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Looking Forward to Autumn

What a Summer it has been! One of the longest, hottest and driest periods for many years. Here in the East of England the weather conditions shortened the length of time we would normally expect many species of flora to be in their prime - it certainly didn't do nature photographers any favours. Hoping now for a favourable fungus season!

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Nature Group eNews. eNews is e-mailed to all Nature Group members whose e-mail address is registered with RPS Membership Department. eNews will appear in your 'in-box' during the months of February, May/June and September - roughly between publications of *The Iris*. It is also available as a download from the 'Nature Group Members' area' of the RPS website.

'eNews' aims to improve communication within the membership, allowing the sharing of information such as sites of photographic interest, field meetings arranged at short notice, natural history photography book reviews, items of photographic kit for sale. Anything that might be of interest to you as a nature photographer is almost certainly to be of interest to some of your fellow Nature Group members. Items of interest are required for the February 2019 issue - please support eNews.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Dawn Osborn FRPS
eNews Editor

Ainsdale Dunes Field Meeting, June 9th 2018

by Trevor Davenport ARPS

The event was fully booked this year with the promise of fine weather and the dunes in good condition after some welcome winter rains.

Following a short introduction, fifteen members of the Nature Group proceeded into the Ainsdale dune area, under the guidance of Dr Phil Smith, and immediately we were photographing Bee and Marsh Orchids together with a variety of beetles and caterpillars.

The day was ideal for photography; warm and gently overcast with very little wind to disturb things.

The highlight of this area in early June is the emergence of many hundreds of the beautiful White Satin moth in the continued irruption that has been a feature here for a long time. It is an unusual event since the moth is described as 'local' and 'not common' in literature, with a scheduled flight period of July and August – not early June as here. The moths could be found in all stages, from caterpillar and pupae to flying and mating pairs and egg clusters being layed on the vegetation. A true photographic bonanza.

Bee Orchid



White Satin Moth Caterpillar

Four-spotted Chaser



Further into the dunes, the slacks (ponds) were still holding water with numerous species of dragonflies and damselflies in high numbers including Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chasers, Black-tailed Skimmers, Emperors and Common Darters; Damselflies were represented by

Ainsdale Dunes Field Meeting, June 9th 2018, continued ...

by Trevor Davenport ARPS

Blue-tailed, Azure and Common-blues. We saw the first of this season's Dark-green Fritillaries, wonderfully fresh and nectaring on thistles alongside Common Blue butterflies and numerous Small Heaths. Other varieties of insect were abundant in the dune vegetation. Many thousands of Common Toad 'toadlets' were emerging from the edges of the slacks requiring carefully placed feet.

It was a most enjoyable day in every aspect and our sincere thanks to Dr Phil Smith for his guidance and for sharing his incredible knowledge of this outstanding location with us. Thanks also to Green Sefton and their helpful staff for accommodating us in the Discovery Centre and their gated car park.

Images by Trevor Davenport ARPS.



Common Blue Butterfly



Dark-green Fritillary



Small Skippers paired



Northern Dung Tiger Beetle excavating burrow



Caterpillar of Dark Tussock Moth

Field Testing the Laowa 15mm f/4 Ultra Wideangle Macro Lens

by Robert Thompson FRPS., FIPS.

Introduction

Wideangle or environmental macro as it is sometimes called is a lesser known genre of traditional close-up photography, but one that is gaining popularity among the macro fraternity. The concept is to show the subject in close-up and set within the context of its environment, unlike the traditional approach where the emphasis is on the subject rather than its background. The technique is probably more often applied to plants and fungi rather than active creatures since the lens-to-subject distance is exceptionally close making it more challenging to achieve acceptable results.

I should point out from the start that this is a field-based assessment of how the lens performs in close-up and its pros and cons. It is not a technical review which is somewhat different. These are my findings and suggestions; others may have a different opinion. What I did want to evaluate from my own point of view was its usefulness in achieving consistently acceptable photographs in the field and how challenging this might be.

It is also essential from the start to clarify the definition of the word 'Macro' which is a term often incorrectly applied to close-up photography. It is frequently misused, by camera and lens manufacturers to describe what is essentially, in most cases, a close-up facility on a lens or compact. The definition of macro photography ('Photomacrography') in the true sense relates to magnifications from 1:1 (life-size) to around 20:1. Photographing subjects below life-size is referred to as close-up photography, which is the category that the vast majority of subjects fall into. However, for the purpose of this article and to reduce confusion I have used the word 'macro' in the general context when discussing close-up photography as a whole.

I was about to head off to the south of France when I received a package from UK Optics, who are the distributors for Laowa lenses manufactured by a Chinese company called Venus Optics; founded by a group of dedicated macro enthusiasts. Since its formation, they have gone on to produce a wide range of specialist accessories and lenses for macro in most of the popular camera mounts. Inside the box was a sample of their 15mm f/4 ultra wideangle 1:1 macro lens. Ultra wide-angle lenses are not commonly associated with close-up photography in the traditional sense; however, I do use them when opportunities present themselves for in-situ photographs. Their lower reproduction ratio and increased angle of view make them challenging to obtain larger magnifications of



Photo 1 Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*

smaller subjects within the frame. The Laowa 15mm f/4 1:1 macro, as far as I know, is the only ultra wideangle lens to offer lifesize reproduction. What makes this lens stand out from the rest is its close focusing capabilities allowing the photographer to achieve much greater magnifications of the subject while taking advantage of the increased angle of view.



Laowa 15mm wideangle macro



Field Test: Laowa 15mm f/4 Ultra Wideangle 1:1 Macro Lens

by Robert Thompson FRPS, FIPF.

First impressions

On opening the box, I was surprised at how small the lens was, I expected it to be larger, but that's no disadvantage; my shoulders continually ache under the weight of my current backpack. It comes complete with a lens hood which is fine for regular photography, but in close-up, every millimetre counts since the lens-to-subject distance at higher magnifications is down to millimetres; 4.7 to be exact at 1:1. The lens is an all-metal design, robust with a filter thread of 77mm, and an angle of view of 110° on a full-frame sensor and 85° on APS-C sensor. The lens weighs 410g and is available in the following mounts, Nikon, Canon, Sony, Fuji and Pentax. What makes this lens different from any current conventional ultra wide angle is its exceptional minimum close focusing distance. A facility that allows you to reproduce subjects at increased magnifications, while still taking advantage of the wider angle of view. The lens also has a built-in shift function of +/- 6mm attached to the vertical axis; this works best on an APS-C sized sensor, however, on a full frame there will be significant vignetting. Focus rotation and travel between 1:1 and infinity is quite short considering it's essentially a macro lens.



2: Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

I should also point out that this is an 'all manual' lens in every sense of the word. There is no automatic coupling to the meter, therefore, aperture selection, metering and focusing have to be carried out manually. Those of you that are not accustomed to lens reversal and stop-down metering; a technique used in the days of film to obtain higher magnifications, might find themselves a little out of their comfort zone with this lens. However, do not let this put you off; with a little practice it quickly passes, and I had no problem adapting to it at all. Focusing is exceptionally smooth and precise. I still prefer to use the viewfinder in most situations for focusing; I guess old habits die hard, but 'Live View' works equally as well especially when the lens is stopped down. Connection to the camera is exact with no play.

Being an ultra wideangle lens distortion is going to be present in some form. Is this a real issue in terms of macro; probably not in most cases? Like other ultra wideangles, it will be evident in some subjects more than others. Modern software is well equipped to deal with most of it. However, as you gain experience with the lens you will easily identify situations where it may be more apparent.



3: Brown Birch Bolete *Leccinum scabrum*



4: Sword-leaved Helleborine *Cephalanthera longifolia*

In the Field

I found the lens relatively straightforward to use in the field. It delivers very sharp results with a slight fall-off towards the edges, but this is not unusual in ultra wideangle lenses. The curvature of the lens is less of an issue in macro, but more critical in conventional photography. The 16 blade aperture lends to a smooth and gradual falloff in blur which I found pleasing when the images were viewed on screen. The absence of autofocus is no disadvantage since it is not an essential feature when shooting close-ups. Focus is best achieved using Live View.

I initially found the clickless aperture control a little hard to get used to; it's easy to overrun on your selected

Field Test: Laowa 15mm f/4 Ultra Wideangle 1:1 Macro Lens

by Robert Thompson FRPS, FIPF.

aperture leading to exposure errors. However, having said that you quickly become accustomed to this; although it would be better to have a definite click to prevent accidental movement. I suspect in the future as interest develops in the lens a later version may have open aperture control.

At 1:1 the lens is just over 4.7mm from the subject. I doubt if you could realistically use it in the field at maximum magnification for active subjects, however, I have managed to produce some reasonable images with some insects and amphibians. The petal-shaped lens hood is not usable in my opinion when working in close-up, it blocks the light and prevents the lens focusing at higher magnifications. Even with the lens hood permanently off, I found no issues relating to flare.



The short lens-to-subject distance naturally raises lighting issues at higher magnifications. The front of the lens naturally casts a shadow on the subject which is difficult to illuminate evenly when the lens is so close. With static subjects, it is achievable since you have time to experiment with the lighting position. The flash spread can be a bit of an issue due to the wide angle of view. The easiest way to overcome this is to balance the flash with daylight rather than opt for full flash exposure. I found no problems with natural light at all. Patience and the right conditions work to your advantage. With stop down metering the fall off in light when you close the lens down makes critical focusing in all but perfect light a bit more challenging. You can engage Live View, which works very well, but I find it much easier just to open the diaphragm to establish focus and close it down to the taking aperture.

Which Subjects Work Best?

It is possible to use this on a range of subjects, however, flowers and fungi as already stated are ideally suited to wideangle macro. Most are of a reasonable size and in many cases close to the ground. Some grow in quite scenic localities with attractive backdrops which bring the best out in this lens.

Photographing insects at such close quarters poses more of a problem. Larger species, for example, butterflies can be approached when confined to the vegetation. Larger dragonflies, mantids, beetles are also achievable since they are mostly inactive when at rest. Smaller insects are much more challenging since they require higher magnifications usually beyond half life-size which is not feasible in many cases without a complicated setup. I have experimented with some smaller species, but it can be very hit and miss. When things do come together you can achieve some amazing results.



Field Test: Laowa 15mm f/4 Ultra Wideangle 1:1 Macro Lens

by Robert Thompson FRPS, FIPF.

The short working distance also raises other challenges regarding lighting. The front of the lens naturally casts a shadow on the subject if used in sunlight which is difficult to illuminate evenly when the lens is so close. My immediate thoughts were to use one of my SB200 flash units which I could just about manoeuvre at the top of the lens, making sure that it did not go beyond the lens rim as it would appear in the field of view. Although this worked in most cases it is not a long-term solution as I had to close the diaphragm on the lens with one hand and operate the shutter with the other; only after the lens was stopped down could I pick up the flash unit. It's not a major inconvenience with a static subject but is more likely to cause issues with an active insect. However, I see this as work in progress; there is equipment out there that can provide a more convenient way of dealing with the lighting problem. On overcast days I had no real issue with illumination.

A Final Word

The results from this lens are impressive and for anyone who wants to pursue this technique; this lens will be a valuable addition to their kit. It is also reasonably priced, so it doesn't break the bank. No ultra wideangle, in my opinion, can easily replicate the results produced by this lens. The optics are extremely sharp, and it does produce some amazing results. There is no doubt that it's pushing the boundaries in the macro world to greater levels. It's also refreshing to see a company that is committed to producing innovative equipment that goes beyond the conventional approach adopted by virtually all of the major brands. If macro is to develop in the future, we need companies like Venus Optics that are prepared to invest and create equipment that allow us to take macro to another level. I feel in recent times, particularly post digital, that most of the major brands have neglected this area, producing revamped macro lenses with little attention paid to other accessories that are equally important.

The Laowa 15mm f/4 1:1 macro makes a great addition to the field kit. Anyone interested in wideangle macro should, in my opinion, explore the possibilities of this lens if you want to add an extra dimension to your photography. At £499 it's very keenly priced and represents great value for money compared to conventional brand lenses.

UK Digital are the sole importers for Laowa products in the UK. Further information can be found on their website. <https://www.ukdigital.co.uk>

Image details

All the photographs were taken on a Nikon D850 mounted on a tripod with the exception of one.

- 1: Brown Hawker.** Cooler evening temperatures allow a much closer approach when larger dragonflies are below the threshold for flight. I was able to get in close to this resting male providing I did not disturb the surrounding vegetation. I was able to push a couple of distracting pieces of vegetation out of the way to get a clearer view.
- 2: Large Red Damselfly.** It is possible on very cool early mornings to get in close to your subject. However most of the time your quarry is likely to take flight, but every now and then you get lucky. The lens in this case sets the subject nicely within the context of its environment.
- 3: Brown Birch Bolete.** Shooting extreme close-ups does add an extra dimension to the image. You can just begin to notice the exaggerated perspective in this example. This arrangement would be difficult to emulate with a conventional ultra wide angle lens due to the increased magnification.
- 4: Sword-leaved Helleborine.** This orchid was a common occurrence in the French Pyrenees along the woodland margins. It is a typical example of where this lens excels in setting subjects in context with the surrounding habitat. Distortion is less evident in this arrangement due to the fact that the surrounding vegetation is a little further away from the main subject.
- 5: Common Frog.** Opportunities with amphibians are possible but you have to work fast. A tripod is much more challenging with these subjects. I resorted to handholding the camera with additional support from a monopod.
- 6: Orange-tip Butterfly.** A cool spring morning when the temperature is below the threshold for flight makes opportunities for photos such as these possible.
- 7: European Mantis.** A disused quarry in the south of France late in the evening provided an opportunity to photograph this resting Mantid. Its larger size meant that I could keep the magnification to a reasonable size while increasing the lens-to-subject distance.
- 8: Pyramidal Orchid.** One of the many sites in the Pyrenees that supports a rich ground flora. We found several species of orchid among the many flowers that carpeted this amazing habitat. With practice, you quickly develop an eye for those subjects that work while at the same time encapsulate the vastness of the landscape they occupy.

The Eyes Have It. Learning from my Photos

by Jean Robson

Having retired early last year I now have more time to develop my interests in natural history and photography, I have learned a lot in my first year! One direction the interest has gone is looking at the eyes of my subjects. We all want our subject's eye to be the sharpest part of the image and that means it is often a very compelling part of the photograph, but this was really brought to my attention by two incidents earlier this year. Firstly Laurie Campbell posted a photograph (better than mine of course!) of a Scottish wildcat which compelled me to go and read about why cats have vertical pupils.

It seems that vertical pupils are the optimal design for ambush predators, especially nocturnal ones, such as wildcats. Vertical pupils allow a narrow depth of field in a horizontal plane to be used to compare sharpness, and stereopsis (comparing distance from each eye) in a vertical plane; thus allowing wonderful judgement of depth, needed to jump onto prey. Herbivorous species often have horizontal pupils which means that they have good ability to scan in front and behind without being dazzled by sun above, so spot their predators.

The second thing I learned from photographing animals and looking at their eyes came from a retirement trip to Antarctica and South Georgia. On returning, delighted with some of my shots, I was told "great shot but shame about the lack of catch-lights in the eye". On looking at my photographs, none of my penguins had catchlights, despite my best efforts, I looked at the images of others' and found very few catchlights! Penguins, unlike man, need to have good vision in air and water. The refraction produced by light passing through the cornea is very much less in water than in air, penguins cope with this by having an almost flat retina, giving room for a much more rounded lens than in man.



Unlike penguins, cormorant type birds have a very curved cornea (giving a bit of refraction in water) and a very pliable lens allowing greater lens shape change. Hence penguins with few catch-lights and shags with big ones!



The Eyes Have It. Learning from my Photos

by Jean Robson

I have also learned that frogs have high-seated eyes with a transparent lid so that they can see underwater and all around them. They have teeth which they use to hold onto prey and a tongue fixed at the front of the mouth, used to catch prey, this means that they can't chew food. Instead they use their eyes to swallow it - retracting the eyes after catching prey, in effect pushing food down the gullet!



Some insects can see more colours than us, including ultraviolet which means that on each flower petal tracts appear to them, like runway lights leading to their pollen!



Rats can also see ultraviolet which may be related to need to see the markings which emit UV light, or to the need to see at dawn or dusk when light is low.

Molluscs have simple eyes ranging from a simple depression filled with light sensitive cells in limpets, to the snail's eye which instead of a formed lens has a glutinous liquid, with no ciliary muscles, which vertebrates used to change lens shape. The snail cannot focus so vision cannot be crisp, but they can detect light through other parts of their bodies so shadows of a possible predator (or photographer) can be perceived!



The Eyes Have It. Learning from my Photos

by Jean Robson

Damselflies have huge eyes, good colour vision and a huge field of view, as they have compound eyes made up of thousands of ommatidia (visual units) of different types, facing in different directions, responding to different wavelengths including UV. The dark spot that looks like a pupil, is a pseudopupil, an optical illusion which occurs when one looks straight down the ommatidia head-on, so no light is reflected.

Spiders have six or eight eyes, with different attributes, despite this many species have very low acuity. Wolf spiders and jumping spiders have good vision. Some but not all of the eyes, have tapetum (reflective layer which maximises light collection for night vision, causing the bright reflections in eyes of cats). The tapetum is particularly well developed in wolf spiders to support hunting in poor light; as not all their eyes have a tapetum some but not all sometimes appear very bright in photographs, or torchlight. Jumping spiders use one set of eyes which give a blurry image to detect prey, another set with good telescopic vision to follow prey, and their third set to judge distance when close to prey!

Learning through photography has been fascinating over the last year, long may it continue!



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Announcements

Dates for your diary

Entries Invited

The following National and International Exhibitions with Nature sections are now open for entries:

Shrewsbury Open Photography Exhibition

Digital Projected images

www.photocompentries.net/?org=ShropshirePS

Entries close 29th September 2018

Dingwall National Projected Image Exhibition

Digital Projected images

www.dingwallcameraclub.com

Entries close 30th September 2018

Guernsey Salon of Photography

Digital Projected images

www.guernseysalon.co.uk

Entries close 25th October 2018

Frome Wessex Salon of Photography

Digital Projected images

www.fromewessexcameraclub.co.uk/pages/salon.php

Entries close 28th October

Smethwick International Exhibition of Photography

Prints and Digital Projected images

www.smethwickps.co.uk/sps-international

Entries close 08 November 2018

Yorkshire International Salon of Photography

Prints and Digitally Projected images

www.yorkshiresalon.co.uk

Entries close 03rd December 2018

Bebington Salon of Photography

Digital Projected images

www.bebingtonps.org.uk

Entries close approx 20th November 2018

Coming up in January 2019:

Bristol International Salon of Photography

Southampton International Salon of Photography

Clay Cross National Projected Image Exhibition

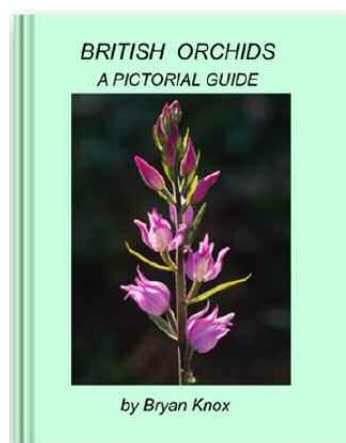
Southport National Open Exhibition of Photography

Solihull Open Exhibition of British Photography

Congratulations

Nature Group member, Bryan Knox FRPS, has recently self published his book entitled 'British Orchids - A Pictorial Guide.'

A superb photographic collection of 52 British Orchids, together with colour variations, some of their hybrids and other anomalies.



This has been Bryan's life-long passion, and these photographs are the result of 60 years of his photographic endeavours. Some of these specimens may never be seen again and others very rarely. Well worth adding to your collection if British Flora is your interest.

You can buy the book in several forms. The printed soft-backed version can be found by clicking the following link:

<http://www.blurb.co.uk/b/8643458-british-orchids-a-pictorial-guide>

However, Blurb only print to order which makes the printed book quite expensive to buy. Fortunately, there are other options.

You can purchase a hard-backed copy from Amazon.com by entering the book title 'British Orchids - A Pictorial Guide' in the search box.

Also at the above link you will find an option to purchase an e-book version for download onto most devices. If you have a PC, you will need to have an e-reader programme, e.g. Kindle. This version will cost you only £5.99. You can also download the ebook edition onto ipads etc via: itunes.apple.com/us/book/id1374483737

Bryan currently has a handful of signed copies at 40% discount, thus lowering the cost to £36 + £5 UK postage. Please contact him directly at:

throwell@hotmail.com

if you would like to purchase one of the signed copies or for any other queries that you may have.

Announcements

The Nature Group Annual Exhibition DVD



A DVD containing all of the accepted images from the 2018 Exhibition is now available.

Order your copy online from the RPS Shop.

Priced at only £10.

See the RPS website for details.

For Sale

Arca Swiss Monoball.

Ball & Socket head suitable for use with Wimberley Sidekick. Serviced by Arca a few years ago and not used since.

In good working order but shows signs of use, hence price.

Current model costs £350 new.

Price £60



L Bracket for EOS 5D3/5DS/5DSR w/grip £15

L Bracket for Olympus OMD EM5 MkII £10

L Bracket for Olympus OMD EM1 MkI £10

All above L Brackets in excellent condition.

Wimberley Lens Plate P20 £30

Wimberley Lens Plate P30 £30

Kirk Lens Plate LP 48 £30

Kirk Camera Quick Release plate for Nikon D70 £30

All above lens plates show signs of use.

When new they cost approximately £60 each.

Above prices are plus postage & packaging.

Email: Dawn Osborn at:
naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com

For Sale

Canon angle finder C.

vg condition, slight signs of wear. **£70 + p&p**

Canon EF12 MkII extension tube. vgc. £25 + p&p

Kirk L-bracket for Sony A7R2. vgc £40 + p&p

Haore L-bracket for Canon 5D4.

vg condition, slight signs of wear. **£20 + p&p**

Hahnel Giga T Pro 2, wireless timer

remote controller for Canon, unused, **£25 + p&p**

Contact: David Osborn email:
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For Sale

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

It costs nothing to advertise and your advert will be read by 1,000+ members of the Nature Group.

To advertise your 'For Sale' items contact:

Dawn Osborn at:
naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com

eNews: Publication Dates

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

Late Winter Copy deadline 30th December
Published mid January.

Late Spring Copy deadline 30th April
Published mid/late May.

Late Summer Copy deadline 31st August
Published mid/late September.

All contributions should be submitted to the Editor at: 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 e-mail. 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 e-mail larger images.

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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 opposite.

The Iris: Publication Dates

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

Spring Copy deadline 8th December
Published mid March.

Summer Copy deadline 30th April
Published early July.

Winter Copy deadline 31st August
Published early November.

All contributions should be submitted to the Editor. Items covering any aspect of nature photography and/or natural history are welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books.

The Editor can be contacted at:
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