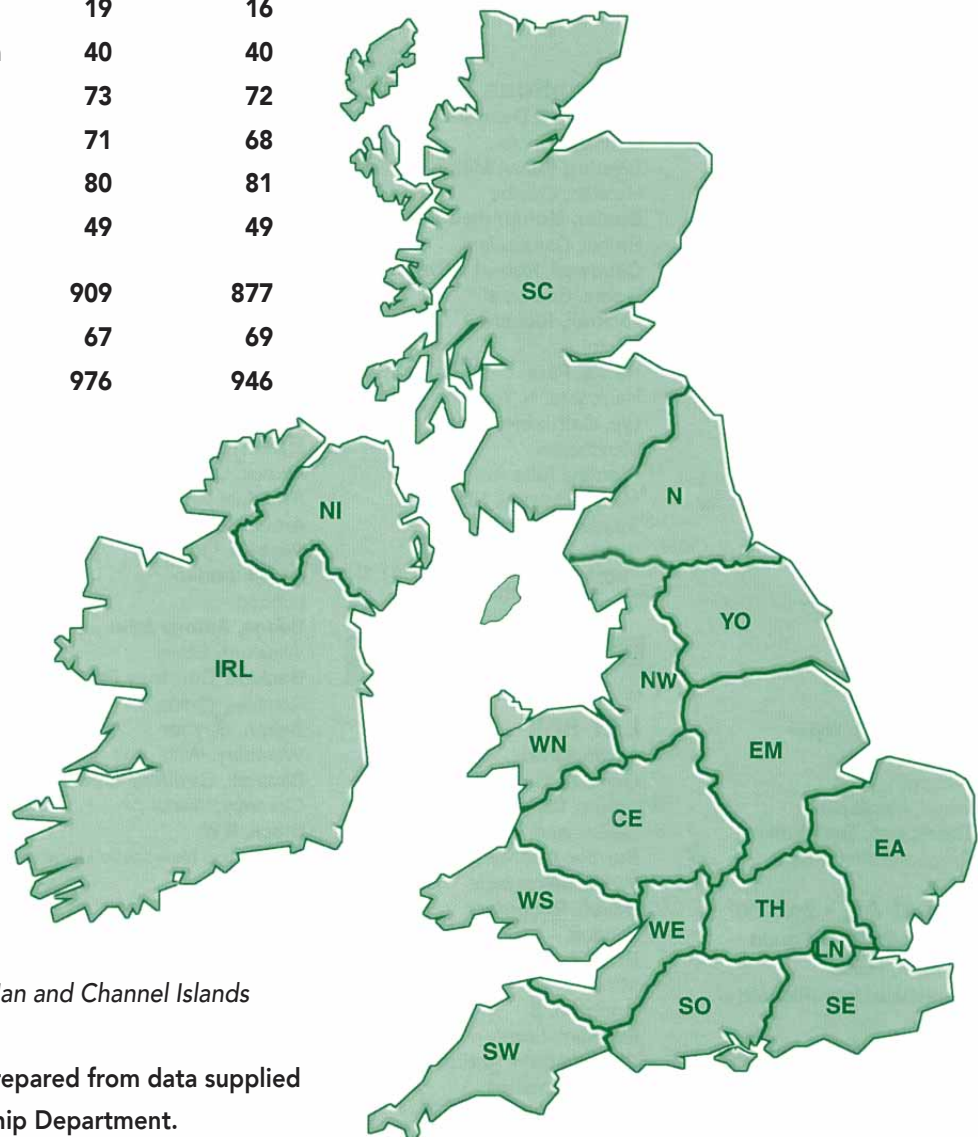
Below Richard photographing fungus close up.



Nature Group Membership Statistics

Regions	Jan 2025	Jan 2024
1 - Central	57	55
2 - East Anglia	102	99
3 - East Midlands	74	66
4 - Eire	15	14
5 - London	74	77
6 - North Wales	6	6
7 - North Western	54	50
8 - Northern	27	28
9 - Northern Ireland	6	3
10 - Scotland	78	69
11 - South Eastern	84	84
12 - South Wales	19	16
13 - South Western	40	40
14 - Southern	73	72
15 - Thames Valley	71	68
16 - Western	80	81
17 - Yorkshire	49	49
Total UK & Eire:	909	877
Overseas*	67	69
Total Membership:	976	946

Distinctions:	Jan 2025	Jan 2024
Honorary FRPS:	3	3
FRPS:	64	67
ARPS:	252	252
LRPS:	235	252
No Distinction:	422	372
Total:	976	946



*Includes the Isle of Man and Channel Islands

These statistics are prepared from data supplied by the RPS Membership Department.

Gaining my Associate Distinction

by Christine Holt ARPS

Although I have always enjoyed taking photographs it wasn't until I joined Hoddesdon Camera Club when I retired that I started to take photography seriously and it became an important part of my life. I had much to learn! My camera was set on auto and I had never done any post processing, so attending camera club meetings taught me a lot. I also attended workshops and joined an on line photography group where I learned from challenges and critiques. I soon found that Natural History was what I was most drawn to so it was obvious that I would choose this genre for my ARPS submission.

I gained my LRPS in 2022. The process taught me a lot, particularly presentation and how to put a panel together. When I began to consider an ARPS distinction I had to decide what my focus should be.

About three years ago I began regular visits to the vineyard which is an area of land belonging to a friend. The land has an enclosed area of vines, the rest is mainly meadow with mature trees, mostly oaks. There is an established pond as well as one that was excavated in 2022 and the soil is heavy clay. The site is bordered

by woods on three sides with a field on the fourth side. I knew the site attracted a variety of wildlife and I began to think of ways to photograph them.

There was an old shed which I thought would make a good hide so I put up some bird feeders and some perches and watched to see what appeared. I knew badgers were regular visitors and I set up a trailcam to see what other night time visitors there might be.

I soon decided that it would be an interesting project and began to record all the different species of wildlife I discovered. The list of birds and animals grew, some I was able to photograph from the hide others were more difficult to capture.

I spent a lot of time there during the covid lockdowns, watching and photographing the birds but although I saw a variety of animals on the trailcam they only appeared at dusk or during the night. During the day I experienced occasional and fleeting glimpses as they slipped away. By the end of spring the woodland birds had stopped coming to the feeders and I had to turn my attention elsewhere.

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I loved photographing insects with my macro lens on Nature Group trips so my next project was to see what I could find on the vineyard. I also planted wildflowers and other plants that would attract insects. This project proved a great success and in the summer this area is full of insects. The pond is now established and attracts damselflies and dragonflies. We are also leaving areas of the meadow uncut through the summer for the benefit of the insects.

In the Autumn I found huge parasol mushrooms appearing under the trees. After attending some Nature Group meetings to photograph fungi and learning about in-camera focus stacking I began to hunt for fungi on the vineyard and then extended my search to the woods bordering the site. There were many logs and fallen trees there and I found these were the best places to photograph the fungi.

After listening to a camera club friend talk about his plans for an ARPS Panel I began to think it was something I could aim for too and decided vineyard wildlife was the obvious subject as the vineyard was a place I visited regularly. It was just an idea until Ann Miles mentioned an advisory day arranged for January and I decided to apply for a place.



My idea was a panel of three rows, birds, insects and fungi but I didn't have much time to put something together. I started by gathering together suitable images for each row, trying to get enough variety. I also tried to choose images with colour harmony. I found that the top row needed to be the insects as they were the lightest and because they were the darkest, the fungi images worked best as the bottom row. The birds we therefore placed on the centre row. Although I had arranged my panel quite quickly I decided to send it in.





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The advisory day was done on zoom. I was pleasantly surprised to hear I was on the right track but one problem was with processing which was understandable as some of them were done in a hurry. I was very pleased to hear though that with a few adjustments, a couple of replacements and some reprocessing I should have a panel that was up to ARPS standard.

I found the advisory day comments I was sent really helpful and I looked at each image, my hanging plan and the advisors' comments and made the adjustments recommended or found replacements.

When Anne asked when I was going to apply I decided I would just take the plunge and book my place, found that the next assessment was taking place in September 2024 and sent in my application.



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Knowing I had a deadline focussed my mind and my next job was to print. I ordered a set of mounts decided on the paper I would use and started printing. I then needed someone to scrutinise my prints as I wanted to make sure they were as good as possible. Anne kindly checked my images and as there was a slight problem with a couple of them I decided it would be a good idea to change them, I didn't want anything that the assessors could criticise. I had everything ready a week before the deadline so off it went.

I watched on line which was certainly a very stressful experience and I was sure at one point that I would fail but was delighted to hear I had succeeded in achieving my ARPS. In spite of the stress levels involved I found it a very worthwhile process to go through.



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Statement of Intent

In my panel I aim to show some of the diversity of species found in an area of private land that I have visited regularly for almost three years.

I embarked on a project to record the different species I identified in the area. In the winter I watched and photographed the birds and in the summer I turned my attention to the invertebrates and macro photography. In the Autumn I was inspired by the huge parasol mushrooms that appeared and started searching for fungi.

My photography has allowed me to appreciate the detail and the beauty in the variety of wildlife I have discovered in this special place and my panel shows a small selection from what I have found.

Species List

1. Cinnabar Caterpillar – *Tyria jacobaeae*
2. Tachinid Fly – *Tachina fera*
3. Common Wasp – *Vespa vulgaris*
4. Small Heath Butterfly – *Coenonympha pamphilus*
5. Meadow Grasshopper – *Chorthippus parallelus*
6. Blue Tit – *Parus caeruleus*
7. Chaffinch – *Fringilla coelebs*
8. Great Spotted Woodpecker – *Dendrocopos major*
9. Dunnock – *Prunella Modularis*
10. Nuthatch – *Sitta europaea*
11. Clustered Bonnet – *Mycena inclinata*
12. Fly Agaric – *Amanita muscaria*
13. Parasol – *Macrolepiota procera*
14. Honey Fungus – *Armillaria mellea*
15. Common Bonnet – *Mycaena galericulata*



11



12



14



15

Congratulations to the Following Winners of the RPS Nature Group Monthly Competition:



**April 2024: School of Blue Lined Snapper
by Richard Merritt FRPS**



**May 2024: Female Hen Harrier with Prey
by Brian Boyes LRPS**



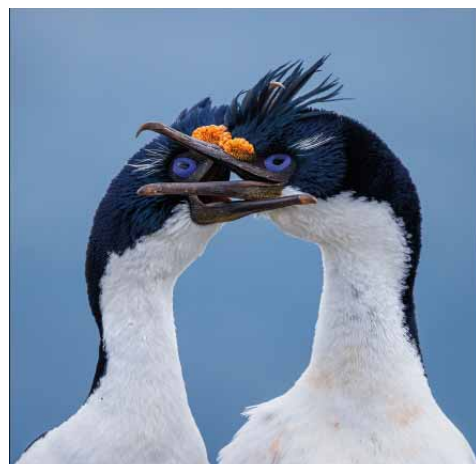
**June 2024: Joint Winner* Kingfisher Emerging with Catch
Kevin Pigney ARPS**



**July 2024: Patchwork Leafcutter Bee
by Chris Jackson LRPS**



**August 2024: Cheetah Cubs - Await Mum's Call
by Terry Godber ARPS**



**September 2024: Imperial Shag Courtship
by Stephen Moon**

Special Congratulations to the overall Winner of the 2024 – 2025 Competition Year: Greg Lovett ARPS

*** June's other Joint Winner was Jeremy Richards ARPS with White-fronted Bee-eater with Catch.
The image is shown on the inside front page.**



**October 2024: Little Owl Dealing with the Rain
by René Cason**



**November 2024: Angle Shade Moths Pair
by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS**



**December 2024: Bear Hug
by Somdutt Prasad**



**January 2025: Violet-tailed Sylph feeding
by René Cason**



**February 2025: Squabbling Buff-tailed Coronets
by Greg Lovett ARPS**



**March 2025: Sanderling Eating Dinner
by Sian Elizabeth**

Lynx watch

Swiss study tour explores the realities of a reintroduction

by Sally Wallis of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

While January's unlicensed abandonment of Lynx in the Cairngorms generated headlines, a study tour to Switzerland revealed valuable lessons for Scotland.

To explore what it might be like to coexist with lynx, the 'Lynx to Scotland' project escorted stakeholders from the farming, shooting and forestry sectors, together with representatives from the Cairngorms National Park, on a fact-finding mission to the Swiss Jura region last year. The group's report of this study tour is published today, revealing their key insights from the trip.

Like Scotland, Switzerland is home to a mix of habitats, with an almost identical area of woodland and similarly abundant wild prey. Sheep in the Swiss Jura are often kept in fields without attendant shepherds, just as they are across much of Scotland, making comparisons with Switzerland especially useful.

The visit highlighted to the group how coexisting with lynx can be both easier and more complicated than is often imagined. The lynx was revealed to be more adaptable than previously thought, allaying concerns about Scotland's ecological suitability. But the different nature of sheep farming in Scotland – and the far greater number of sheep – were still concerns for attendees who were otherwise impressed by the relatively limited number of lynx-livestock conflicts in Switzerland.

One attendee reflected that '...the size of the Scottish sheep flock and the way it's managed means the challenge of lynx predation would be greater in Scotland.' However, despite similar reservations, another felt that '...a Swiss-style reintroduction and conflict management structure could work in Scotland [with a] modernisation of wildlife conflict management and a change in culture.'

Study tour guide, Hugh Webster, who manages rewilding relations for SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, said: 'The recent illegal release of lynx in the Highlands has sparked debate over the return of this missing native species, and also underlined the risks of unlawful action, raising concerns about animal welfare, legal processes and the importance of consultation.'

A responsibly planned and licensed reintroduction, built on respectful dialogue and trust, is the only way to ensure that any future reintroduction is a success for both nature and people.'

Switzerland reintroduced their lynx over 50 years ago, with over 200 animals now roaming landscapes that still support traditional livestock farming. The Swiss wildlife management model offers useful lessons as Scotland considers how coexistence could best be achieved, following a potential reintroduction.



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Left: Pascal Junod, chief of the Forest Department at Boudry, was evangelical about the role of lynx within complex, healthy forests. Swiss foresters played a central role in the initial reintroduction of lynx in the 1970s.

From Rapids to Rewilding

Nature champions join forces for Scotland's rivers

by Sally Wallis of SCOTLAND: The Big Picture

Aviemore-based active travel company, Wilderness Scotland, is making waves for nature through a new three-year partnership launched in March with rewilding charity, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, which will help to breathe life back into Scotland's rivers.

With a long history of supporting environmental initiatives, Wilderness Scotland will support the charity's 'Riverwoods' projects across its Northwoods Rewilding Network. These projects help to create healthy, nature-rich watercourses and riverbanks that will boost biodiversity as well as Scotland's resilience to climate change.

Wilderness Scotland's founder, Paul Easto, said: *"We're committed to creating transformative environmental change, which is why we're delighted to partner with SCOTLAND: The Big Picture to support river restoration. Together, we'll help create thriving riverbank woodlands and healthy river systems, benefiting people, communities and wildlife. Story-telling is key to this collaboration – we want to show our customers the real impact of rewilding, from lush riverbanks teeming with life to the return of species. With its impressive track record in powerful visual storytelling, SCOTLAND: The Big Picture is the perfect partner to share these messages."*

To date, some 274 new wetland features have been created across the Northwoods Rewilding Network, with a series of 20 new water bodies at one particular site leading to a 668% increase in breeding amphibians. More than 200 seed islands have been established to create new woodland corridors of alder, aspen and willow, that shade and nourish the water for vulnerable species such as Atlantic salmon and otters. Elsewhere in the network, river 'rewiggling' has slowed the flow of water, creating new habitats and reduced the risk of flooding.

"Many of Scotland's rivers have been straightened, dredged and dammed," explains Rewilding Investment Lead for SCOTLAND: The Big Picture, Kathleen Slaney. *"Restoring natural river processes on rivers such as the Spey, Dee and Tay, along with their catchments, is one of the most effective ways of boosting wildlife and reducing the impact of climate change, by locking away carbon and reducing flooding. With Wilderness Scotland's support, rewilded river corridors will provide vital habitat, absorb carbon and improve water quality, delivering real benefits for both people and nature. We're thrilled to have their support."*

Globally, wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests, while Scotland's Salmon are now classified as endangered. Restoring the health and function of rivers and wetlands for nature, climate and people has never been more urgent.

Each traveller joining a Wilderness Scotland trip can support this vital project through participation in the Wilderness Conservation & Community Fund (WCCF), an initiative which allows participants the chance to give back to the environments and communities at the heart of Scotland's wild places.

- Find out more about river restoration in Scotland: <https://www.scotlandbigpicture.com/riverwoods>.
- Discover Wilderness Scotland's range of nature-based trips here: <https://www.wildernessscotland.com/>

Wilderness Scotland and SCOTLAND: The Big Picture - joining forces to restore the health of Scotland's rivers and wetlands for nature, climate and people.



The Falkland Islands

Part V. Not only Penguins

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

In this, my final piece on the Falkland Islands, I will try to represent some of the other species who make these islands their 'home', whether seasonally for breeding, or all year round.

The Falklands is an archipelago comprising of over 700 islands lying in the South Atlantic, approximately 750 miles north from the Antarctic Peninsula and between 250 miles from Tierra del Fuego and the east coast of Patagonia. The islands comprise a total land area of approximately 4,700 sq miles and the two main islands - East and West Falkland divided by Falkland Sound - account for a large percentage of this. Many of the offshore islands are tiny and inhabited only by species of birds

A visit to the Falklands will usually begin with a night in Port Stanley after your flight into RAF Mount Pleasant. Inter island travel to the smaller islands are made by small planes operated by Falkland Islands Air

Services - FIGAS. Flying around the islands is in itself a wonderful experience - flying fairly low one really sees the colours of the sea and the land

Many visitors are surprised by the number of bird species that may be seen. During the breeding season as many as 70 species of birds may be nesting around the islands. There are another 20 or so regular visiting species that do not breed in the Falklands and 'vagrant' species could push this number up to over 100, but its fair to say that you would be incredibly lucky to see some of these. Some species will only be found on one or two islands while others will be found at many locations. To maximise photography, Sealion, Bleaker, Carcass and Saunders Islands are the best ones to visit.

The majority of seabirds can be seen around the coast almost everywhere but if you want to photograph birds like Black-browed Albatross at their nest sites there is nowhere better than Saunders Island.

Southern Giant Petrel



Black-browed Albatross





Black-browed Albatross with its chick.



South American Tern in flight

Flocks of Imperial Cormorant (aka King Cormorant) heading out to sea to fish can be seen frequently. They have colonies around the islands, typically large and noisy. At Bleaker Island they have approximately 8,000 breeding pairs in the main colony, very close to the settlement. They are the subject of frequent attacks from Southern Skua who often work in pairs - one to 'persuade' the attendant adult from the nest, thereby leaving the nest open for the other to grab an egg or a chick. Dolphin Gulls will also take advantage of such situations.

Approximately 200 pairs of Southern Giant Petrel also breed at Bleaker Island. These are scavengers and do a very good job of cleaning up the carcasses of penguins, seals, whales and sheep. They are a globally threatened species and are extremely sensitive to disturbance during their breeding season.

There are many other species of birds that breed and are common in the islands - such as White-rumped Sandpiper, Two-banded Plover, Rufous-chested Dotterel, Magellanic and Blackish Oystercatcher, Snipe and Falklands Pipit. Species of Goose include Kelp, Ruddy-headed and Upland. Several species of Duck including the Flightless Steamer Duck, Speckled Teal, Silver Teal, Patagonian Crested Duck and Chiloe Wigeon. White-tufted and Silvery Grebe can be found on many ponds, and occasionally Black-necked Swan. Falklands Thrush, Tussac Bird, Dark-faced Ground Tyrant, Long-tailed Meadowlark, Black-throated Finch, Black-chinned Siskin



Imperial Cormorant coming in to land



Dolphin Gull pair



Skua pair with their kill.



Falkland Skua eating a Cormorant egg.



Southern Sealion pair



Calceolaria fothergilli - Lady's Slipper



Sub-adult Southern Elephant Seals sparring



Commerson's Dolphins close to shore



Leopard Seal



Brown Hare

and two species of Wren, Cobbs and Grass Wren. Birds of prey include a sub-species of Peregrine, Red-backed Hawk (aka Variable Hawk) Crested and Striated Caracara. The Striated Caracara is one of the scarcest birds of prey in the world but is locally common at several locations in the Falklands. There are many other birds (too many to mention), some you will no doubt be familiar with include Black-crowned Night Heron and Short-eared Owl.

Being islands far from any large landmass, there are no native land mammals, although there was at one time a Jackal-like creature known as the Warrah - *Duscicyon antarcticus*. It isn't known how it arrived on the islands but may have been brought over by South American Indians. It is now extinct, the last one having been killed in 1876. All other wild mammals have either escaped from ships (Black and Brown Rats, Mice, etc) or were deliberately introduced by settlers - European Rabbit, Brown Hare and Patagonian Grey Fox, the latter may still be found on only one island.

I'm running out of space but feel I must mention the flora and landscape. The Islands are far from being flat, and have very interesting geological features. Rugged cliffs up to 700 ft above sea level, craggy quartzite mountain ridges up to 2300 ft, stone runs, thousands of lakes or ponds and marvellous sandy beaches. Each one providing a habitat for plant life. Over 300 species (incl. orchids) occur in the Falklands - many found nowhere else in the world.

Personally, I can't wait to get back there!!



Striated Caracara



Snipe



Islander Aircraft operated by FIGAS

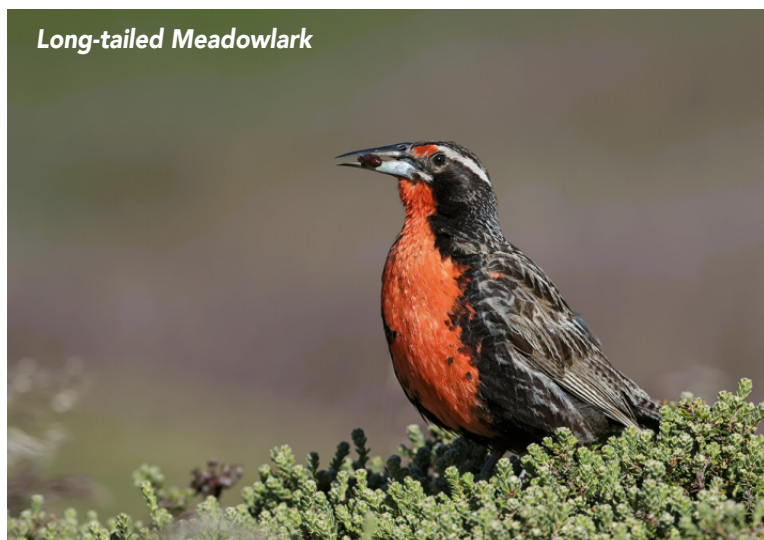
Kit used: Canon DSLRs and R Mirrorless plus lenses in various focal lengths including: 24-70, 70-200, 100-400, 100-500 and 300mm + 1.4X/2X extenders.



Silvery Grebe pair



Black-throated Finch



Long-tailed Meadowlark



The weather can be changeable!

A Magical Moment

by Patricia Pearl



June 2024, I was up at 3.30 am to photograph dawn at the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney and 'prepared' to see birds, in particular, a Short-eared Owl often seen on local fence posts. Following my largely unsuccessful attempt at photographing the sunrise over the stones, I drove my car carefully along the road, my long lens beside me on the passenger seat and the window down. Seeing the owl ahead of me, I brought my car to a gentle stop. The window was already down so the bird was undisturbed. It stared at me patiently for some moments as I managed to take several shots through the open car window. The morning breeze ruffled just one loose feather. A magical moment.

Olympus E-M1 Mark III, Olympus 100-400mm at 210 mm, 1/2500 sec, f/6.3, ISO 1000.