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ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY



Great Northern Diver - wing flap after preening by Edmund Fellowes FRPS

THE IRIS



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS
Issue No. 120 / Winter 2014

David Osborn FRPS invites you to join him on his Fabulous Falklands Photo-tour

Departing November 2015

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Contact David Osborn at:
Email: poppyland3@btinternet.com
Web: davidosbornphotography.co.uk

Chairman's Day 2014 Sunday 9th November 2014

10.30 hrs - 16.00 hrs

The Old Schoolhouse

Oldbury, West Midlands (nr Junction 2 of the M5)

Speakers:

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Trevor Davenport ARPS | - Treasures of the Sefton Coast |
| Geoff Trinder ARPS | - Photography my way |
| Chairman, Tony Bond FRPS | - Fungi - The Hidden Kingdom |

Two recent successful Fellowship panels will be on display -
the authors will be present to answer any questions.

Cost for the day: £16 including lunch, teas/coffees. Please advise of any special dietary requirements.

To obtain your tickets please send your cheque, made payable to 'RPS Nature Group',
plus a stamped self addressed envelope to:

Nature Group Chairman, Tony Bond FRPS, 9 Beech Drive, Leigh, Lancs WN7 3LJ

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Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied on CD as sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 ppi (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). If your image is selected for use on the cover of The Iris you will be requested to supply a file size with dimensions approx 3000 x 2000 pixels. All cover images will be in vertical format

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by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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by Edmund Fellowes FRPS
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Committee

Officers

Chairman: Tony Bond FRPS

Leigh, Lancs WN7 3LJ

Tel: 01942 674773 Email: anthony.bond39@btinternet.com

Secretary: Margaret Johnson LRPS

53 Mapperley Orchard, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8AH

Tel: 01159 265893 E-mail: m.jos@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Margery Maskell ARPS

Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 5DW

Email: rpsngtreasurer@virginmedia.com

Vice Chairman: Richard Revels FRPS

Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065 E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Immediate Past Chairman: John Bebbington FRPS

Langport, Somerset, TA10 9SE Tel: 01458 253027

Email: john.bebbingtonfrps@ukonline.co.uk

Committee Members

Editor of The Iris: Dawn Osborn FRPS

Dereham, Norfolk,

E-mail: iris_editor@btinternet.com

Exhibition Secretary: Ralph Snook ARPS

Bristol BS32 4EJ

E-mail: ralph.snook@btinternet.com

NG Rep to Advisory Panel: David O'Neill LRPS

Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6DG

Email: david.oneill@wildhorizons.uk.com

Programme Co-ordinator: Richard Revels FRPS

Biggleswade, Beds. SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065 E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Kevin Elsby FRPS

Aylsham, Norfolk,

Tel: 01263-732839 Email: wildlife@greenbee.net

John Jones ARPS

Kegworth, Derby, DE74 2FW

Tel: 01509 672125

Barbara Lawton FRPS

Wolverhampton, West Midlands, WV9 5QG

E-mail: barbara.lawton@talktalk.net

Sue McGarrigle LRPS

Worcester.

E-mail: sue@suemcgarrigle.co.uk

Geoff Trinder ARPS

Belton, Doncaster, DN9 1PG

Tel: 01427 872051

Ex officio Committee members

President of the Society;

Vice-President of the Society;

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 above.

Editorial

I recently had cause to bring our 'Code of Practice' to mind and our mission statement that 'The welfare of the subject is more important than the photograph'. I have recently returned from a trip to the Yellowstone and Tetons National Parks where I witnessed some of the worst behaviour I have ever seen regarding personal safety and potentially dangerous wildlife. But this was nothing compared with a tragic incident reported in a Jackson newspaper. September is the time of the rut, for Elk, Bison and Moose. In a meadow adjacent to a camp site, a Bull Moose was courting a cow. This event coincided with the arrival of a Grizzly Bear at another prime location for Moose, but due to irresponsible behaviour, Park Rangers closed access to this site to everyone. Unfortunately, when folks asked where they could see Moose, the Rangers directed them to the camp site which soon became inundated with people carrying cameras. What happened next is vague but it would seem that the bull's pursuit of the cow and the proximity of people, gave her only one escape route, into the campground. She fell over a picnic table and stepped into the iron grill of a barbecue, breaking her leg. The rangers were called and she had to be euthanised. If that was not sad enough, the calf, just months into its life, will likely not survive the winter without its mother. This news made me both sad and angry. Sad that such a magnificent animal had to die and angry that responsible wildlife photographers have been tarred with the same brush as the 'stop at nothing paparazzi'. Blame for this incident has been shifted back and forth - too many people, the noise of a truck starting up and the possibility that the cow's eyesight may have been impaired. I have no doubt that the series of incidents that began with the rash behaviour around the Grizzly Bear culminated in this sorry story. Whatever the cause, it is a story we can all learn from. Please distribute the 'Code of Practice' to other wildlife photographers when giving talks, etc. Copies can be obtained from the Secretary, Margaret Johnson LRPS.

Finally, our Annual Exhibition is coming up (entry form in this issue) - please do remember to enter.

Nominations are also required for new Committee members (see page 5). Don't be shy! We would love to have you join us. Also, keep sending in those articles. I have a couple in hand but more are required for the 2015 issues. Last but not least, I wish all our members a Happy New Year.



From the chair

Firstly I would like to welcome all the new members and particularly those from outside the UK. We pride ourselves on being the friendly group and I hope you all enjoy your membership even if you are unable to participate in any of our activities. The large number of new members has resulted in some of you failing to receive a copy of *The Iris* in your welcome pack for which I apologise. You are the victims of success and the print run for this edition has been increased as a consequence.

Here in Britain the mild, wet winter seems to be responsible for a wealth of orchids all over the country. I and a few other members were able to see and photograph Lady's Slipper at Gait Barrows NNR when they were at their best thanks to the local knowledge of Sheila and John Weir. Kew and Natural England have done a superb job not only in re-introducing this spectacular orchid which was once down to only one fully authenticated British plant but also making it possible for everyone who wishes to see it at Gait Barrows by just following the signs. I have never been a believer in conservation simply for its own sake as was once the trend. I have always considered that it is important to get people on your side by showing them why conservation matters.

The early spring had unintended consequences for the organisers of field meetings. Trevor Davenport tipped me off that some of the specialities at Ainsdale would be past their best by the time of his field meeting. There were unprecedented numbers of bee orchids two weeks before the meeting but the consolation was species such as Marsh Helleborine and Pyramidal Orchid which are normally found in only July. The latter used to be quite scarce at Ainsdale but was one of the first orchids we saw on entering the reserve. The meeting was well attended with some people travelling from afar to this superb location. I also went to the field meeting at the residence of Christine and Geoff Trinder which was over subscribed. Geoff had arranged some subjects for us to photograph under controlled conditions while Christine kept us well fed and watered. However one highlight for me was unexpected. Those of you who have been to the Trinder residence will know that there are several ponds and some sharp-eyed members spotted two emerging large red damselflies. This was something I had long wanted to photograph but had never been fortunate enough to see.

By now I hope that you will have examined the Definition of Nature Photography and considered whether it has any impact on your work. I should add at this point that it came as a surprise to the committee and it was pure coincidence that it coincided with the articles on cheating by Richard Nicoll. No genuine nature photographer could disagree with the guiding principle of the Definition that it is totally unacceptable to create an image by combining elements from two or more files. I have always believed that the purpose of nature photography is to produce images of significance to the naturalist. This has now been lost and replaced in the exhibition world by the pursuit of sensational images which win medals and letters. A few years ago exhibitions were awash with pictures of flying birds - one of the reasons why we have separate sections in our exhibition for subjects which move and those which don't. However, as Dawn wrote in the previous edition of *The Iris*, when the detail of the Definition is examined significant difficulties arise. This is particularly evident with respect to cloning. In past years we had to physically remove distractions before exposure whereas we can now do it electronically after exposure, resulting in less disturbance and/or damage to the environment - many subjects will simply leave the scene if they are disturbed. I have yet to meet a member who objects to the removal of distractions by cloning. It is altering reality by adding elements which is unacceptable. Fiona McKay has been probing deeper into the Definition and you will find her thoughts elsewhere in this edition. She is right to point out the confusion over plants. Would my images of the Lady's Slipper, raised at Kew and planted out in Lancashire, be considered acceptable? Many people find it strange that zoo animals are allowed. Perhaps I should go to Chester zoo rather than Gait Barrows. Also, the Definition says nothing about cute titles so presumably they are acceptable even though they render the image of no value to the naturalist. Of course, if you are not interested in entering exhibitions you can just do your own thing, but if you think that exhibitions on the BPE circuit are a refuge think again - one member in a better position to pass an opinion than most has said that they are "tarnished by favouritism, cronyism and nepotism".

Enough of this gloom and despondency. I hope to meet many of you at my Chairman's Day on the 9th of November.

Tony

The Nature Group invites members to host Field Meetings

I should like to begin by thanking all those members of the Nature Group who led and hosted a Field Meeting during 2014. Most meetings were quite well attended and the weather was much kinder to us this year than last. The early and warm seasons meant that some of the targeted species were becoming past their best this year, but nevertheless there was still plenty of good subject matter to photograph.

I managed to attend three of the meetings, and at the Malham Tarn meeting managed to add a new species of orchid to my library of images, the Heath Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia borealis*, which I do not get in my home region.

Now is the time to plan the calendar for next years Nature Group's Field Meetings, so please don't leave it to others to lead these meetings which are an integral part of the Group's activities.

If you have a suitable wildlife site with interesting subjects in your area, please consider becoming a leader - you will not be expected to instruct others about photographic techniques or be an expert at identifying all the wildlife found. As many members of the Nature Group are retired, mid-week meetings are often very well attended.

To ensure entry into the Spring Issue of The Iris details should be sent to me before the end of January 2015.

Please contact me if you wish to discuss your ideas.

Richard Revels FRPS
73 London Road
Biggleswade, Bedfordshire
SG18 8EE

Tel: 01767 313065
E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

RPS Nature Group - Field Meeting 2015 Please return this form before 31st January 2014

Location _____

Meeting Place _____

Grid Reference _____

Leader _____

Day & date _____

Cost (eg car parking) _____

Subjects of interest _____

Items to bring:

(tick as applicable and add any other necessary items).

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stout Shoes | <input type="checkbox"/> Wellingtons |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterproofs | <input type="checkbox"/> Packed Lunch |

Additional information

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____

E mail: _____

Field Meeting Report

Bempton Cliffs 5th July 2014

Bempton Cliffs RSPB Reserve receives approximately 200,000 bird visitors a year from the end of April through to the middle/end of August. They come to breed and rear their young. The various species of birds can be seen from five viewing platforms erected at locations along the cliff top. The guano, which is the bird droppings, can be smelt all along the cliffs!

It was nice to see eight Nature Group members in attendance at Bempton Cliffs RSPB shop, some old friends and some new. The day started rainy and overcast so we enjoyed a hot drink indoors while having a short briefing - during this time the rain stopped! We set out onto the Cliffs and headed northwards towards Filey. The first indication of bird life was the call of the Kittiwakes (and the strong smell of guano!), but at the first viewing platform there was not much evidence of the presence of Gannets or Puffins. We continued northwards to the next of three viewing platforms where it soon became clear that there was plenty of subject matter to photograph including Gannets (*Morus bassanus*) and Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*). Many Puffins leave the cliffs early to feed, spending most of their day on the sea, while those with Pufflings, the Puffin chicks, stay near the burrow. We didn't see any Pufflings as they stay hidden underground and fledge at night or in the early hours of the daylight. We also saw and photographed Guillemots (*Uria aalge*), Razorbills (*Alca torda*) and Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*).

A few of the group managed to make it as far as the last viewing platform which was like a mini multi storey, but only two levels! While a few of us were happy taking photos of the Gannets in flight at eye level and above, we also managed to photograph Gannets landing. I managed to make it to the last viewing platform just before the lunch break and with time to photograph a Gannet feeding its fluffy chick.

Following our lunch at the RSPB shop the sky brightened up and we saw the sun. We decided to go south toward Flamborough Head where there were two more viewing platforms. On our way there I found and photographed a very nice Five-Spotted Burnet Moth (*Zygaena trifolii*). Butterflies were seen on route, including Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*), Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*) and plenty of Ringlets (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) but they were too active for photography.

After about an hour or so most of us headed north back along the cliff and were rewarded with shots of Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*). Back at the first viewing point I managed to capture a shot of a Puffin which had just taken off. After taking more inflight shots of the Gannets it was time for another cup of tea and to leave for home or go back to our B & Bs.

Nominations for Committee welcomed

The Nature Group Committee welcomes nominations from any member who feels they could assist in the running of the group by performing a role or because they have a particular skill to offer. Being a committee member requires a willingness to assist with a variety of events and/or tasks plus attendance at Committee meetings (held 2 or three times a year, usually but not exclusively at Smethwick P.S. Clubrooms, near to Junction 2 of the M5).

If you would like to be more involved in the running of your group, or know someone who would, please email the Chairman, Secretary or Editor as soon as possible. (Email addresses on page 2). A Nomination Form will be emailed to you. The form must be returned before the end of November. Elections will take place at the 2015 Annual General Meeting.

The Gambia

by Jon Ashton

The Gambia is just a small country – approximately 11,000 km² with a population of between 1.5 and 2.0 million people. It is situated on the west coast of Africa and surrounded by the much larger country of Senegal. The entire country lies below 100m and is approximately 330 km long by 25–30 km wide, the Gambia River runs through the centre of the country and is tidal for about 200 km. Mangroves grow over most of the river banks and many low lying swamp areas, accounting for as much as 30% of the country.

The Gambia was a British colony until 1965 when it gained independence and became the Republic of The Gambia in 1970. Most of the population is Muslim and approximately 25% is Christian. The people are very friendly and they love the British people. Most of the tourists are British, followed probably by the Dutch. You must remember the people in Gambia are, in general, rather poor and so whenever you are offered assistance with baggage, directions, drinks or food, etc a tip is anticipated and often requested.

A full passport with more than six months validity is required, along with immunisation for yellow fever, (not essential but a good idea), tetanus, hepatitis c, polio, diphtheria and tablets for the prevention of malaria. It is a good idea to go to your GP a couple of months before departure, there you will be able to request a form to complete regarding immunisation, the practice nurse will be able to review your records and destination and then determine precisely what will be required.

Hand luggage allowance was 5kg and hold allowance 20kg (beware sometimes it is 15kg). I packed the minimum amount of clothing, that which could easily be washed and dried in order to save space in the hand luggage. In my suitcase I packed my camera rucksack which contained cleaning materials, flash gun and 17-40mm lens along with extension tubes and teleconverters. I wore a photographer's vest and in this I carried two camera bodies, a 180mm macro lens and 100-400mm zoom lens, I also carried spare batteries and compact flash cards. The 500mm lens was carried as hand luggage in a tailored rucksack that I could carry on my back. Once I had got through baggage inspection I could place the macro and zoom

lens in the side pockets so it was easy to carry and I did not have a vest swinging around all over the place. I am often asked how many memory cards I take, each time I have visited I have required slightly less but I think if you carried something like 120GB you would have plenty for 1 week. On the last trip I came back with about 80GB of images. In the evenings we usually went through the day's shoot and deleted the out of focus/poorly exposed/duplicated images so the compact flash cards tended to last a little longer than might have been initially expected. I found 32GB cards to be very convenient and I do not have any hang ups about card reliability, I used Lexar, Sandisc Transcend and Kingston in speeds of 300x to 800x. The mainstay camera was a Canon 7D and the buffer is 21 raw images so I never encountered any problems with card speed or buffer size..

On my first visit I took sterling travellers cheques and £50 worth of Dalasis – you will get a better exchange rate in your hotel. The second and third visits I took cash, it is much quicker to exchange and also a better exchange rate. As might be expected there is a variety of hotels ranging from what might be loosely referred to as 2* to 5* rating, comparatively speaking, costs are low. Hotel food ranges from fair to very good though it may prove highly repetitive – so the answer is move around, go to the hotel next door or to a well frequented restaurant. On one trip we had “Banjul belly” for one day only and none of us were ill; it did not prevent us from going anywhere or, more importantly, from pressing the shutter button.

We stayed at the Hotel Senegambia, its accommodation was adequate for our needs, there are different rooms available and slightly more up market rooms are available at the hotel next door - the Kairaba. In a nutshell I would say accommodation and food in this location is acceptable to good.

The Gambia has a tropical climate and there are two distinct seasons though there is no sharp division between them. The wet season is approximately June to September and the dry season runs from October to May. For our first two trips we decided to visit at the very end of November/beginning December, so the dry season had started and logically this meant

that birds would often be attracted to water, and we anticipated a good deal of hide photography which was near to water – but more of that later.

In total I have visited The Gambia three times - in January/February 2014 and November of both 2012 and 2010. In 2014 the climate was idyllic, it was in the upper 20's and was not humid, so walking around with photographic gear was never a problem. The previous trips in November were a different cup of tea altogether. I will not dwell upon the geography and climate further, but I would advise you that, speaking as an Englishman, it is incredibly hot and humid; walking with a rucksack full of camera gear, plus a 500mm mounted on a tripod is not much fun at 36°C and 80–90% humidity! Having said that it is not always necessary to walk far with all the gear, it depends upon where you go and what you hope to photograph.

So far I think I may have portrayed a slightly less than inviting scenario but hopefully some of the images associated with this article will convince you otherwise. I regard The Gambia as an absolute gem from a bird photographer's perspective. Sunshine is more or less guaranteed from 7am to 6pm - with occasionally a few wispy clouds in a blue sky. As might be expected the best light is in the morning and afternoon - from around 12pm to 2pm the sun is high in the sky and can make for harsh shadows. There are something like 600 different bird species that may be seen at differing times of the year, mammals are considerably fewer but there are plenty of insects for those interested in macro photography.

£600 or less will get you a return flight to The Gambia for one week, and includes bed & breakfast at the hotel and transfer fees. As a guide, an evening meals cost from 250 to 850 Dalasis and drinks are cheap - the local beer is £1-2 per pint depending upon the time (there are happy hours when it is less). As is the case with all locations it pays to look thoroughly on the internet before you place a booking, there are excellent bargains to be had.

We concentrated on locations within a one hour drive from the hotel. We did not travel up the River Gambia, which is where most tourists go, because we only made one week visits and wanted to minimise our travelling time. The simplest way of getting around is to hire a taxi from outside the hotel. We hired a battered old Nissan four wheel drive (which turned out to be two wheel drive - yes we got stuck



Pied Kingfisher



Western Reef Heron



Senegal Thick-knee



Squacco Heron



Red-billed Hornbill



Abyssinian Roller



Little Bee-eater

in mud at one point - you soon learn never to assume anything in The Gambia! It is relatively cheap to hire a taxi - 2100 Dalasis approx for the day (about 64 Dalasis to £1.00). The venues we visited are all well known by the taxi drivers and of course the numerous bird guides. We tended not to hire bird guides and took tips from bird watchers and photographers for the best venues. Abuko forest is generally regarded as a must go to place but we have been twice and were bitterly disappointed. The forest has not been maintained, the hides have just about collapsed and the water holes were overgrown. After walking around the forest in high heat and humidity for relatively few images was most disappointing. There is a large pond by the visitor centre which can be a good location - but that is about it from my experience. Whilst driving from one location to another you will see numerous photographic opportunities - villages, people or market places etc. The local people, especially the women, do not usually like having their photograph taken, so if you want portraits it is a good idea to ask first and as might be expected after a few Dalasis have changed hands a photo will be possible. Here are some of the venues we visited - and a couple we didn't:

The Abuko Forest Reserve - 25-35 minutes inland

A forest reserve with a central oasis, a pool overlooked by a balconied hide and a good network of paths mean that this is 'a must' for any visit to the Gambia in any season. Turacos, Greenbuls, Paradise Flycatchers, Wattle-Eyes and a crowd of Kingfishers are all regulars as are Red Colobus Monkeys which are rare elsewhere. As previously mentioned, my personal experience of Abuko forest has not been good - to walk around the whole reserve (to ensure you don't miss anything) takes several hours and can be testing especially when carrying a large rucksack of gear and a tripod mounted with a camera and 500mm lens when temperatures are in the 30s Celsius with 90% humidity and you find all the specialised photographic facilities have gone to ruin. We did not visit the local rice fields as we did not engage a guide but we have since learned this can be very advisable.

Brufut Forest - 45 minutes from the coast

A dense dry scrubby forest which has a good web of paths and which is home to the Legendary Dr Owl, a local ornithologist whose profession is to locate the nesting and roosting Verraux's Eagle Owls, the White-faced Scops Owls and the resting spots of the Long-tailed Nightjar. You can observe the latter from about 3m without disturbing them - incredible! Brufut is always worth a visit in conjunction with Tanji and

woodland around the village produces a wide variety of birds. This area was managed by WABSA: Birdfinders and the Exmoor Falconry Centre have funded the reserve which has a well and a hide to enable visitors to view the Verraux's Eagle Owls which breed in the area. I understand that the area is now being managed by a local community group with the intention that all the revenue will go direct to the community. We did not visit the forest but we did go around the periphery, the reason being that light is very limited in the forest and it was unlikely we would get decent uncluttered views of subjects.

Tanji Reserve - 30-40 minutes from the coast
Dry scrubland and forest with sandy paths that lead to a beach side lagoon. A mecca for sunbirds and many other species, including many migrant warblers and gamebirds. The coast is great for waders, terns, gulls and ospreys. Another 'must visit' location in any season. Tanji Bird Reserve is an officially protected area of The Gambia and is only about 5 minutes drive from the Kotu Bridge area. The reserve is just over 6 square kilometres and encompasses a wide range of different habitat types from beach, tidal lagoons, mangrove swamp, coastal scrub and dry savannah woodland. The reserve also protects Bijilo Island which is The Gambia's only offshore island lying about 1.5 kilometres from the coast. The island is a nesting site for numerous birds. We did not visit the island due to time constraints and besides which there were ample opportunities on the beach.

Bund Road, once a primary site, previously had good times there but now the road has been completely rebuilt and is used by faster traffic, I would no longer give this site my recommendation for safety reasons.

Denton Bridge/Lamin Lodge - 30 minutes inland
A mangrove cruise awaits as do ospreys, pelicans, herons, egrets, caspian terns and blue-cheeked bee-eaters. In two or three hours you can enjoy a leisurely and safe journey into the creeks where spoonbills and yellow-billed storks can also be seen. The craft vary depending on the party's size - from dug-out canoes to a large cruiser with all facilities, lunch and a rooftop viewing platform.

Brufut Woods turns out to be a very good place for birding. It contains areas of undisturbed savannah woodland attracting many different types of species. Light or the lack of it tends to pose a problem and very often the birds are located in highly contrasting surroundings.



Black Kite



Speckled Pigeon



Broad-billed Roller



Osprey



Caspian Tern



Grey-headed Gull



Pied Crow

Kotu Bridge, Kotu sewage ponds & Casino cycle track area consists of a series of open sewage pits, rice fields and the nearby golf course. The pits are separated from the road by about 50 metres of open woodland and can be reached along a sandy track. The range of birds seen at the pond is amazing and they will all allow you to get fairly close to them. In the area itself and in the rice fields a lot of different bird species can be found. This area is where most photographers and birders go at some time, it tends to get busy and you will be continually harassed to engage the "best guide" - so beware!

Camalou Corner, is very worthwhile in November especially it is very good for waders, herons kingfishers and black kites, many terns and bee eaters, many other species may also be seen.

Marakissa River Camp is excellent and it is now easily accessible as there is a road as opposed to track for most of the journey. Here you can hire a canoe and paddle up the River Marakissa which is very shallow, numerous waders, herons cormorants and kingfishers are present on the river banks as well as raptors flying overhead. Paddling on the river is very pleasant but if there is a breeze I would warn you that sitting behind a tripod 500mm lens on a wobbly canoe can be nerve racking as well as extremely difficult. Lunch can be ordered at the lodge and it is a welcome break in the heat of the day. There is a cafe area and an area under cover where you can watch birds at close quarters as they come down to feed and drink. In addition to bird photography there are good macro opportunities especially in November.

In addition to these sites it is very worthwhile spending time in the hotel grounds and that of the adjacent hotels. The birds there are fairly used to people and many are quite approachable, I can guarantee you will see and be able to photograph many species ranging from Kites and Vultures to Cattle Egrets to beautiful Sunbirds and Mannakins. The vultures and kites are fed at 11.30am daily at the Hotel Senegambia and provides great photo opportunities but you must remember that the sun is fairly high and it is only occasionally that you will get images of birds with the under wing well illuminated. There are also Red Colobus Monkeys and Green Vervet Monkeys, Monitor Lizards and Sgama Lizards. We generally spent the first day in the hotel grounds in order to acclimatise to the weather and take it easy after the journey.

Driving from one location to another was noticeably easier in 2014, whilst not all roads are anything like perfect there has been a big improvement and we soon found ourselves at the various destinations. The four wheel drive was open backed but had a tarp over the back so we never got sunburnt and I always used sunblock. I usually wore T shirts and shorts during the day and lightweight trousers in the evenings. Insects were not troublesome - they are there in abundance in certain areas but they are not the ones you would want to be in anyway! Driver ants can sometimes be seen when crossing through various paths through woods. By all means look at them - they are fascinating - but take my advice and do not let them come into contact with your skin. The larger ants have large and powerful jaws and can inflict a painful bite but more importantly this can lead to a serious infection, so be warned. Mosquitoes were not usually a problem, I doubt if I was bitten more than six times in three separate trips.

If you do consider going to The Gambia for a nature photography holiday and you would like to ask any questions please feel free to contact me by email: jonathanmashton@gmail.com



Red Capuchin



Pied Hornbill



Green Vervet Monkey



Yellow Epauletted Fruit Bat



Hooded Vultures

A Fellowship in Bird behaviour

by Edmund Fellowes

Since earliest childhood I have been fascinated by birds. I started bird photography, and also bird ringing, when still at school. My first serious project was the study of Reed Warblers rearing a Cuckoo in a reed bed now, sadly, obliterated by the M3. The films were developed in the school darkroom and the prints, augmented by text, pasted into a notebook and submitted for a schoolboy competition. I won a bird book! There was no advice from anyone, but I was armed with the book "With Nature and a Camera" by the Kearton brothers, published in 1898. This gave a few tips, mostly about photographing seabirds on St Kilda, and how to cooperate with game keepers, but they also showed a hide and some pictures of wild birds. I made a hide of hessian and with my folding Kodak '66' and a close up lens, I put the hide exactly 18 inches from the Reed Warblers nest. Virtually any other species of bird would have abandoned the nest, but Reed Warblers like a very enclosed nest site, wrapped about by reeds, and so took no notice of the curious addition to the reed bed.

School was followed by six years in London. Nature had to take second place to the necessity of study and then of earning a living, and lack of funds made bird photography out of the question. I did however make regular trips to the bird observatory on Bardsey Island in North Wales, where I joined a group of like-minded students. Birds were never far from my thoughts.

In 1970 I went to work in Zambia for a year, and by now I had purchased an SLR - a Pentax S1A. It was entirely mechanical but with my Westonmaster light meter and its accompanying Invercone, I was back into bird photography, now with 35mm coloured slides on Kodachrome 25.

On my return to Britain, I came to live in Dumfries, where there was, and is, a flourishing Camera Club, of which I have now been a member for 43 years. The club had three members who were established bird watchers and photographers who taught me how to do things properly. I joined the Nature Photographic Society to get some feedback



on my monochrome prints; then after a few years joined the Nature Photographers Portfolio (NPP) which at that time circulated a box of slides.

I was lucky to travel to Shetland and then to Portugal, but most of my bird photography happened in Dumfriesshire, where I still live. I have made bird watching trips to South America, and photography trips to Africa, The Falkland Islands and Scandinavia. Bird watching and bird photography are different sports, but while bird watching I am always on the lookout for photographic opportunities. I like nothing better than to see such an opportunity and then work out how to get a hide in place, and to sit with the excitement that the birds may (or may not) cooperate.

Over the years various friends have suggested that I might have a go at an ARPS, but I was happy simply to show my pictures to bird watching and photographic clubs. Then my friend Mick Durham FRPS, with whom I do a lot of my photography, applied for his RPS distinctions and I was spurred into action. I submitted some of my best images for the 'A' and I subsequently regretted this as they could not be resubmitted in my panel for the 'F'. I had to collect a new selection of images. Fortunately some were already in the computer, and now retired I had time for further local projects. Trips to Iceland, Norway and Spitzbergen provided more.

Eventually I had twenty new images of birds in action, showing various aspects of their behaviour. Of these 13 are from Dumfriesshire, 4 from Iceland, and one each from Hungary, Spitzbergen and Norway. Only the Hungarian Hawfinches are from a situation which I did not develop for myself, but they sit so symmetrically in the middle of the top row, showing some fierce confrontation between the two male birds, that I was pleased to include them.

I give many of my pictures to the British Trust for Ornithology - a charity organising "citizen science" research into British birds. Among other projects the BTO has counted heron colonies all over the UK for more than 70 years, and organises counts of birds which provide details on a national scale of the ups and downs of bird populations. Much conservation work is based on their findings. I take part every year in several of these enquiries. The BTO needs a lot of bird images for their magazines and leaflets which it distributes to the 30,000 bird recording volunteers. Their activities are best reviewed on the BTO website at www.bto.org.

I hope that you will have enjoyed looking at my illustrations of the life adventures of these beautiful creatures. I continue to find delight in birds, and to photograph their activities, especially close to home.





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11

- 1 Siskins fighting.
- 2 Great Tit landing
- 3 Redstart with raised wings showing moult.
- 4 Grey Phalaropes mating
- 5 Grey Heron preening under wing
- 6 Whinchat landing
- 7 Long-tailed Tit collecting feathers
- 8 Siskin confronting Goldfinch
- 9 Sparrowhawk male display at plucking post
- 10 Great Northern Diver wing flap after preening
- 11 Whooper Swan end of Triumph display
- 12 Black-tailed Godwit feeding in snow.
- 13 Black-headed Gulls nest building
- 14 Goosander with Lamprey
- 15 Harlequin drake swimming in torrent
- 16 Barrow's Goldeneye taking off





Statement of Intent

I am a life long birdwatcher. I strive to share my enthusiasm with other people, and to show them the beauty and the wonder of the life of birds. My panel of pictures shows Scottish birds, varying from the very common to the more hard to find. Many of them were photographed in places where birds are used to people and can be readily approached. Some of these locations were in Norway, where species scarce in Scotland are sometimes more numerous. About half of these pictures were obtained within a couple of miles of my home in Dumfriesshire. Much of the enjoyment of my photography comes from the preparatory bird watching.

I frequently use hides in order to photograph birds in action. I take great care that my bird watching and photography does not disrupt the activities of the birds, as they go about their natural lives. When photographing birds, protected under Schedule 1 of the Protection of Birds Act, near their nests, I always obtain a permit from Scottish Natural Heritage.



60 Degrees North



by Kevin and Margery Maskell

Great Skua in aggressive stance - MM

At 60 degrees north lies an archipelago of over a hundred islands that make up the Shetlands, of which only 15 are inhabited. Located 110 miles north-north-east of the mainland of Scotland, the Shetland Islands are closer to the Arctic Circle than to London.

Access to the mainland is via air or ferry. The companies that run the small 34 seat aircraft have hand luggage dimensions that can be quite a bit smaller than normal airlines and the allowances also vary between the different carriers. These planes depart from several Scottish airports. The other method is by an overnight ferry which departs from Aberdeen, and on some days, stops at the Orkney Islands en-route.

For us, with big heavy lenses, the ferry was the obvious choice. It is a 600 mile trip for us to drive to Aberdeen, so we completed the journey over two days, stopping somewhere on the Northumberland coast overnight. Whilst there, we were on the lookout for photographic opportunities along the coast, and the Kittiwakes in Dunbar.

Both our trips have been in June and have consisted of a week on one of the photographic tours that are available from a variety of tour companies, plus a few extra days by ourselves. We used Shetland Wildlife

Holidays with Hugh Harrop. The advantage of going on this tour was to get to some places that we couldn't get to by ourselves, as Hugh had permission to go into restricted areas.

Central and South Mainland

After leaving the port of Lerwick, we travelled south, stopping at the bay next to the Tesco store, to photograph the Grey and Common Seals basking on the rocks.

A boat trip from Lerwick to the island of Noss, for the Gannets, Guillemots and Shags, on the east facing 592 feet high cliffs. This was one of the occasions where being part of a group was an advantage, as we were taken out early morning, before the public boat trips started. In addition, the eight of us were the only ones on the boat, and Hugh got the skipper to move his boat into positions ideal for photography.

The trip to the island of Mousa, an RSPB Nature Reserve, and a bit further south, was another good example of being part of a group. The boat took us to the island in the morning, and we were collected when the first public trip arrived. This allowed us to see the Black Guillemots on the cliffs before they flew out to sea. Whilst there, we also saw Arctic

Terns, Great Skuas, and the Red-throated Divers. As Mousa is also the home of the Storm Petrels, which nest in the old brock and in the surrounding stone walls, we made a special trip out to the island again that evening. These birds only come in to land at night, so we needed to be at the brock by dusk, and then wait very quietly for them. It was still dark when we left, therefore torches were a must. We used head band torches, to keep our hands free.

Sumburgh Head, a RSPB Nature Reserve, is on the top of the cliffs, on the southern tip of the mainland. On our walk up from the car park we stopped to look down on the Guillemot and Razorbill colonies. Higher up the cliff were Fulmars and Puffins. They flew past very close, enabling us to get some good close-up shots. Sometimes it was possible to see the Great Skua and the Arctic Skua flying around as well as the gulls. On the stone walls small birds, like the Wren and Wheatear could be found. During the last couple of years access has been restricted due to a lot of building work going on but this should have been completed by the time you read this.

The small beaches and bays were good for Dunlins, Sanderlings, Turnstones, Plovers, Eider and Shelduck.



Sanderling in summer plumage - MM



Fulmar - KM

Black Guillemot - KM





Common Seal - KM

The islands

The islands are accessed via interlinking vehicle ferries. These are normally booked in advance, but one could take a chance and try to get on the first one that is not full.

Travelling north, we took the ferry over to the island of Yell. Here can be found Butterwort and Sundew. From the other end of Yell, there is a ferry service to Fetlar or Unst.



Puffin - KM

Fetlar is the place to go for the Red-necked Phalarope and the Red-throated Diver, on the Loch of Funzie. It can be a long wait and there is no guarantee that they will be there. Unfortunately, access to part of the loch is restricted, so we were not able to walk around it.

Unst is the most northerly inhabited island. Here, the Keen of Hamer a National Nature Reserve, is a Serpentine rock that has been weathered to produce angular stones. In this barren landscape are some rare plants - Norwegian Sandwort, Northern Rock Cress, and Edmondston's Chickweed. Other plants include Frog Orchids, which are not easy to find as they may be only about 75 mm high when in flower.



Oystercatcher with chicks at nest on post - KM

Hermaness, another National Nature Reserve, is about a 2 Kilometres walk from the car park, over the headland to the cliffs, which rise up to 170 metres. Whilst there we could look down on the Gannet colonies, and get close-ups of Puffins. From the cliff tops, it is possible to see whales and dolphins. On the opposite headland, we were taken to a restricted area to photograph Great Skuas.

As we travelled around the Shetlands, we always had a camera ready to take pictures, in case we came across birds on posts, fence wires or in the fields. This was also the case on the coast, whilst on the lookout for otters. We did see one in the distance, but it was on the only afternoon that we had heavy driving rain.



Gannet collecting nesting material - MM



Oystercatcher - MM

Australian Bird Life

by Neil Anderton ARPS AFIAP



Galahs - male and female

My interest with wildlife goes back a long time. It started with a visit to a photographic exhibition at the Melbourne Town Hall in the late 1950's which I attended with my brother. The images that caught my attention were a collection of B&W Nature Prints of mostly African animals.

It wasn't until the early 1970's while working for an Airline in Victoria and doing a few overseas trips that my interest was rekindled. At that time I had just bought a new Canon FTB with a standard 50mm f/1.4 lens and a 200mm tele lens. This was OK but it wasn't giving me the results that I required for



Crescent Honeyeater - male



Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater



Scarlet Robin - male



Spotted Pardalote - male



Sacred Kingfisher with Skink



Rainbow Bird

making quality 16 x 20" prints. In the days prior to digital my camera of choice was a Hasselblad 500 CM & 500 ELM with lenses from 80mm up to a 500mm APO Tele Tessar. With the advent of today's digital SLRs and Lenses image quality is compatible and much more user friendly.

I have been photographing wildlife now for over 40 years, mostly birds, and getting to know their habits. For example, Honeyeaters, watching them feed on various trees and shrubs. I remember watching a Yellow-tufted Honeyeater feeding on a certain type of bush and 100 metres away other Honeyeaters like the White-plumed were feeding on a different type of bush. In hot summer weather all the Honeyeaters and various other small birds in the area will come in together to drink at a stream or even a small puddle of water following rain.

I have covered many thousands of kms travelling in Australia in the quest to find and photograph some of our feathered friends. The weather within Australia has a big bearing on seeing and photographing birds. In my opinion the best time of the year is from late March if we receive good rain, through to late December, the remaining months are just far too hot and dry.

Some of my interesting photography occurred in late March last year after a good rain event where water had filled a depression in a tree fallen trunk this provided an excellent opportunity to photograph a group of our more common species such as Honeyeaters, Robins, Thornbills, Treecreepers & Whistlers. What a great location just 6 km from home to the small car park plus a further .5 km walk to this location in the bush. Last year at a small National Park a short distance from home I photographed 3 of our most colourful Robins a Flame, Red-capped and Scarlet. All 3 are most attractive little birds.

At the present time I am using Canon equipment for all of my nature work with lenses from 17mm up to my EF600mm f/4L IS Lens but, just to confuse things, I also have 3 Nikon DSLR cameras with lenses from AF-S17mm f/2.8 up to a AF300mm f/2.8D lens.



Red-capped Robin - male



Red-necked Avocet



Regent Bowerbird



Tawny Frogmouth and chicks

British Wildlife - an Associateship Panel

Andrew McCarthy ARPS

I began photography as an enthusiastic teenager in the early 1970's and over the years I have explored a wide range of genres, including travel, landscape, street and nature photography. During the last few years I have focused mainly on nature and, in 2010, I joined the RPS with the intention of improving my technique in this area, by working towards my Licentiateship.

In early 2011 I was delighted to pass my Licentiateship assessment at the first attempt with a panel of natural history images and, encouraged by this success, I started working towards the Nature Associateship. Just before Christmas 2011 I emailed a draft panel of potential images to Tony Wharton for his thoughts, together with a draft Statement of Intent. Tony pulled no punches. He felt that only two images were of 'A standard' and that the rest were a considerable distance off the level needed. Licking my wounds, I

did what I suspect a number of other budding 'L' and 'A' photographers with dented pride have done - I left my RPS membership un-renewed and spent the next year working on other projects.

In late 2012, I rejoined the RPS with the intention of working towards my 'A'. This time I realized that if wanted to succeed I would need to change my style from a previously rather 'pictorial' approach towards one with a more technical, natural-history focus. This time, I decided, I would treat the exercise like a professional assignment and concentrate on improving my technique to the point where I could submit with a good prospect of success.

Whilst I have travelled and photographed abroad on many occasions and thoroughly enjoyed it, I felt at the outset that my panel should consist of British wildlife images, since this most closely reflects my



Grey Squirrel feeding on acorns

personal natural history background. A British-oriented panel then, with a focus on my home locality of Devon, would also allow me to maximize my time in the field (and thus improve my technique) whilst also enabling me to juggle a busy full time job as a consultant ecologist.

It was at this point that I began to research the technical standard underpinning the Associateship. I started by looking at successful panels in 'The Iris' and then by attending an assessment day at Fenton House. The technical standard of images that day was impressive but I was encouraged by the fact that some of my more recent shots seemed to me to be 'up to standard'. The key lessons I took from this process - especially from the assessment day - were that my images would need to be pin sharp, 'illustrative' rather than 'pictorial', have sufficient depth of field to show critical biological elements clearly and, ideally, be well-composed and with clean backgrounds. They would also need to demonstrate a range of shooting techniques, a mastery of lighting and be nicely exposed with no loss of detail through clipped highlights. Processing, printing and mounting would obviously need to be of the highest order. I also added a self-imposed criteria - that as many images as possible in my new panel would need to display some element of animal behaviour - for example feeding or reproductive activity - rather than being simple static portraits. All in all a pretty challenging task!

Spring and early summer 2013 saw me refining my shooting, post-production and printing techniques and trying to maximize my rather limited time in the field by carefully researching sites where I might expect to find the types of species I wanted in my panel (with one of the best sites turning out to be our back garden!) I continued shooting through summer 2013 towards a nominal 2015 submission date until mid-August, when I attended an inspiring invertebrate workshop in Shropshire run by John Bebbington and attended by Robert Hawksworth (both of whom are respected Fellows and RPS Nature Distinction Panel members). Their comments on my images were very positive and both suggested that instead of waiting till 2015 I should organize my assessment right away. The next available date was 19 March 2014 and so, with some trepidation, I went ahead and booked.

I realized after speaking with John and Robert that for a visually cohesive panel I would ideally need between 40 to 50 shots of 'A' quality from which to choose, so,



Fox vixen and cub socialising



Fox with rabbit prey



Grey seal bull



Red deer during rut



Adder



Slow Worm



Large red damselfly

in addition to shooting specifically for a new panel, I began to trawl my back catalogue to see if any of my older images could be included. By the end of the year, I was confident I had the required number of images to set about preparing a decent panel and the early part of the new year saw me experimenting with various layouts, shooting new images and agonizing over whether the resultant panels were balanced or not! John Bebbington, who acted as a patient mentor throughout this process, offered excellent advice on both the technical standard of my images and also on potential approaches to panel layout. He suggested for example that instead of having a mixed set of images, which was my original starting point, I might consider aiming for a more tightly structured approach, perhaps with a group of related species on each line. After a good deal of thought and experiment I decided to organize the panel in three rows - mammals on top, reptiles and amphibians in the middle and invertebrates beneath - to give the panel more visual cohesion. Eventually I had a layout that I believed had a nice balance of tone and composition and which would give me a reasonable chance of success on the day. The images were then very carefully processed, prior to printing at 10" x 15" size, before being mounted on clean white card. Finally, once my Statement of Intent was tweaked and finalized, I was ready to go.

The assessment day eventually came around and after a nerve wracking wait, I was delighted to pass



with no referrals. I was even more pleased when Ben Fox approached me at the end of the session to ask if my panel could be kept by the RPS to be shown as an example of good work at future distinction workshops.

The months since my assessment have provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the benefits of the distinction process and also to continue to work on my technique and my natural history knowledge. Interestingly, most of the images in my successful panel, apart from three from the previous few years, were all shot in 2013. Only one (the large red damselfly image) was from the set I originally submitted to Tony back in 2011. What was initially a big disappointment and dent to my pride, eventually turned out to be the impetus I needed to make much needed improvements to my photography and I can wholeheartedly recommend the process to any photographers with a real desire to improve the technical standard of their work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank John Bebbington for his time and considerable patience during the last few months of 2013 and early 2014. It really was invaluable and shows how important a good mentor is in the distinctions process.

www.andrewmccarthyphotography.com



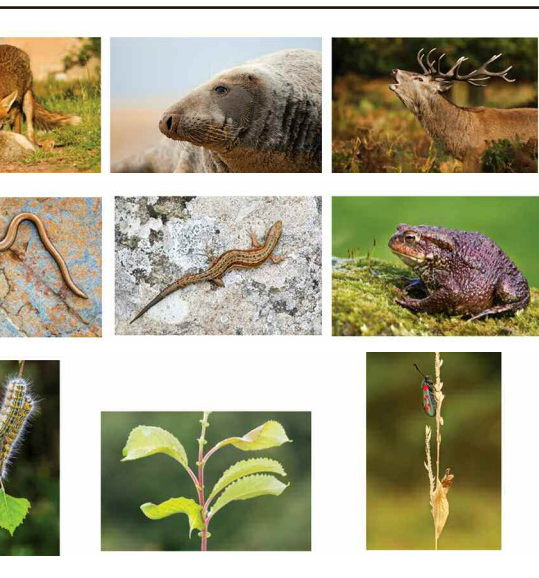
Andrew McCarthy

Statement of Intent

My panel shows a range of native or naturalised British fauna from three taxonomic groups; mammals, herpetiles and invertebrates. The panel is arranged in three rows to distinguish these groups; I have attempted to present each image so they complement one another in terms of tone and composition and the position of each is intended to contribute to an overall cohesive visual effect.

The images illustrate a range of photographic techniques and compositions, as well as different lighting situations.

The majority of images show aspects of each species' natural history; for example social behaviour, reproductive strategy or life-history stage. In only one instance is more than one image shown for a single species; the two fox images are intended to illustrate very different aspects of this species' behaviour.



Common Toad



Lake Kerkini



by David Cantrille FRPS

Dalmatian Pelican

In February 2014 a small group of us spent a few days at Lake Kerkini in northern Greece to photograph Dalmatian pelicans. Our trip was arranged by Emil Enchev (www.cometobg.com), a Bulgarian photographer very familiar with the area.

We flew into Sofia and stayed in the Bulgarian mountains near Melnik, crossing into northern Greece each day for the pelicans on Lake Kerkini. An alternative, I believe, would have been to fly into Thessalonika and stay in lodging near the lake.

On the lake is a colony of Dalmatian Pelicans, at this time of year in their orange breeding plumage (the lower mandible and pouch become an orange-red). With a three meter wingspan, the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelicanus crispus*) is one of the world's heaviest birds. Nature protection measures have helped numbers to increase in recent years.

In addition to the large Dalmatian pelican there were also several smaller Rosy pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) on Lake Kerkini. Around the lake shore a variety of other birds can be found, amounting to around 300 species in all, both resident and migrant, making the lake a bird-watcher's paradise. The area is a Ramsar site.

With only a few days' visit our focus was on the pelicans and Emil hired a local fisherman to take us out on the lake and attract the birds with a bucket of fish. We wondered at first how Emil, a Bulgarian, was able to communicate so well with the Greek fisherman, until we understood that this part of Greece was once a region of Bulgaria and the old fisherman could still talk the old language.



Rosy Pelican

Being amongst the pelicans made for some good close-up shots. As the birds followed the boat, we were able to take a number of flying shots also, though it was sometimes difficult to isolate one bird from the flock. The Dalmatian pelican has silvery-white plumage and a shock of feathers on its head that looks like an untidy haircut. The Rosy pelican, being smaller, was somewhat intimidated by the larger Dalmatians, but managed to get a share of fish by sheer persistence. The Rosy is a very attractive bird with pale pink plumage and a blue, pink and yellow bill at this season.

The weather was fine and sunny for most of the three days we were there and there was a beautiful view of the snow-capped Kerkini mountains to the north of the lake. For photographs of an amazing bird in breeding plumage, this was a worthwhile few days.



Dalmatian Pelicans



Dalmatian Pelican landing



Dalmatian Pelican coming in to land



Dalmatian Pelicans - crossed bills

Awesome Araucaria

by Karel de Pauw & Krystyna Szulecka, ARPS

The monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*), also known as the Chilean pine or pehuén, has been a popular garden plant in Britain since Victorian times. Native to the lower slopes of the Andes in central and southern Chile and western Argentina, it is an evergreen coniferous tree that can reach a height of 30-80m with a 2m diameter trunk and is usually found above 1,000m where it tolerates temperatures as low as -20°C.

The monkey puzzle tree is the national tree of Chile. Due to declining abundance the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) changed its conservation status in 2013 to that of an endangered species.

The name monkey puzzle tree dates to its early cultivation in the mid 19th Century when the species was still a rarity in Britain. The owner of a specimen at

Pencarrow garden near Bodmin in Cornwall showed it to friends whereupon one of them commented that, "It would puzzle a monkey to climb that". Similar sentiments are expressed in French where it is known as *désespoir des singes* ("monkeys' despair").

The scientific name is derived from the Spanish exonym *Araucano* ("from Arauco") for the native Araucanians, the Mapuches of central Chile and south-west Argentina, whose territory incorporates groves of the species. The Mapuche call it *pehuén* and consider the trees sacred. Some Mapuches refer to themselves as Pehuenches ("people of the *pehuén*") as they traditionally harvested the seeds for food. They also used the resin obtained from incisions in the trunk to treat ulcers and wounds.

Juvenile monkey puzzle trees have a pyramidal or conical silhouette, with sweeping branches that arise in whorls from the trunk and arch upwards. With maturity they develop the distinctive, irregular, umbrella shape with a flattened crown. Adult trees have massive erect stems with horizontal spreading branches, covered with sharply pointed, dark green, scale-like leaves while the trunks are pocked, wrinkled and lobed, resembling elephant legs.

The trees are anemophilous and usually dioecious, with male and female cones on separate plants. Occasionally, an individual tree will be monoecious, bearing cones of either sex, or change sex with time. The male (pollen) cones are leafier, oblong-shaped and carried throughout the plant. The spherical female (seed) cones are usually perched on branches high up in the tree and mature 18 months after pollination. Each cone can hold up to 200 seeds and disintegrate at maturity to release the 3-4 cm long nut-like seeds. The seeds are edible, similar to large pine nuts, and extensively harvested in Chile. The tree does not yield seeds until it is around 30-40 years old but once established it can live as long as 1,000 years.

The monkey puzzle tree is sometimes called a "living fossil", a term Charles Darwin coined in *On the Origin of Species*, on account of its ancient lineage:



"These anomalous forms may almost be called living fossils; they have endured to the present day, from having inhabited a confined area, and from having thus been exposed to less severe competition."

There are 19 different *Araucaria* species scattered around the globe, in New Caledonia (where 13 species are endemic), Norfolk Island, Australia, New Guinea, Argentina, Chile and Brazil. By far the greatest diversity occurs in New Caledonia as a result of the island's long isolation and stability. Many of the current populations are relicts and their common ancestry and restricted distribution date back to the time when the present dispersed southern hemisphere continents were linked by land.

Araucaria forests were once distributed globally and formed a major part of the wooden flora of the Middle to Upper Jurassic of the Mesozoic era (about 165 to 155 million years ago). At the time, Chile and Argentina were part of the subtropical and temperate regions of the southern supercontinent Gondwana, a landmass consisting of what is now South America, Africa, Antarctica, India, Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea.

An extinct member of the genus, *Araucaria mirabilis*, is known from abundant, well preserved, silicified wood and cones found in Chile and Argentina, dating back to the Middle Jurassic. Preserved in volcanic ash, some of the specimens measure 3.5m in diameter and were at least 100m in height when alive. Darwin studied these fossils during his travels through South America and in *The Voyage of the Beagle* he noted his surprise that:

"[E]very atom of the woody matter in this great cylinder should have been removed and replaced by silex so perfectly, that each vessel and pore is preserved!"

Araucaria mirabilis' closest living relative, however, is the Australian Bunya pine (*Araucaria bidwillii*), reflecting the Gondwanan distribution of the genus. The long necks of sauropod dinosaurs may have evolved to enable them to browse the foliage of the tall *Araucaria mirabilis* and other *Araucaria* trees. The global distribution of vast forests of *Araucaria* makes it likely that they were the primary food sources for adult sauropods during the Jurassic. Juveniles, however, lacked the bulk of the adults and, requiring larger amounts of proteins for growth, probably had to subsist on other plants.



Male pollen-bearing *Araucaria araucana* cones (KdP)



Female seed-bearing *Araucaria araucana* cones in different stages of maturity (KdP)



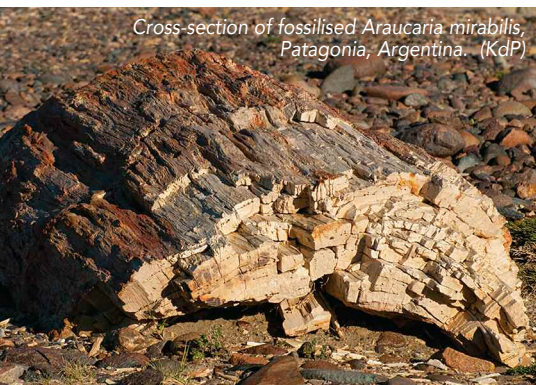
Norfolk Pine *Araucaria heterophylla*, Rottneest Island, Western Australia. (KS)



Araucaria araucana forest,
Lanin National Park, Argentina. (KS)



Fossilised *Araucaria* species,
Whitby beach, North Yorkshire. (KdP)



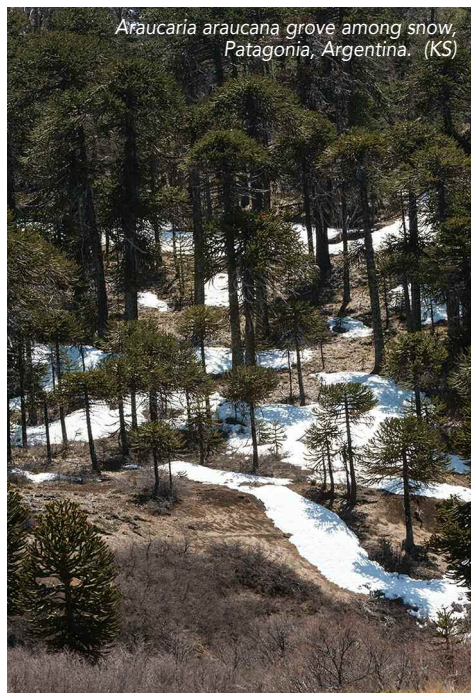
Cross-section of fossilised *Araucaria mirabilis*,
Patagonia, Argentina. (KdP)



Silicified *Araucaria mirabilis*,
Patagonia, Argentina. (KdP)

Although living members of the *Araucaria* genus are no longer extant in the northern hemisphere, fossilised wood from a species similar to the monkey puzzle tree, popularly known as Whitby jet, is found along the North Yorkshire coast. It dates back to the Early Jurassic when a sea covered that part of northeast England. *Araucaria* driftwood gradually sank to the sea floor as it became waterlogged and was covered in sediment to be transformed over millions of years into jet. Exposed in the cliffs north-west and south-east of Whitby, jet is found as small pieces on the beaches and among the rocks or as thin seams within the cliffs. Polished, this semi-precious stone takes on a waxy lustre of deep opaque black, hence the term “jet-black” that dates to the eleventh century. As the black colour never fades polished jet was used as mirrors in medieval times. Only hard jet, fossilised in stagnant, anaerobic, salt water (as opposed to soft jet, formed in fresh, aerobic, water) is ideal for making jewellery and ornaments. The best quality hard jet is found in one specific compacted layer of shale known as “jet-rock”.

Monkey puzzle trees are still seen in front of houses in Britain, especially those dating to Victorian times, and they were recently introduced into urban landscapes, eg in the centre of Leeds. Most of us pass by these magnificent trees without giving much thought to their long and complicated journey through time and space before arriving on our shores.



Araucaria araucana grove among snow,
Patagonia, Argentina. (KS)

The new 'Definition of Nature'?

Fiona Mackay ARPS AFIAP

I read the Editor's reactions to the new joint Nature and Wildlife Photography definition with interest. (The Iris, Issue 119, Summer 2014). The ambiguities surrounding cloning out or in, does indeed require clarification. However, I think the whole document is flawed and confused. Could this be because they started with their original definitions, kept their favourite bits and added in a few new bits rather than starting afresh? There is an air of 'cut and paste' about it. Certainly there are problems with concepts, as I outline below.

In what follows, I have simply gone through the text in order and given a quotation from the relevant part before adding my comments.

"Nature photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archeology"

This assumes we all share a definition of natural history and its branches and can easily deduct anthropology and archaeology from it. As I never thought archaeology was part of natural history, it would seem that my own mental definition of 'natural history' differs slightly. So do we, worldwide, in fact share a common concept of what 'natural history' is? Might it not have been better to start with a clear definition of what 'Nature' means in the context of photographic exhibitions? The exhibition sections are headed 'Nature' not 'Natural History' so why not tailor-make a definition, rather than shoe-horn it into the expression 'natural history', which trails a lot of cultural baggage behind it?

"Photographs of ... cultivated plants... are ineligible"

We might need a definition of 'cultivated' as will become clear later. Does it mean something like "propagated or planted, grown and cared for by human agency"?

"Photographs of ... feral animals ... are ineligible"

The word 'feral' might cause problems for non-native speakers of English. In six bilingual dictionaries of reasonable size that I checked, only one had the word 'feral' in it. On cross-checking the equivalents given to see how they were rendered back into English, I got 'wild', 'uncultivated' and 'living in a natural state'. Thus a non-native speaker, having

consulted their dictionary, might be forgiven for thinking at this stage that photographs of wild animals are ineligible.

"No techniques that add, relocate, replace or remove pictorial elements ... are permitted"

I'm not sure what this means. It suggests that there are elements of the photograph that are not pictorial and that they can be removed, relocated etc., but we do not have a definition or example of a 'pictorial element' or a 'non-pictorial element'. If what is meant is that nothing can be cloned etc. except camera introduced elements, why not just say so clearly? 'Pictorial elements', undefined, is not helpful.

"HDR, Focus stacking and Stitched Images"

I don't do any of these, but don't they all involve using more than one image to create a single composite that was not actually taken by the camera? Yet two are allowed and one is not. It would be good to know the reasoning behind this.

"Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided in two classes: Nature and Wildlife"

There are two problems here. One is the problem of using the word 'nature' in the heading and one of the sub-sets. This simply cannot be. The other is that this is quickly followed by "*Images entered in Nature sections*" and "*Images entered in Wildlife sections*", where we have moved from 'classes' to 'sections'. This is confusing. I think I know what they mean but in a document of this kind I should not have to go around saying "Well, I think I know what they mean but they haven't said it."

"landscapes".

Does this mean that traditional landscapes are now to be regarded as part of Nature sections rather than some other section of an exhibition? "geologic formations" are listed separately. So what does 'landscape' in this context mean? Landscapes are normally judged pictorially, yet "*the story telling value of a photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality*". If it refers to traditional, pictorial landscapes, does this mean that landscape photographs must not have elements 'added, relocated, replaced or removed'?

"This includes images taken with the subjects in controlled conditions, such as zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, aquariums and any enclosure where the subjects are totally dependent on man for food" This is a reversal of the previous FIAP definition, which prohibited such images. In my view, this is a dumbing down and lowering of standards and is possibly a whole separate debate. It is also possibly a cheat's charter. Anyone who was prepared to produce the sort of composite, manipulated images described by Richard Nicoll will not baulk at marking something as 'wildlife' when it is not.

And more confusion - *"subjects ... in botanical gardens"* really needs a definition of 'subjects' or a definition of that word 'cultivated' that appeared earlier on. If 'cultivated' means something like 'planted, grown and cared for by human agency', then botanical subjects in a botanical garden, other than naturally occurring weeds, are ineligible. Presumably all other subjects in the garden are allowed, except possibly subjects such as feral pigeons, although they are 'extant zoological organisms free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat' – in other words, wildlife subjects. Yet for non-botanical subjects, the conditions in a

botanical garden can hardly be described as 'controlled'. The only subjects in a botanical garden that are controlled are the botanical specimens, which, being cultivated, are ruled out by the earlier statement.

"Images entered in Wildlife ... are defined as one or more extant zoological or botanical organisms.." This is a really careless piece of writing. The image is a zoological or botanical organism? I think I know what they mean but ...

This new common 'definition' is ill-conceived, badly thought out, not well-written and produces more confusion than clarity. It is also far too long. Nor does it address the problem of correct nomenclature. It is a missed opportunity and it will be difficult for exhibition organisers to police this, given that it is so open to multiple interpretations. They should have started afresh and rather than being hung up on the word 'definition' should have gone boldly forth to grasp the nettle of 'regulation'. This would have allowed them to include regulations regarding meta-data, provision of raw files and other points as mentioned by Richard Nicoll. The result might have been a simpler, clearer and more concise document.

Setting up Galleries on the RPS website

Galleries are a good way of showing your work to other people, but the contents should be relevant to the groups that they appear in.

For example - you have set up a gallery of landscape images, a gallery of nature images and a gallery of heritage images. Within the gallery editing page you see a list of the region and groups that you belong to. Lets say that in addition to your Region and the Nature Group, that you also belong to the Archaeology & Heritage Group. Please, do not tick them all for each gallery, just because you belong to them all.

In the above example, all three galleries can appear in your Region, but only the gallery containing nature images should appear in the Nature section as well, as the other two galleries

are not relevant to natural history. Likewise, the gallery of heritage images should appear in the Archaeology & Heritage section, but not also in the Nature section. Therefore the gallery of landscape images should only appear in the Region, and not be appearing in either of the two specialist groups.

Please, check the contents of your galleries already up on the RPS website. Are they relevant to the specialist groups that they appear in? If not, please deselect the appropriate galleries from the groups concerned.

Thank you.
Margery Maskell ARPS, Nature Group Treasurer and Webmaster

Nature Photography Definition - Further Clarification

Earlier this year it was announced that PSA (Photographic Society of America), FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique) and the RPS (Royal Photographic Society) had jointly developed a common definition for Nature Photography for use by all international exhibitions recognized or patronized by any or all of these organisations. The representatives for each organization were Daniel Charbonnet, FPSA, EPSA (PSA), Pierluigi Rizzato, MFIAP, EFIAP/p (FIAP), and John R. Simpson, ARPS, MFIAP (RPS).

The new definition (published in the Summer 2014 Edition of *The Iris*) will come into effect on 1st January 2015, and will apply to all Nature, Wildlife, and Nature Themed sections of all exhibitions recognized and/or patronized by PSA, FIAP and RPS with closing dates on or after 1st January, 2015. The intent of the new common definition is to reduce conflicts for the exhibitions, the exhibitors and the judges when a single exhibition has been recognized by multiple organizations and to provide some clarification. More recently, in an issue of the PSA Journal, PSA Exhibitions Vice President, Daniel Charbonnet, FPSA, EPSA, expanded on some areas in the definition. Apparently, these same areas were in the previous PSA, FIAP, and RPS definitions but were frequently overlooked or misunderstood by both exhibitors and selectors. Here (printed with the permission of Mr. Charbonnet) is an extract from the August 2014 issue of the PSA Journal:

The definition does not allow replacing the background of your image, adding additional content from another image, or cloning out content from your original image. This restriction of cloning out content includes what you may think is inconsequential, such as a blade of grass in front of an animal's face. If you cannot crop it out, you must live with it if you intend to use the image in a Nature or Wildlife section of an exhibition.

Both the old PSA and FIAP definitions and the new common definition prohibit human elements that are not an integral part of the nature story. Human elements are not limited to people or parts of people in the image. Human elements that can cause your images to be disqualified, or at best scored low, include but are not limited to:

- Roads, paths, vehicle tracks, or trails
- Fences and fence posts
- Signs
- Power Poles
- Wires
- Buildings (or parts of buildings)
- Walls or parts of walls
- Mowing and plowing patterns in fields
- Cut tree stumps, cut off limbs, branches or stems
- Jesses and thongs on legs of raptors and other birds (these are not scientific banding)

The new definition does include some examples of human elements that are integral parts of the nature story. Examples of allowable human elements include:

- Birds nesting or feeding young on or in man-made objects.
- Insects depositing eggs or egg sacs in man-made objects.
- Animals eating fresh kills on fence posts, pilings, in roadways, etc.
- A flood with raging water with a house or other human element floating in the flood.
- A tornado ripping apart buildings or throwing around human elements.

The 'natural forces' examples show nature stories where these natural forces are out of control. The keys are whether the judge considers the human element integral to the story and considers the nature story strong.

Domestic animals are hidden in the "artificially produced hybrid plants and animals" clause in the current PSA definition. The new common definition specifically lists domestic animals, including those that have gone feral, as not being allowed.

- Domestic animals are animals, such as horses, cats, dogs, poultry, cattle and sheep, that have been tamed and kept by humans as work animals, food sources, or pets, especially members of those species that have become notably different from their wild ancestors through selective breeding.

- This particular restriction eliminates just about all the 'wild' horses in the world since those in the Americas, Europe and Western Asia are feral domestic horses, not true wild horses. The only true eligible horse is the rare Przewalski's Horse also known as the Mongolian Wild Horse. Zebras, kiangs and onagers (wild asses) are also valid eligible members of the horse family.
- It also reinforces the exclusion of any Llamas and Alpacas because those have always been domestic animals and have no ancestors that were never domesticated.
- Cultivated plants are those that are grown specifically in decorative gardens and for food. Wildflowers planted in botanical gardens are allowed subjects in the same manner that wild animals in zoos are allowed subjects.

The restrictions on, and allowances for, computer processing of your images remain but hopefully have been made a bit clearer.

- Adding pictorial elements to your image or removing pictorial elements from your image remains in force. Please remember that cloning elements already in your image and making additional copies of those elements is the same as adding elements and is not allowed.
- Adjustments that enhance your image without changing the content include exposure (globally and selectively), color balance, contrast, sharpening (globally and selectively), noise reduction, conversion to greyscale monochrome (with no color added), straightening, resizing, and cropping.
- Deliberately blurring the background is not allowed.
- Adding a vignette not originally produced by the camera is not allowed
- HDR and focus stacking are still allowed. While several images are involved with each technique, you are not adding any pictorial elements. The content of each image in the stack is the same but with HDR the exposure for each image in the stack is different and with focus stacking the point of focus of each image in the stack is different.
- Stitching is still not allowed. The content of each image is different. In this process the images are joined side by side with just enough content overlap to permit alignment and stitch the images together. Examples include stitched panoramas and stitched macro images.

A panorama created by cropping a single image into panorama proportions is permitted.

The overriding requirement for any of the allowed adjustments is that the results must appear natural to the viewer. In this case, you are not the viewer; the judge is the viewer. You have an emotional attachment to your images so what looks natural to you may not look natural to someone else.

Try not to confuse pictorial quality with technical quality if you are asked to be a judge. The prime factors for pictorial quality are composition, quality of lighting and impact. Technical quality primarily covers exposure and sharpness. An over or under exposed image or an out of focus image is still a bad image no matter how strong the story. Two factors that straddle technical quality and pictorial quality are depth of field and partial cropping of subjects at the edges of the frame and admittedly these factors are judgment calls.

The common Nature Definition endeavors to level the playing field for nature photography and provide a standard for differentiation between a nature photograph and a pictorial image that happens to use a nature subject. "

If you want to enter images into the Nature Sections of International Exhibitions it is important to abide by the new 'common Nature Photography Definition' required to be used by Exhibitions patronized by PSA, FIAP and RPS after 1st January, 2015, however many clubs have already begun using it. PAGB have also adopted the 'Definition' and BPE Exhibitions patronized by PAGB will also be affected.

Editor's Note: The Australian Photographic Society have published their interpretation in a document downloadable from the internet:

<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=PSA+Clarification+on+Nature+Definition>

Editor's Note: I asked Fiona Mackay to comment on the 'clarification'. Here is what she said:

First up -

Statistics: The original joint definition was 445 words long. The PSA clarification is 1110 words long. This does suggest there was something wrong with the original definition if this amount of clarification is required. Part of my objection to the joint definition was its conceptual woolliness, leading to ambiguity and uncertainty. There is little that is uncertain, although still disputable, in the PSA's take on it.

Validity: It is a joint definition. Do these nuts and bolts comments from the PSA have the *imprimatur* of FIAP and the RPS or is the PSA alone the global authority? Do FIAP and RPS have any different interpretation?

That said, here are some comments on the PSA's contribution -

- It is expressed in terms of regulation rather than definition. That makes it harder to quibble with. One might think the regulations are too extreme or misguided, but if that's what they are, the choice is to accept them or not enter exhibitions. However, the question of whether they are good regulations remains.
- There is some attempt to clarify the expression 'human elements', though in somewhat draconian fashion. It suggests that you cannot, for example, have a road or a path or a bit of a building in the far background, although in a broad sense it might be part of the story in countries where wildlife lives in close proximity with humans and it tells you more than a beautifully diffuse background that tells you nothing, and, after all, 'the story telling value ... must be weighed more than the pictorial quality'. Wildlife is not confined to the wide open spaces and wilderness areas. Surely what matters is if it is intrusive, detracts from the story or suggests that the animal is not living wild and free. I would say this is better as a guideline than a strict regulation. 'Should not be present' rather than 'shall not'. I think judges could probably use their common sense on that and indeed after all the draconian listing he says that is the key – whether judges think it is integral to the story or not. They may not agree with the photographer, however. But the search for an 'ideal' picture, excluding all human elements, can be as much a distortion of the truth as anything else.
- Cultivated or uncultivated? He does at least give a definition of 'cultivated'. It may not be one that I agree with, or be flawed – for example, the definition given would allow crops such as bio-fuel crops, or cotton, as they are not grown for food, should anyone wish to present them. However, are botanic gardens decorative gardens or not? It all depends on what you mean by 'decorative', I suppose and that is not defined. I still prefer a sense of 'planted by or grown by man' as part of a definition and that would exclude botanical gardens as the plants there are not truly wild.
- Similarly, the author expands on domestic animals, although I was amused at the section on llamas and alpacas, which "have always been domestic animals and have no ancestors that were never domesticated". Of course they have wild ancestors somewhere along the line, albeit a long time ago. I suppose even Man had wild ancestors somewhere, even if, to quote W.S. Gilbert, it was a "protoplasmal primordial atomic globule" (Mikado). It's fine to define them as domestic animals and therefore ineligible, but it shouldn't be supported with nonsense.
- There is no clarification of the term 'landscape'.
- Not specific to the PSA 'clarification' but I suspect it was driven by the PSA - I'm bothered by the inclusion of zoo and game farm animals and animals living in enclosures and totally dependent on man for food while at the same time excluding feral animals. For me, an animal adapting to life in the wild is more interesting from a natural history perspective than an animal adapting to life in some kind of enclosure, but if you have the one, why not the other? I can't really see any conceptual justification for this. I think such justification as the PSA might have is that feral animals were once domestic animals and domestic animals are not allowed. However, they are now wild. Similarly, domestic animals are now domestic but were once wild. In other words the criterion for domestic animals is their current status while the criterion for feral animals is their former status. That seems to be intellectually eating your cake and having it. One could argue that animals in zoos and game farms are undergoing a process of domestication (and some are certainly 'work' animals, earning their owners money by posing for photographers...). Some may have been born in captivity and never experienced life in the wild, while wild/feral goats in Scotland, for example, have had

generation after generation after generation living in the wild. There is nothing to cover naturally produced hybrids, such as feral cats breeding with the Scottish wild cat. What category are they? One could go round in circles for ever on this. And what is the position of garden escapes as botanical subjects? Tricky, as what is a garden escape here could be a wild flower somewhere else.

- What about "the common Nature Definition endeavours to level the playing field for nature photography and provide a standard for differentiation between a nature photograph and a pictorial image that happens to use a nature subject"? I think he's talking about the difference between what can be entered in a Nature section and what should be entered in an Open section, where manipulation is allowed, but I have this feeling that images of captive animals really fall into the latter category. To me they are not really nature. Yet there are some aspects of nature that can only be shown through studio shots or some other kind of manipulation, and which have important educational value and which perhaps should count as nature shots since they can educate us about natural processes and would be impossible to portray except in a studio situation. However, there seems to be no place for them in any of this.
- The confusion between sections and 'classes' is perpetuated.
- It should be clear by now that I think the business about zoo and game farm animals and botanic gardens being allowed is an unnecessary complication. The old FIAP definition excluded them, and rightly so, in my opinion.
- It is possible that confusion arises because there seems to be no clear concept of what the Nature section of an exhibition is for. Is it to inform, educate or entertain? Is it first and foremost about photographic skill and producing 'wow' pictures or about giving visual insights into the way nature works and how beautiful it is? Almost a quasi scientific purpose? If just the former, then digital/computer adjustments of all sorts are part of the photographer's armoury. Using captive animals would also contribute to getting a pretty picture. However, the ban on various technical adjustments suggests a more serious purpose. If we were really clear about the purpose, perhaps the other things would tidy themselves up. Perhaps. Or perhaps not.

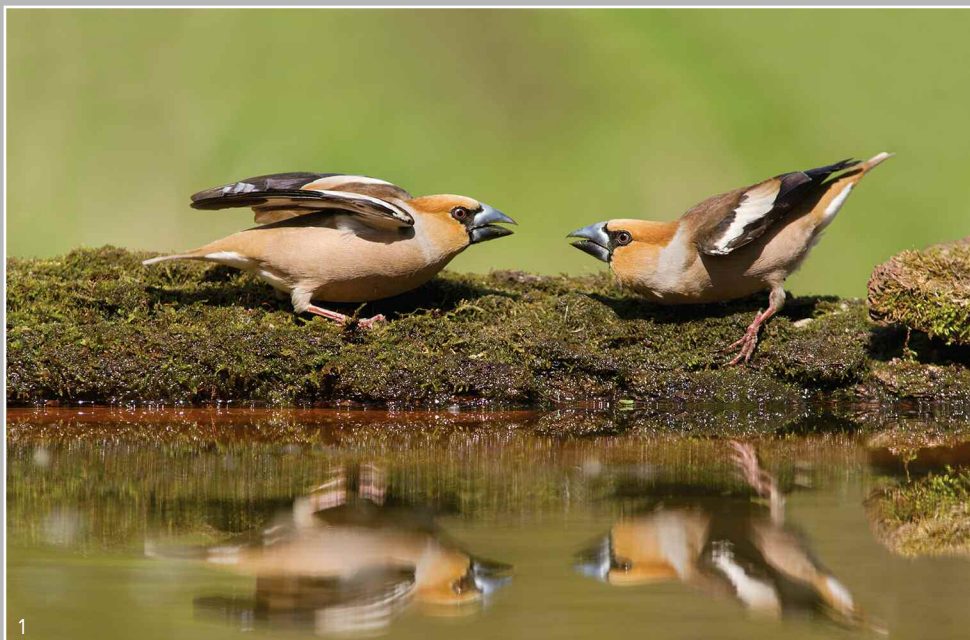
- As far as the technical things allowed and not allowed are concerned, I'm pleased to see a reason being given for why stitching is not allowed but focus stacking and HDR are. It's to do with whether or not you are adding or removing elements and not with whether you do or do not end up with an image that the camera did not take. Each way you end up with an image the camera did not take but two are by alteration, either of focus or exposure and one is by addition, or rather extension, possibly without alteration. OK. But it is perhaps an unnecessarily fine distinction.
- The cloning question is clearly going to be contentious. The definition talks about 'pictorial elements', which suggests that techniques such as cloning can be applied to 'non-pictorial' elements. This PSA expansion refers to content. Still, I don't see any harm in cloning out an irritating out of focus highlight or two in the background or an intrusive twig in a corner and will happily do it but I draw the line at anything adjacent to or touching the main subject(s) and would certainly never clone in. (Although some people might argue that replacing that highlight is removing and replacing, therefore out and in). I feel this PSA document is an 'interpretation' of what is said in the joint definition, as the actual wording of the joint definition does seem to leave some scope for very minor cloning of 'blemishes', such as distracting background highlights – which, indeed, the old FIAP definition did allow. Perhaps they did not intend to leave that scope and it was simply badly worded. There is, however, the problem of those who, given an inch, take a mile and maybe it is felt that zero tolerance is the only answer. I suspect, however, that a lot of people will do what they have always done, namely just ignore the definitions.
- I don't know how all this will be policed. I suppose there is nothing to stop individual exhibitions demanding entries by post, either as prints plus a CD or on CD for PDI, the CD to contain a folder with original raw files. The additional cost to the entrant might put people off and it might, if people still entered, create an elite set of exhibitions. But how do they check up?

I see that up to this point I have used 1606 words. Enough. Too many?



**More images from
Andrew McCarthy's
successful
Associateship Panel.**





More images from Edmund Fellowes Fellowship Panel



- 1 *Hawfinch confrontation between two males.*
- 2 *Common Buzzard feeding on rabbit*
- 3 *Red-necked phalarope collecting green oil.*
- 4 *Great Cormorant with Sea Trout*