



RPS Nature Group – Minutes of the 45th AGM 24th April 2021

The 45th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group was held on Saturday 24th April 2021 starting at 1315hrs on-line using Zoom. It was attended by 67 Members.

The AGM Agenda, Minutes of the 44th AGM 2020, Officers' Reports and Programme Coordinator's Report were made available in advance of the AGM and remain available on the RPS website under:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/nature/2021/april/2021-agm-reports/>

Welcome and Apologies for Absence:

Thomas Hanahoe, Chair of the RPS Nature Group welcomed Group Members and John Miskelly, RPS Honorary Treasurer, to the Meeting.

Apologies for Absence had been received from: Maggie Bullock, James Foad, Martin Hancock, Rod Orrell and Evan Dawson (RPS CEO).

Minutes of the 44th AGM 2020 (printed in Issue 12 of the Group eNews, February 2021 and available on the RPS Nature Group Website):

There were no corrections to the Minutes and it was proposed by Ralph Snook and seconded by Julia Wainwright that the Minutes be approved.

Matters Arising:

None.

Chairman's Report – Thomas Hanahoe FRPS:

My term of office as Chairman of the Nature Group Committee is now complete. It is a sign of the times that during that two year period the Committee has become expert in on-line meetings. Previous practice was for the Committee, three times each year to gather round a table at Smethwick Photographic Society, but in 2020, as a result of the Covid 19 viral pandemic lockdown of society, the Committee held eight virtual meetings and also provided numerous other computer-based activities for Members. In the process we learned a lot and it is likely that the Committee will continue with on-line meetings, which have removed the need for long journeys and the associated travel expenses, and may enable Members from distant parts of the United Kingdom to join the Committee.

Despite the lockdown the Group continues to flourish with 913 members In January 2021 compared with 905 in January 2020 (Iris Magazine 139 Spring 2021 p37).

National lockdown impaired our programme of Field Meetings. During 2020, 17 Field Meetings were planned with more in the pipeline, but regrettably in May and June, eight had to be cancelled because of Covid-19 restrictions. I am pleased that Field Meetings are now back on track, albeit limited to individual groups of five participants for each leader, and ten trips are scheduled to be held between April and July 2021. These numbers are most impressive compared to those of yore. I extend my congratulations to all those concerned.

The Chairman's Day meeting at the end of October was also on-line with over 90 people taking part in the event, including Dr Alan Hodgson, the President of the Royal Photographic Society. I was honoured to be joined on the virtual stage by Dr Daniel Hayhow, Environmental Scientist at Earthwatch Europe, who presented a lecture on 'The State of Nature 2019' and by Dr Mike Daniels, Head of Land Management at the John Muir Trust, who spoke on 'Rewilding in Britain'. Following the Chairman's Day, the virtual Annual General Meeting of the Nature Group agreed the revised Regulations of the Nature Group, which were updated to reflect changes in practice and also agreed that the Annual Exhibition will in future include a new separate section to accommodate Nature Photographers aged 18 years or younger.

The Committee is comprised of volunteers who give their time and expertise freely, investing substantial amounts of time on behalf of the Nature Group and I thank each of them for their support during my term of office.

Treasurer's Report - David O'Neill LRPS:

This is included at the end of these Minutes.

Secretary's Report - Duncan Locke ARPS:

Last year's AGM, originally planned for the 4th April 2020 had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Later in the year, a short on-line AGM was held on the 31st October 2020 as part of the Chairman's Day; the Minutes of this Meeting were published in the Group eNews No. 12, February 2021.

The Committee had already successfully trialled the use of video meetings using Zoom before the Covid-19 restrictions came into place. Between the 20th April 2020 and the 1st March 2021, we have had 11 well attended Committee Meetings on Zoom including two specifically to discuss the Update of the Group Regulations.

Historically the Committee normally had two face-to-face all day meetings a year plus a third shorter meeting after the AGM. Moving to on-line meetings has resulted in greater flexibility as to when Meetings are held plus a big reduction in the mileage driven by Committee Members to attend them. The Group has made considerable financial savings in the cost of room hire and expenses and at the same time reduced the Group's carbon footprint.

Going forward, Committee Meetings will continue to be held on Zoom at about 6 to 8 weeks intervals unless there is an opportunity for the Committee to meet face-to-face, such as following the AGM. Once Covid-19 restrictions are over, I expect that face-to-face AGMs will resume at Smethwick as it is central and provides an excellent venue for the print Exhibition.

There have been no changes to the Committee during the year. We did not have a full-time Treasurer and so David O'Neill continued to act as both Vice Chairman and Honorary Treasurer. Ralph Snook, in addition to being Exhibition Secretary, also acted as Webmaster for both the Group pages on the RPS website and for the Nature Group Galleries website, which he created in the middle of last year and provides an excellent platform for Members to show their images. It can be found on:

<https://www.nggalleries.net/>

Ann Miles, as Programme Coordinator has kept the Events and News sections of our Group pages on the RPS website up-to-date.

I hope that Group Members are aware that we have a Facebook Group administered by Julia Wainwright, for you to share images and information about your nature photography. So please join the Group (you will need your RPS membership number), which can be found on:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/188690442327099/>

In September 2020, the Committee put a considerable amount of work into updating the Regulations that govern the operation of the Group. The previous Regulations had not been updated since December 2006 and were in urgent need of updating to reflect the move to more on-line communication, staff changes at the RPS, increasing Group membership and to update financial procedures such as the declining use of cheques. The updated, October 2020 Regulations, were approved by Group Members at the AGM on the 31st October 2020.

Communication between the Committee and the Group Members is an issue. The Iris is our longest serving communication and the only item sent by post to ensure that it reaches all Members; we have no plans to change this. However, the bulk of the Group's day to day communication is by e-mail and website and it is important that those Members who do have e-mail addresses, but have not registered them with the RPS, do so if they want to receive up-to-date information on Group activities.

I act as Membership Secretary in that I monitor the number of Members in the Group and send a welcome letter and a copy of the latest issue of The Iris to each New Member. The membership of the Group as of the 1st March 2021 was 919. This compares with 905 Members on the 1st March 2020. Over that period 176 New Members joined the Group and 163 Members left. This represents a turnover of close to 20%, which I find surprisingly high.

As of the 1st March 2021, the Group had 860 Members in the UK, Eire, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands plus 59 overseas Members. The biggest overseas Group is in the USA (12 Members), but they are well spread out.

As I said at last year's AGM, I believe that the aim of the Group is to inspire and educate its Members into taking better images of the natural world and so we must organise events for Members to get together – Covid-19 restrictions permitting – and develop their nature photography. We now have an ever growing programme of Field Meetings, Workshops and Residential Weekends. Even with periods of lockdown in 2020, we managed to run nine Field Meetings.

Ann Miles is doing an excellent job of organising events, but we can always fit in more especially in those parts of the country where none are held at present. So please think about whether you could organise an event that would be of interest to Group Members and talk to Ann.

Finally, the 2022 Spring Meeting, AGM and opening of the Annual Exhibition will, I very much hope be at Smethwick Photographic Society, in April 2022 (date to be advised). In the mean time, stay safe and hopefully by the time the summer comes, we will be less restricted in our photographic opportunities.

Programme Coordinator's Report – Ann Miles FRPS:

Field Meetings and Workshops during the last 18 months have been very disrupted for obvious reasons but, whenever restrictions have allowed, Nature Group Members have taken part in the various Field Events.

During 2019, we ran 11 Field Meetings and 2 Macro Workshops.

In 2020, we managed to run nine Field Meetings. Before lockdown they were to: Ham Wall, Somerset; Titchwell, Norfolk and Welney, Norfolk. After easing, successful trips were made to: Sharpenhoe Clappers, Buckinghamshire; Snettisham, Norfolk; Paxton Pits, Cambridgeshire; Monkwood, Worcestershire; Clowes Wood, Kent and Bradgate Park, Leicestershire. A further 10 events organised to Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, London, Nottinghamshire, Pembrokeshire, Somerset and Warwickshire had to be cancelled. All events were well supported.

Like many groups, we decided to run Zoom meetings including both techniques talks and lectures. In 2020, Ian Wilson ran four very successful sessions on various processing skills. Mick Durham, Chair of the Natural History Photography RPS Distinctions panel ran a Zoom Distinction Advice session, which was followed by a full Natural History Advisory Day run from Bristol HQ. The Chairman's Day talks were varied and very enjoyable and the year rounded off with a lecture by Adrian Davies on Photographing the Unknown World.

2021 commenced with Zoom sessions from: Ian Wilson on File Preparation and Printing; Nick Upton on UK Wildlife Introductions and Conservation; Robert Canis on Passion Projects In Nature and the Landscape and Charles Erb took us Beneath UK Seas. In March, Alison Mees entertained us with a very informative talk on Cheetahs in her Living the African Dream and Qasim Syed showed us how to Focus Stack with a handheld camera. We have still to come: Dynamic Wildlife with Gordon and Cathy Illg and A Year in the Life of a Yorkshire Wildlife Photographer with Steve Race. Most of the lectures and demonstrations are available as Recordings from the Nature Group Page of the RPS Website.

As soon as lockdown eased at the end of March, we started to arrange Field Meetings (numbers will be limited and social distancing will be observed). There are 10 field meetings already advertised at the time of this report with more to come. These are to: Royston Heath, Hertfordshire for Pasque flowers; Paxton Pits, Cambridgeshire; Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire; Lake Vyrnwy, Powys; Rutland Water Leicestershire; Prestbury Hill, Gloucestershire; Strumpshaw Fen, Norfolk; Martin Down, Hampshire; Snettisham, Norfolk and Titchwell, Norfolk.

I would like to thank all those who have volunteered to run or assist with either outings (Julia Andrew, Annette Beardsley, John Bebbington, Nick Bowman, Trevor Davenport, James Foad, Duncan Locke, Qasim Syed and Peter Ward) or Zoom sessions including Mick Durham, Ian Wilson, Qasim Syed and all our excellent Speakers.

We are still looking for Volunteers to help organise events so we can spread the locations out over more of the country. I am always willing to come to your area and help with an initial event if required and we take care of all the advertising and booking procedures. You can restrict the numbers to whatever you are comfortable with.

We would also love to hear from Members about what they would like to see in the Nature Group's programme, for example another Macro Workshop, Focus Stacking Days, help with Video Techniques, etc.

Thomas Hanahoe thanked Ann Miles on behalf of the Nature Group and the Committee for all of the hard work that she had put into organising so many events despite the Covid-19 restrictions. He echoed Ann's comment that it would be good to see some Members in Scotland running events north of the border.

Committee for 2021 - 2023:

Duncan Locke said that there were no contested positions and the Committee for 2021 - 2023 will be as listed below. He pointed out that there was a vacancy for an Honorary Secretary as he was now Vice Chair as well as Acting Honorary Secretary.

He welcomed Peter Ward as Treasurer. Stan Saunders, who had been on the Committee for the last four years, had decided to stand down and he thanked Stan for all of his input during that time. Thomas Hanahoe echoed these words by welcoming Peter Ward and thanking Stan Saunders.

Officers:

Chair:	David O'Neill LRPS
Acting Honorary Secretary:	Duncan Locke ARPS
Honorary Treasurer:	Peter Ward

Committee Members:

Vice Chair:	Duncan Locke ARPS
Immediate Past Chair:	Thomas Hanahoe FRPS
Exhibition Secretary:	Ralph Snook ARPS
Group Magazine Editor:	Gerald Griffin ARPS
Group Newsletter Editor:	Dawn Osborn FRPS
Programme Coordinator:	Ann Miles FRPS
Residential Weekend Advisor:	James Foad LRPS
Webmaster:	Ralph Snook ARPS
Committee Members:	Julia Andrew LRPS Julia Wainwright FRPS

Any Other Business:

John Curgenven asked about the relatively large number of Members who leave the Group each year and whether or not anything was being done to address this. Thomas Hanahoe said that the number of Group Members had reduced in recent years due to the RPS ceasing to offer first year free group membership. Duncan Locke said that he followed on from his predecessor as Secretary in that he used to e-mail each Member leaving a short questionnaire asking them why they had left. Only about 10% of these were returned and those that were generally did not have any issues with the Group. The most usual reasons given were: Members getting to an age when they felt they were not getting any benefit from membership and cost of membership not of the Group, but of the RPS. At present he has stopped sending out questionnaires.

In advance of the Meeting, John Curgenven had also asked about the option of not receiving a hard copy of The Iris by post, but instead reading it on-line on the RPS website. He was not asking for a reduction in his membership fee, but thought that any savings made if this option was generally available to Members could be used to benefit the Group as well as reduce the use of paper. It was noted that sending hard copies overseas was getting increasingly expensive and there was no guarantee that they would arrive. Thomas Hanahoe said that this was a question that the new Committee will consider.

Date and Venue of the 46th RPS Nature Group AGM 2022:

The 46th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group will be held on Saturday 9th April 2022 (date to be confirmed) at either Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, B69 2AS or on-line on Zoom dependent upon any remaining Covid-19 restrictions in force at the time. In response to a question from Coin Smith, asking if it would be possible to live stream the AGM from Smethwick for the benefit of Members who were unable to attend in person, both Thomas Hanahoe and Duncan Locke said that this would definitely be considered.

Treasurer's Report for AGM 2021

David O'Neill LRPS

Report for the Year Ended 31st December 2020

Cash Book Summary:

Current Account Balance:	31 st Dec 2019	£ 23,619.41
Income for 12 Months to 31 st Dec:		£ 15,459.94
Expenditure for 12 Months to 31 st Dec:		(£ 12,494.65)
Closing Balance:	31 st Dec 2020	£26,584.70
Bank Account Balance:	31st Dec 2020	£26,584.70

Income and Expenditure Summary:

	Income:	Expenditure:
Members Subscriptions:	£12,687.25	
VAT Refund:	£ 162.24	
Deposits – Blencathra (2021):	£ 1,425.00	
Exhibition:		£ 1,166.47
Events in Year:	£ 1,139.45	£ 833.77
Printing & Distribution (Iris):		£ 9,348.64
Travel, Room Hire AGM/Committee:		£ 1,140.77
Admin & Other		£ 5.00
Other Income	£ 46.00	
Totals	£15,459.94	£12,494.65

Notes:

1. Printing Costs includes new software purchased for both The Iris and the eNewsletter.
2. Income from events has dropped because of cancellations and refunds, but the Advisory Day raised £1435.
3. Exhibition expenses are low because the travelling print exhibitions needed to be cancelled.

Summary:

Income has remained relatively stable this year, but expenditure has dropped significantly because of all the Covid-19 related cancellations.

David O'Neill LRPS
1st February 2021