



During Winter months our shores and salt marshes are a haven for many over-wintering species of birds, especially waders. When severe cold and snow drive in from the north and east we may also find that some species of European birds have crossed the Channel ahead of the inclement weather front - birds such as this beautiful male Smew.

While many birds will still be in their winter plumage, Wrens, Robins and Dunnocks have already been heard in song but Spring is still a long way off - please remember to put out fresh water and food for them.

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Welcome to the fifth issue of the Nature Group eNews. eNews is available to all Nature Group members as a download from the 'Nature Group Members' area' of the RPS website. An RPS 'Bulletin' will be emailed to all members whose e-mail address is registered with the RPS Membership Department. Issues of eNews will be loaded to the RPS website during the months of February, May and September - roughly between publications of *The Iris*. Back issues of eNews are also available.

The Nature Group Committee's aim in starting 'eNews' was to improve communication within the membership, allowing the sharing of information such as sites of photographic interest, field meetings arranged after publication of *The Iris*, natural history photography book reviews, items of photographic kit for sale. Anything that might be of interest to you as a nature photographer will almost certainly be of interest to your fellow Nature Group members. eNews can only continue with support from members. Please support eNews with items of interest for the Summer 2019 issue.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Dawn Osborn FRPS
eNews Editor

Shorties at Burwell

by Professor Thomas Hanahoe PhD FRPS HonDSc

Over the last month or so I have made three trips to Burwell Fen in Cambridgeshire. It's a flat landscape not far from the River Cam, wild with a significant amount of fallow land in an area famous for its drains and dykes: the kind of landscape which harbours a large number of small mammals and is highly attractive to owls and other birds of prey.

My first visit was on a beautiful sunny afternoon towards the end of November with a soft winter light and still air. Four Short-eared Owls appeared in daylight at about 1.30pm and they were still hunting when I left at sunset. They were a magnificent sight against the low evening sun which high-lighted their bright yellow eyes with their wings backlit as the birds quartered the fields hunting for voles amongst the grasses and reeds.

On my second trip the Shorties were in the air but they remained some distance away and were too far for me to photograph.

Again on my third trip the owls were present, mainly in the distance but occasionally passing closely by. However, the highlight of the afternoon was a Kestrel which for about five minutes perched on a nearby fence post. I walked progressively towards the post, taking photographs and she remained quite still, watching me all the time. I walked to within about ten metres of her and had a wonderful view of this most handsome bird of prey.

If you like birds of prey, Burwell Fen is a great place to visit.

Professor Thomas Hanahoe PhD FRPS
HonDSc
www.hanahoephotography.com



Short-eared Owl hunting in evening light over Burwell Fen.

© Thomas Hanahoe FRPS



Short-eared Owl hunting over long grass.

© Thomas Hanahoe FRPS



Kestrel sitting on a farm post.

© Thomas Hanahoe FRPS

Atlantic Grey Seals - A Success Story

by David Osborn FRPS

It's probably fair to say that here in the UK we are living in an over populated country with low natural bio-diversity. It's probably also true to state that there are very few mainland unmanaged and undisturbed natural wild areas remaining where wildlife can exist with little or no disturbance. Having said that, it's also fair to say that apart from some very high profile re-introduction release programmes, we rarely have a major wildlife success story that we can truly be proud of. However, something somewhere is clearly working and the expansion of the population in the North Sea of the Atlantic Grey Seal has, over recent years, become an amazing success story.

As our largest carnivore, the UK's coastal waters are home to about 50% of the total world population of Grey Seals. Ponder on that statement if you will, low bio-diversity or not, it's quite incredible to be able to say that there's a large mammal living here and that the UK is the major world stronghold for that species. That in itself is quite amazing and, apart from a certain highland cat, there really isn't much else found around the UK that depends so much on us as a country for it's existence.

Take a look at the latest figures from England's largest colonies to see just how well they've adapted to life in the North Sea:

- Blakeney Point, North Norfolk, now officially England's largest colony, this year recorded 3012 pups. The first ever recorded birth was 1988. So from nothing it's become the largest colony in just 30 years.
- Horsey, my own local colony has increased from one pup in 1987 to 2068 this year.
- Donna Nook on the Lincolnshire coast and the previous largest colony on the English mainland recorded 2063 pups.
- The Farne Islands off the Northumbrian coast where the population has increased nearly 50% over the last 5 years with 2602 pups born this year. Unfortunately, due to the nature and geography of The Farne's, the colony there is very susceptible to losses from storms. The breeding success is wholly dependent on the arrival of autumnal storms - the later the storms arrive the greater the survival rate is, which in turn effects the future numbers of available breeding adults.

As far as I'm aware there is no long term research taking place for studying or analysing the species success or expansion, but my own take on it would be as follows:- With the decline of the UK's once widespread fishing industry I'm guessing there's now more than enough small fish in the North Sea to sustain this population increase and that, along with the fact that we have no large predators present in the area, has created almost ideal conditions for the seals to live and flourish in. This expansion has only been possible because this is a

marine mammal with minimal dependency on the land. I'd suggest the success at Blakeney Point is purely down to it's remote location, which together with the wardens and the fence ensures minimal disturbance from visitors. I'd further suggest that a high percentage of the seals in Norfolk probably came from an earlier expansion at the Donna Nook colony.

Whatever the reasons, they're here and at times are very tolerant of our presence. Watch, enjoy and be proud of their success in our over crowded Britain. I can assure you, not everyone does!!



Birding Pals

by Kevin Elsby FRPS

I am very fortunate in that I travel extensively around the world in pursuit of my passion of watching and photographing wildlife. Although I am a tour leader for a wildlife tour company, and a speaker on cruise ships, I also travel independently with my wife to many destinations.

Sometimes I am very familiar with the place we are visiting, for example southern Spain or Mallorca. At other times, I may well not be, for example Cuba or the Seychelles.

In order to eliminate much of the logistics of finding wildlife, such as where to go, hiring a car, negotiating cities (very tricky in Havana with limited road signs) and the language difficulties, I have used a website called Birding Pals on several occasions over the last few years.

This is a website where members offer to guide visitors to their part of the world in search of wildlife. I have used the service in several parts of the world – Peru, Chile, Seychelles, Finland to name some, with great success. Not only does it increase the time you can set aside for wildlife watching and photography but it can lead to long-lasting friendships with the guides you use, as well as giving you a better understanding of the people and the culture of the country you are visiting.

The website address is <http://www.birdingpal.org> and for a nominal subscription fee, you can register and can then search for Birding Pals by clicking on a map of the world then ‘drilling down’ to the country you want. Some countries such as the USA and UK have a higher number of Birding Pals than others, and I have not been able to find guides at all for some destinations I have visited.

When you see a list of guides for your destination, it is a simple matter of contacting the guides via the Birding Pals website addresses, outlining your requirements (dates, venues, hit list of species, cost etc).

Many (most) of the guides are amateur nature enthusiasts, and in my experience have generally been excellent. Some countries also have professional guides who can be contacted and hired.

I have also acted as a Birding Pal guide myself in Norfolk, helping people from other parts of the world see the wildlife on our shores. It’s quite a nice feeling that you are giving something back to nature by letting others explore and enjoy what you have been doing for years.

With everything to do with the internet though, an element of caution is needed. Try and get as much information about the guide that you can and play it safe. Having said that, I have never had any surprises when I have used the service.

RPS Nature Group Residential Field Meeting

Slapton Ley Field Centre, Slapton, Kingsbridge, Devon. TQ7 2QP

2nd - 5th August 2019

Leader: James Foad LRPS

The 2019 Residential Field Weekend is now Fully Booked.

However, it is always possible that one or more of the participants may have to cancel due to circumstances not foreseen at the time of booking.

If you were interested in attending this Residential Field Meeting, please contact James and ask to be put on the waiting list.

Please contact:

James Foad LRPS

Email: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com

Phone: 07834 810430



Announcements & RPS NG Meetings

Dates for your diary

Entries Invited

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

February

Vale of Evesham National Exhibition

Digital Projected images

www.eveshamphoto.net

Entries close 28th February 2019

March

Basingstoke Camera Club Exhibition

Digital Projection (PDI)

www.basingstokecameraclub.co.uk

Entries close 2nd March 2019

South Birmingham Open Digital Exhibition

Digital Projection

www.southbirminghamphotographicsociety.co.uk

Entries close 3rd March 2019

April

Cheltenham International Salon of Photography

Digital Projection (PDI)

www.CheltenhamCameraClub.co.uk

Entries close 1st April 2019

Rushden Open Photographic Exhibition

Digital Projection

www.rushdenopen.co.uk

Entries close 7th April 2019

Robin Hood Open Digital Exhibition

Digital Projection (PDI)

www.robinhoodexhibition.co.uk

Entries close 20th April

Neath & District PS Salon

Digital Projection (PDI)

www.neathphotographicsociety.org

Entries close 21st April 2019

June

Winchester National Exhibition

Digital Projection

www.winphotosoc.co.uk

Entries close 30th June 2019

July

Beyond Group

Digital Projection (PDI)

www.beyondgroup.org.uk

Entries close in July - check website

Saturday February 23rd Welney Wetland Centre

The Ouse Washes, of which Welney Wetland Centre Reserve is part, host around 100,000 wildfowl and waders in winter. Whooper and Bewick's Swans, Hen Harriers, Barn Owls, Short-eared Owls, Peregrines and Merlins can be seen.
(<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/welney/>)

Ticket Price	With Gift Aid	Without Gift Aid
Adult	£8.70	£7.90
Concessions	£7.40	£6.72

For an extra £15 (and depending on the water level), you can use the basement of the main hide for photography at water surface level.

Meet in the Café at 10.30am for coffee and plans for the day. The swans are fed at 12 noon, 15.30 and 18.30pm. There is always extra action to photograph at the time of the feeds.

The majority of the swans fly in around sunset and on a fine evening are a great spectacle. The evening feed, lit by floodlight, is an opportunity for some creative work perhaps.

As well as photographing the swans and ducks, there are several hides to visit with opportunities to photograph a variety of Waders, Water Rail, Crane, Marsh Harriers and various other Raptors.

Welney will be running a Hare Walk at 2pm lasting about an hour. Although you are unlikely to get close enough for a good photograph, there is always a chance!! No additional cost as included in admission fee, but booking is essential as spaces are limited. Book in advance by calling 01353 860711 or email info.welney@wwt.org.uk.

Sunday February 24th Wicken Fen National Trust Nature Reserve

The target species for Wicken Fen at this time of the year are Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers, neither very predictable in their flight times and patterns.

If you would like to come and explore Wicken (there should be other species to photograph from the hides and banks), please email me for details. I will send you a detailed map, any entrance fees that will apply, car parking, timings to meet up with leaders, cafe times etc. This outing will be weather dependent.

Contact Ann Miles: ann@pin-sharp.co.uk

RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting 2019



Saturday 6th April 2019

**Smethwick Photographic Society
The Old Schoolhouse, Churchbridge, Oldbury,
West Midlands, B69 2AS**

for directions see below)

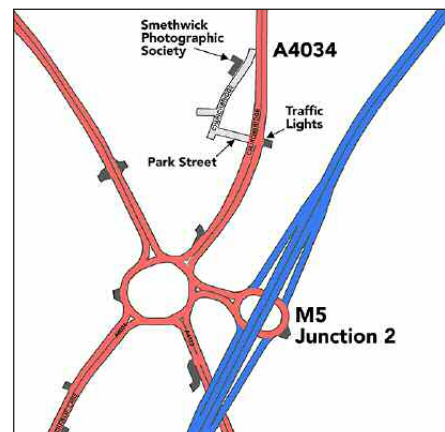
Programme:

- 10:00hrs** Doors open, tea and coffee available
10:30hrs **Welcome and Introduction**
10:40hrs **'Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks', Trevor Davenport ARPS**
11:40hrs Break
12:00hrs **'The Bizarre and Beautiful in the Insect World', Ann Miles FRPS**
- 13:00hrs** Break for lunch
Please bring your own packed lunch as lunch will not be available.
There is a dining area.
Tea, coffee and drinks will be available at the bar.
- 13:45hrs** **43rd Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group**
Agenda:
1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the 42nd AGM 2018 (printed in Issue 131 of 'The Iris')
3. Matters arising
4. Chairman's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Secretary's Report
7. Any Other Business
8. Date and Venue of the 44th AGM 2020
- 14:15hrs** **Opening of the 2019 Exhibition**
Presentation of the Awards
Projection of the accepted images
- 16:30hrs** **Close**

The accepted prints of the 2019 Exhibition will be on display throughout the day.

Directions:

From Junction 2 of the M5 follow the signs for the A4034 north towards West Bromwich.
Once on the A4034 stay in the left hand lane and after about 1/3 mile turn left at the first set of traffic lights into Park Street.
At the end of Park Street turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac).
The Old Schoolhouse is the last but one building on the left.
If you have SatNav use postcode: B69 2AS
Google Maps Coordinates: 52.497771, -2.019776
Although due to be finished in Spring 2019, the long running road works between Junctions 1 & 2 of the M5 may still be ongoing.
Members using this section of the M5 should check the status of the road works before travelling and allow extra time if necessary.



The Future of Field Meetings is in Your Hands

Dear Members

On behalf of the RPS Nature Group, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who hosted or supported one of the Nature Group meetings during the course of 2018, whether it was the Residential Courses, the Technique Days or the Field Meetings.

At the recent Chairman's Day, Duncan Locke kindly prepared a questionnaire, asking members who attended what they would like to see more of from the Nature Group. The most popular response was 'more Field Meetings'. However, these can only take place if members are willing and prepared to host such events.

RPS Nature Group Field Meetings have always been an integral part of the Nature Group's activities - they offer members the opportunity to meet other natural history photographers, to exchange ideas, as well as visiting sites of natural history interest which they might not know or would not normally access.

This is the time of year when I invite members to volunteer as field meeting leaders. I am urgently appealing to members to consider hosting a field meeting in 2019. If you know a site with interesting subjects to photograph, please consider becoming a leader - you are not expected to instruct others about photographic techniques or to be an expert at identifying the wildlife subjects. You just need to be familiar with the site. Date and time are up to you - it does not have to be at a weekend but can be any day of the week. Mid-week meetings are often very well attended as many members of the Nature Group are retired from full-time employment.

If you are tempted to volunteer but need more information, please contact me by email or complete the form below. Please get in touch as soon as possible before 10th March to ensure that we have sufficient time to advise the membership about the field meetings. I look forward to hearing from many of you.

Regards

Barbara E Lawton, FRPS, DPAGB

Email: rpsngprog@talktalk.net

Name:	Day, Date & Time:
Address:	Site Location
Telephone:	Meeting Place/Grid Ref/Post Code
Email:	Subjects of Interest
Please email this form before 10th March to Barbara Lawton FRPS at: rpsngprog@talktalk.net This form can also be downloaded from the Nature Group Members area of the RPS website: www.rps.org	Additional Information
	Cost: (eg Car Parking Fees)

Announcements

The Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2019



Saturday 6th April 2019

The Old Schoolhouse,
Churchbridge, Oldbury,
West Midlands B69 2AS

A DVD containing all of the accepted images in the 2019 Exhibition will soon be available.

Copies of the 2018 Exhibition DVD are still available to order 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 normal wear & tear. Currently costs £350 new.

Price £50



L Bracket for EOS 5D3/5DS/5DSR w/grip £10

L Bracket for Olympus OMD EM5 MkII £10

L Bracket for Olympus OMD EM1 MkI £10

All above L Brackets in excellent condition.

L Bracket for Canon 5D4.

very good condition, slight signs of use. **£10**

L Brackets enable quick changing of the camera from horizontal to vertical and back without the need to re-adjust your tripod and/or tripod head.

Wimberley Lens Plate P20 £25

Wimberley Lens Plate P30 £25

Kirk Lens Plate LP48 £20

Kirk Quick Release Plate for Nikon D70 £20

Lens plates show normal wear & tear.

When new they sell at approx. £60 each.

Prices do not include postage & packaging.

Email: Dawn Osborn at:
naturegroup_news_editor@btinternet.com

For Sale

Kata R-103 Photo Backpack



Black & gray exterior, thickly padded interior, YKK zippers, laptop compartment, carrying handle, tripod holder & waterproof cover. Holds a DSLR body with 300mm lens attached, 2nd body, up to 4 other lenses & accessories.

Exterior Dimensions: 36 x 20 x 53 cm (WxDxH)

Interior Dimensions: 33 x 15 x 45 cm

Weight: 3.74 lbs (1.7kg)

Brand new - never used. Purchased for £135.

Price £30 + p&p

Email Jeff at: zuckerhutl@yahoo.com

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 members nothing to advertise and the advert will be read by over 900 members of the Nature Group.

To advertise your items contact the Editor at:
naturegroup_news_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 mid January
Published early February.

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.

No payment will be made for material used. Submission of images assumes permission is given for their use in eNews. Authors should hold the copyright for any images submitted for use in eNews.

The views expressed within Nature Group eNews are solely those of the contributor and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or the Nature Group Committee.

Distribution:

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Director General of the Society;
Hon. Treasurer of the Society;
Chairman of the Nature A & F Distinctions Panel

Nature Group Exhibitions:

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