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THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
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Cheetah family by Sue Godfrey-Green ARPS

THE **IRIS**



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

Issue No. 130 / Spring 2018



Wildflowers, Doubtful Harbour



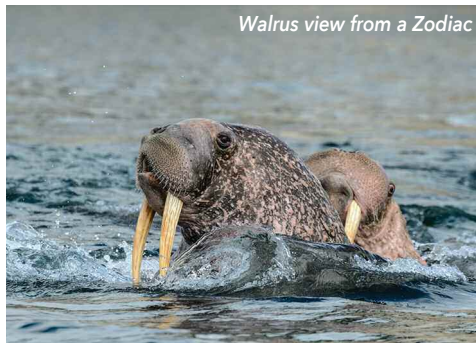
Long-tailed Skua



Exodus of Guillemots from bird cliffs



Bird cliffs at Ptichiy Bazar



Walrus view from a Zodiac

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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 flattened 8bit sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Please do not send larger images. If your image is selected for use on the cover of *The Iris* you will be asked to supply a larger file.

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Cover image: Cheetah family
by Sue Godfrey-Green ARPS

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Nature Group Exhibitions

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

Editorial

Hello - I hope you have all enjoyed some quality photographic time during the winter months. When the light is poor and the days short, I try to make the best of them and use them as an opportunity to catch up on image processing - I never seem to process all the images I would like to before I go off on another trip and it's rare that I can find time or opportunity to process images further back than the last trip.

The Spring issue 2017 was supposed to have been my last, however, things turned out differently and I had to step back in to the role of Editor to produce the Winter and Spring issues. In addition to The Iris I have also had two issues of the eNewsletter to prepare and it hasn't been easy to fit everything in around the trips I had planned. I have managed it but my image editing and printing have suffered again as a result. I doubt I will ever catch up!

I would like to take this opportunity to say 'Thank you' to all the members who have supported The Iris during my tenure. You have shared some wonderful experiences and many great images on the pages of The Iris. I hope to have the time to share some of my own in the future! It has been over fourteen years and 43 issues of The Iris since I stepped in to the roll of Editor and I can honestly say I have enjoyed it immensely. Without your stories, experiences and images it would not be the success it is today.

Please continue to support The Iris. The new Editor, Gerald Griffin ARPS, will need the same level of support, so please keep submitting those articles. His email address is listed in the column to the left.

Please don't forget the eNewsletter either. Short 'newsy' articles with pictures can be used, reviews on kit, items for sale, places to visit, etc. You can contact me at: naturegroup_enews_editor@btinternet.com

Finally, do try to support the Nature Group. It is your group but the committee (all volunteers) need your help with ideas and support to organise events, field meetings, etc. We can't do it all on our own. Please try to attend the Nature Group's Spring Meeting. It's a great day, full of photographic interest - a talk by Robert Thompson FRPS in the morning and a projection of the accepted digital entries of the Annual Exhibition in the afternoon. The walls will be covered with the accepted prints which can be viewed during the breaks. What's more, there's no charge to attend. I hope to see some of you there.



From the chair

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of the Iris. As I write this, in late February, the weather forecast for the UK for the next week shows bitterly cold winds coming from the east and Siberia. Until now, the winter has proved to be very mild, a recurrent theme over the last number of years. Snowdrops are still on display at present, and that other harbinger of spring, Winter Aconite, is also putting on a good show.

Where I live in East Anglia, the North Norfolk coast has had its usual numbers of over-wintering geese. These always provide an evocative sight especially in the evening when they are flying to roost. The number of winter thrushes and waxwings seems lower than normal but maybe the coming cold snap will bring in some visitors from continental Europe. Time will tell. I feel a 'proper' winter should always include good numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings, together with a cooperative Waxwing or two! Snow or hard frost are also good elements for a successful wildlife photograph.

The combined Spring Meeting, Annual General Meeting and Annual Exhibition of the Nature Group will take place at Smethwick Photographic Society Clubrooms, The Old School House, Churchbridge, Oldbury, West Midlands on Saturday, 21 April, with doors opening at 10am. During the morning session we are delighted to welcome Robert Thompson FRPS our guest speaker. Robert's background in natural history is extensive and he enjoys regular commissions for his work. His experience is wide ranging including photographing while hanging from helicopters, to descending cave systems 200 feet below the surface, and everything in between. Robert is an outstanding natural history photographer and a superb speaker. We are very lucky indeed to have secured his time and I'm sure you will be thoroughly entertained by his talk. I look forward to seeing you on the day. You can find out more about Robert and the work he does from his website: robertthompsonphotography.com

The entry for the Nature Group Annual Exhibition has been very good this year and following the AGM, there will be a projection of the accepted digital entries plus the usual awards ceremony for the prize winning entries. The prints will be on display all day.

The committee is still working on the prospect of video submissions. There is more to this than initially met the eye in terms of how we regulate this, and so we have deferred the introduction of this section.

Another date for your diary is the Nature Group Chairman's Day, also to be held at Smethwick, on Saturday 15th September 2018. Please keep an eye on the summer edition of The Iris and/or e-Newsletter for further information and programme.

The second Nature Group e-Newsletter has been released and I am sure you enjoyed reading it as much as I did. As you know, the e-Newsletter is designed to complement The Iris and can cover such things as items for sale, reviews of photographic equipment as well as articles of interest to your fellow wildlife photographers. In this issue, there were two such articles, sad tales of man's interaction with two different species of native wildlife and the sorry consequences that can bring.

Along similar lines, I have been lucky enough to spend the past five weeks in Antarctica and South Georgia working on a cruise/expedition ship. One of the problems we encountered, was the large number of Antarctic Fur Seals now living on South Georgia. Their numbers are increasing at a rate of 7% per year, and it is likely that the population is now higher than before the age of sealing, an event which almost caused their total extinction. Landings at many of the tourist beaches cannot be made during the breeding season because of the vast numbers of aggressive males and at the end of the season mothers with pups can also be quite aggressive. These animals can move faster on land than a human and serious, life-threatening injuries to human visitors have occurred due to bites. Among the solutions I heard whilst in Antarctica, was that culling of Fur Seals may become necessary in order to reduce the risk of attacks on human visitors. This seems a somewhat extreme and dramatic proposal, and it remains to be seen whether or not it is taken forward as a genuine measure. Fur Seals are increasing due to the fact that their main competitors for food, namely the great whales (also hunted close to extinction) have not regained their population size prior to the whaling industry. Another case of interference by man upsetting the ecology of a species and one problem bringing about another.

Finally, on a sad note, Margery Maskell has decided to resign from the committee at the AGM in April. The committee and I are sorry to receive this news, but fully understand her reasons. Margery has given loyal service to the Nature Group and on your behalf I would like to formally recognise this by offering sincere thanks for all the hard work she has done in her roles as Treasurer and Webmaster. I am sure that you will join me in wishing Margery all the very best for the future. Needless to say, there are vacancies on committee which need to be filled soon.

In the meantime I wish you good weather and good photography and hope to see you on 21st April at Smethwick.

Kevin

An Expedition to Wrangel Island

by Maggie Manson ARPS

Any journey engenders a sense of excitement or anticipation, but especially when the destination is remote and rarely visited. So it was when we set out for the Russian Far East, travelling overnight from Moscow across nine time zones to Anadyr on the Pacific coast. Here we boarded the Spirit of Enderby, which was anchored in the Gulf of Anadyr and surrounded by seals and Beluga Whales. We sailed out east across the gulf and then north through the Bering Strait, past Cape Dezhnev, the closest point in Asia to Alaska, and into the Chukchi Sea. On our journey north we encountered Gray, Bowhead and Humpback Whales, a huge Walrus colony and fantastic bird cliffs populated by Horned and Tufted Puffins, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Parakeet and Crested Auklets, Glaucous and Vega Gulls and Pelagic Cormorants. Northern Fulmars and Shearwaters (Sooty and Short-tailed) kept us company as we sailed north. On the fifth day at sea we woke to find loose pack ice clunking against the ship and our first glimpse of Wrangel Island shrouded in cloud (July 29th).

This remote island has had few human visitors because, until fairly recently, it was almost permanently encased in sea ice. Even now with global warming access by ship is still only reliable in August and September. Having escaped glaciation during the last ice age, the island supports great biodiversity, including more than 400 species of plants and 100 species of migratory birds. It is of major importance as a denning site for Polar Bears and is the only Asian breeding site for Snow Geese. Large numbers of Pacific walrus live around the shores. Also abundant around the island are Bowhead Whales and the shallow waters are an important feeding ground for Gray Whales which have travelled all the way from Mexico.

Wrangel is a sizeable island of 7600 square km, with a mountain range spanning the central area. The highest peak is around 1000m and at either end the coast is dominated by high cliffs. Along with its much smaller, closest neighbour, Herald Island, Wrangel was designated as a protected nature reserve in 1976 and in 2004 was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status. The surrounding waters are also protected to a distance of 24 nautical miles.

As we navigated through the sea ice we encountered our first Polar Bear family, two first year cubs with their mother. Considering how few ships pass this way, they seemed remarkably unconcerned by our presence. The female approached to check us out, sniffing the air before leisurely leading her cubs across the broken ice floes. For around half an hour we were treated to some comical moments as the youngsters tried to jump from one piece of ice to another often with soggy results. On leaving the bear family we passed some walrus relaxing on the ice.

As we approached the shoreline we counted another seven bears on the tundra, white dots on the brown landscape. The zodiacs were launched for a landing at Doubtful Harbour, but as we approached the beach, we spotted a very large female bear relaxing on the grassy slope surrounded by wild flowers. She strolled along the ridge before coming down to the shoreline for a closer look.

Doubtful Harbour, the site of old ruined settlements, is now home to four rangers throughout the year. During the summer months they are joined by several research scientists. As the station is provisioned only once a year, most of their food is tinned or dried. Their accommodation is none too luxurious either. No wonder that when given the opportunity, they are extremely enthusiastic to join an expedition ship for a few days of "home comforts". Two lucky rangers and one researcher were to accompany us during our time on Wrangel. Their local knowledge was invaluable, but when walking in polar bear country, it was also reassuring to have an armed guard.

We spent several hours exploring the area around the ranger station. Various nations, including Canada, Great Britain and the United States, sent expeditions to discover and then lay claim to the island. There is evidence of prehistoric human settlement, but in modern times the first landing occurred as recently as 1881. Among those who went ashore was John Muir who was the first to publish a description of the island. For a brief time, early in the 20th century, there was a settlement of Chukchi fishermen here when in 1916 Russia laid claim to the Island. Now the

site is littered with derelict buildings and rusty debris from those times. But despite this, the flora and fauna appear to thrive. We spotted a distant Snowy Owl, many Snow Buntings, Eiders, Kittiwakes, Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas (known as Jaegers on this side of the world), some very distant Musk Oxen and a huge variety of beautiful wild flowers.

Wrangel was the last place where woolly mammoths survived, becoming extinct as recently as 4300 years ago, some 6000 years after they had disappeared on the mainland. It is thought that this last population may have been hunted, but eventually died out through an accumulation of damaging genetic mutations in the dwindling population. Many corpses were preserved by the cold climate, but with the melting of the permafrost in recent decades, their remains, including the huge tusks, are reappearing all over Siberia. Some of these are finding their way into the ivory trade. Because the mammoth's closest relative is the Indian elephant, this often makes it very difficult to identify legal from illegal sources of ivory.

We returned to the ship with our local guides and headed back into the sea ice where we spotted several more bears, including a male with a seal kill and a single female resting on the ice who was inquisitive enough to approach close to the ship.

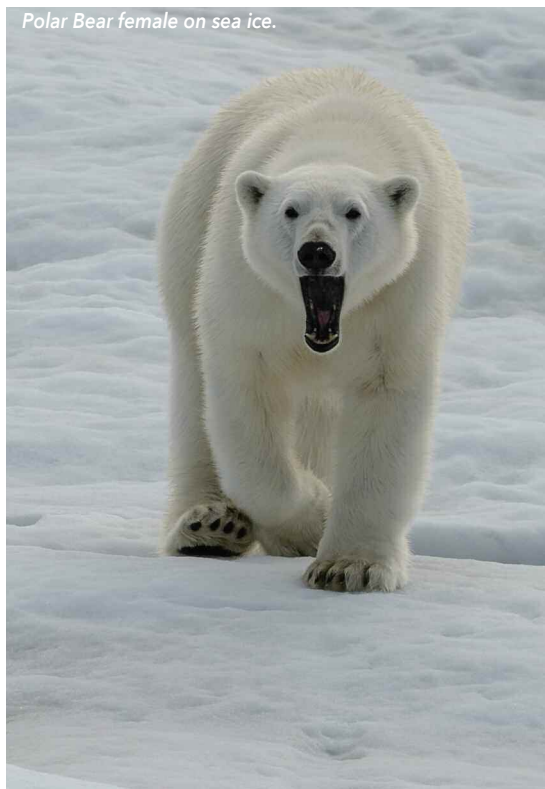
The following day our plans were thwarted by high winds and heavy seas, making it impossible to land, but late in the day we finally found some shelter at Cape Waring on the east side of the island, allowing us to cruise along some spectacular bird cliffs in the zodiacs. Photography from these inflatables is challenging at the best of times, but not least on this occasion because of the swell. Hand holding is really the only option, unless it is possible to use the edge of the rib as support. The cliffs were home to Common, Brunnich's, Pigeon and Black Guillemots, Black-legged Kittiwakes, Glaucous Gulls, Horned and Tufted Puffins and Pelagic Cormorants. We cruised slowly along the cliffs, photographing the birds and the amazing rock formations. Then without warning, on rounding a corner, we came across a mother bear and two cubs above us on a scree slope. They showed no sign of distress at our presence, giving us ample opportunity to observe and photograph them. Almost immediately, as we drifted by, another family came in to view, this time with three cubs, although one stayed well hidden behind a mound of scree. This brought our total for the trip so far to



First year Polar Bear cubs.



Polar Bear family on sea ice.



Polar Bear female on sea ice.



Crested Auklet



Glaucus Gull on iceberg



Walrus off Wrangel



Guillemots on sea ice

38 bears. Our Russian guide Grisha, who has visited Wrangel quite a few times, was ecstatic, explaining that never before had he seen cubs on the island. On this trip, however, they seemed to be around every corner.

On July 31st we headed for Wrangel's nearest neighbour, Herald Island, some 60km to the north east. As we approached the small rocky island in zodiacs we could already count another 17 bears. One or two were at the water's edge, others were climbing the scree slopes, several large individuals were curled up asleep and one mother was nursing her two cubs. The geology was stunning and a pair of Horned Puffins posed perfectly amongst the black rock. As we cruised around the island more bears were spotted on the skyline. We had planned to land on the only small beach, but that too was occupied by two male bears. The younger of the two came to the water's edge to investigate, before swimming off out to sea. By the time we left Herald Island our bear count was up to 60.

Back in the pack ice later that afternoon we approached a mother and two cubs who had just enjoyed a good meal judging by the blood on their fur. They were so relaxed that the captain was able to manoeuvre the ship right up to their ice floe and out again without them so much as stirring.

One of our Russian guides was studying the Snow Goose population. The birds arrive on the island from North America in May to nest and at the end of June they take their young to the tundra in the north of the island. There now are thought to be some 250,000 birds. By the end of August they will have all departed.

Today was the last time the sun would remain above the horizon until next spring, so to celebrate, some very hardy souls amongst us took part in a polar plunge.

The following day we landed at Dream Head on the northwest side of Wrangel and went walking across the tundra. Although relatively flat, this was surprisingly tiring as with every step we sank into the boggy ground. We had distant views of musk oxen (reintroduced in 1975) and Snow Geese, with Dunlin calling and Arctic Skuas overhead. Large standing stones were covered in a stunning array of brightly coloured lichens. Back at the beach flocks of Eiders were gliding low over the water.

Sailing a little further south, in the afternoon we landed at Ptichiy Bazar, another area of bird cliffs. The walk to the top of the cliffs was strewn with flowers and lichens. The rangers kept a lookout for bears, which fortunately were only sighted in the distance. Later, in beautiful evening light, we revisited the cliffs by zodiac to photograph the birds on their nests and in the sea, as well as some stunning ice sculptures. The spectacle, noise and smell of the bird colonies was overwhelming. Only a few weeks after our visit a Bowhead Whale carcass was washed up on the shore in this area and some 230 bears came from all over the island for a share of the feast.

The following day (Aug 2nd) was our last on Wrangel and having circumnavigated the island, we sailed back to Doubtful Harbour to return the rangers to their base. We had another opportunity to photograph the flowers and bird life. In contrast to our first visit in soft light, on this occasion the sun was very bright, making some photography more challenging. As we returned to the zodiacs an interesting phenomenon was occurring in the shallows. Thousands of Capelin were throwing themselves out of the water, making an easy meal for the Kittiwakes.

Back on board, everyone agreed that this had been a very special experience, not least because we were among a very few privileged humans to have ever set foot on the island. As we sailed back towards the Siberian Coast we drank a toast to Wrangel with Russian vodka.

We travelled with Heritage Expeditions in the excellent company of Mark Carwardine (tour leader, conservationist, BBC presenter and wild life photographer), Joe Cornish (landscape photographer), Katy Murray (historian and polar enthusiast) and Nathan Russ (Heritage expedition leader).



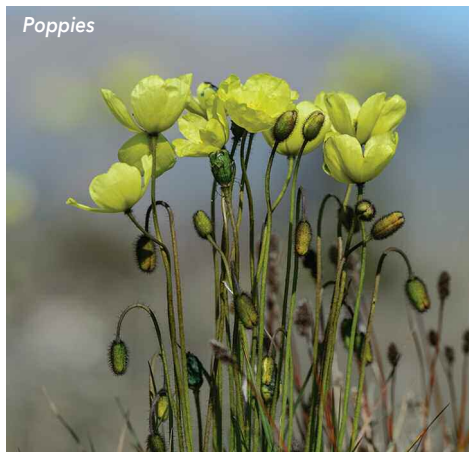
Cliffs at Cape Waring



Horned Puffins, Herald Island



Ruined Settlement, Doubtful Harbour



Poppies



Wrangel Island

Book Report

Close-up and Macro Photography - Its Art and Fieldcraft Techniques.

Robert Thompson FRPS

Focal press/Routledge

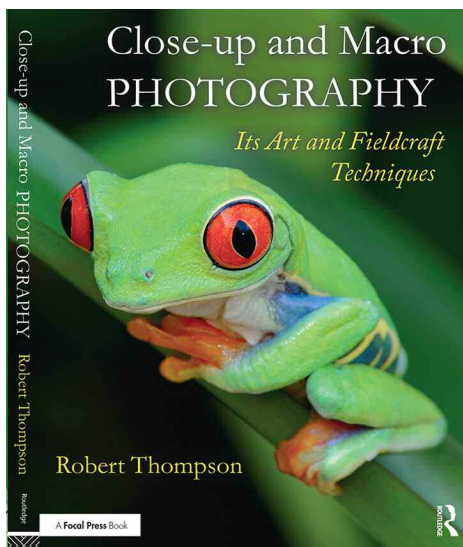
isbn 978-1-138-65847-9

In today's tough world of publishing we rarely see quality publications on minority specialist subjects. The reason for this is that turnover is normally too small for publishers to see a worthwhile profit. Thankfully Routledge/Focal press has a refreshing approach to their library catalogue and has recently commissioned Robert Thompson's latest book 'Close up and Macro Photography'. Whilst being a minority interest subject, and in every way the exception to the rule, this book would nevertheless be a very welcome addition to anyone's bookcase.

Rest assured, this is a quality publication with 306 pages and nearly as many photo's. This book has something about it before you even open the front cover, looking so good it's almost a shame to open it, but open it you must as it contains a wealth of information and is lavishly and beautifully illustrated with a varied selection of Robert's close up work, all selected to highlight various points of technique or what imaging potential is possible once you take a closer look at the natural world and go in close.

The book is divided in to 4 sections -

1. Digital Fundamentals - dealing with all aspects of camera selection, features and equipment as well as offering a host of useful reference information to aid the reader's understanding of photography and how it can be applied to macro photography.
2. Fieldcraft and Methodology - focuses on camera set up and fieldcraft. In this section Robert begins to explain his approach, techniques and shows the reader his current equipment.
3. Portfolio Case Studies - this is by far the largest section of the book and here we're taken into the specifics of dealing with photographing the various subjects which lend themselves to macro work - insects, flowers and fungi etc. Here Robert gives step by step explanations of his approach and techniques.
4. Workflow and Presentation - this final and equally important section offers information and ideas of how best to show and present our work.



This publication is quite superb and one that I feel will become a classic reference book on the subject of macro photography. This book didn't just happen, it's the result of many years of experience, gained from success, trial and error, patience and discovery in the field. Robert shares his extensive knowledge as he guides and explains his approach to the subject and his methodology.

This book in itself is a modern day classic on the subject of close up and macro photography and I for one cannot see how you could produce a better publication. This has it all and covers just about every aspect of close up photography you can think of. It is simply the best of its type currently available.

Whether you are just starting out, or a long in the tooth die hard, I recommend this book to you all. Not only does it cover all of the basics but also includes useful information we can all benefit from. And if that's not enough, just look through the fabulous photo's.

Robert Thompson FRPS is a freelance natural history photographer, writer and author with a number of well known publications to his credit. He is best known for his close up and macro work.

My Journey from LRPS to ARPS

By Sue Godfrey-Green

I have always enjoyed travelling in Africa. On my very first trip to Africa I visited the Ngorongoro crater. Camping overnight on the rim of the crater, I lay in my sleeping bag with the hairs on the back of my neck tingling as I listened to the roaring of lions and the cackle of hyenas during their territorial skirmishes. The following morning we travelled down into the crater through several glorious layers of mist, and entered a world so full of wildlife it took my breath away - a world I had heard about but had found hard to believe could truly exist. So that was it, from that point I was truly smitten and I knew I would return to Africa again and again.

From my early days in Africa my interest in wildlife photography increased, however, so did my other commitments. After a series of breaks from photographing wildlife I finally retired and four years ago decided to challenge my self-taught photography skills. In 2014 I was successful with my application for a Licentiate distinction with some very welcome support from my mentor. Two years later, encouraged by my previous achievement, I studied the RPS website to learn how improved my photography skills would need to be to achieve an ARPS distinction.

I was aware that there was quite a significant jump from LRPS to ARPS. I used the online help provided by the Society and applied for a Distinction Advisory Day to gain further advice. When I requested

the further support of a mentor I was thrilled that they agreed to support me. I firmly believe the support of a good mentor makes a huge difference.

Statement of Intent

When it came to writing my statement of intent I asked myself what I most wanted to show in my images of East African Wildlife. The answer to that was relatively easy as my most precious moments were spent observing animals in their natural environment, their relationships and interaction with one another. My brief statement evolved from my experiences photographing the wildlife in East Africa.

Statement of Intent

These images have been selected from various trips to Africa over the last few years. Locations include the Masai Mara and Samburu National Parks in Kenya. I have also visited the Kalahari in Botswana, Kruger National Park and Mala Mala in South Africa.

Within the panel, I have tried to show a good cross section of various aspects of bird and animal behaviour, including flight, drinking, bathing, mating and feeding on prey.

Wildlife of Africa



Sue Godfrey-Green



1



2



13



7

Choosing images for a panel

Collecting a panel of 15 images in line with my Statement of Intent became a daunting task. Definitely more difficult than I had imagined it would be. The images all had to be technically superior to my previous work. The images had to be properly exposed, sharply focused and well composed. I knew I had to select images that did not show common flaws such as poor detail in the shadows or blown highlights. Composition had to be appropriate for the habitat of the animal or the bird. Working through this process I soon realised that some of my images were poorly cropped. I sometimes have a tendency to tightly frame the subject thus reducing the sense of the habitat of the animals.

This was a very challenging time and I almost believed that I might not be able to achieve my goal. I went through a stage of feeling quite disheartened when I saw that some of the images I considered to be among my best were showing flaws that I had not noticed previously. This process was a huge learning curve but enabled me to view my work far more critically than ever before. Some images required re-processing of the raw file to improve the overall quality. I constantly checked for faults such as colour noise and over sharpening. Eventually I did get used to discarding an image that I thought didn't reach the appropriate standard for the panel. Goodbye indeed to some of my favourites! As I discarded each of these images I reminded myself of the importance of maintaining my original concept and it was only by my ruthless critique of each image that I could maintain a sustained piece of work. I felt the encouragement and support of my mentor helped immensely at this time.

Composing the panel

I wanted the images to interrelate with one another in terms tonality, flow and species. I chose birds showing a variety of activities for the top layer of the hanging plan and non-carnivorous animals in the middle layer. I chose carnivores for the lower layer of the panel. This was inclusive of a baboon as they can also be carnivorous. The images were placed to balance the panel and conserve interest in the panel as a whole.

I chose to attend the RPS at Bath on my Assessment Day. The staff created a warm, helpful and friendly environment. I learnt a great deal from listening to the assessors' comments and critiques of the panels presented to them.

I thank everyone for that day, I will remember it for a quite a while. It had been a long and emotional journey for me and being recommended for the Associate Distinction made every aspect of the journey incredibly worthwhile.

Choice of Images

1. Ground Hornbill in flight. These are described as flightless ground dwelling birds that only fly on rare occasions. Masai Mara, Kenya
2. Juvenile Lilac-breasted Roller has just been given a caterpillar by the parent. Samburu National Park Kenya
3. A rare site of a pair of ground dwelling Secretary Birds building a nest high in a tree. Samburu National Park
4. Waxbill in a golden afternoon light, perched on a sandbank. South Africa.
5. Hamerkop at a waterhole. South Africa
6. Nyala Antelope at a waterhole, groomed by an Oxepecker.
7. Male and female Grevy's Zebra. South Africa.
8. Marabou Storks flying into a tree before sunrise. Masai Mara.
9. Wildebeest mating. Masai Mara
10. Elephant making as much disturbance as possible leaving a water hole. Kalahari Desert, Botswana.
11. Jackal with lungs taken from a zebra brought down by the Marsh Pride of Lions. Masai Mara
12. Interaction of a Cheetah family resting. Masai Mara
13. Young pregnant Baboon contemplating at the edge of a waterhole. South Africa.
14. Male and female lion resting between mating cycles. Masai Mara
15. Caracal with a recently caught Hare. Masai Mara.



The Secret Life of the Brown Hare

by Jean Manson



My fascination for watching and photographing Brown Hares began around 5 years ago on a very misty March morning. I was driving past a local field, and through the haar I noticed a large number of blobs in the field. I stopped to have a closer look. To my surprise they were Brown Hares, about twenty in all, running, boxing and playing.

Realising that I had so many near by I started to go out at dawn and dusk. I quickly became aware that the hares are creatures of habit often in the same fields at the same time of day. In that first year I was able to capture them at sunrise and sunset. Using my car as a hide I saw them boxing and mating, sunning themselves in the fields and mainly eating grass. They move so silently and sometimes with incredible speed (up to 40 mph). Their pathways between fields were very visible as they always used the same tracks so it was possible to just sit and wait for them to magically and silently appear.

As the crops grew taller it became much harder to follow them and by mid summer that year I had largely given up. But next year I started to look earlier and by February I was finding them in groups in the fields often with the snow falling. I decided it was time to try getting closer and abandoned my car hide

in favour of sitting in the fields. Once I had established which were the best fields it became a case of just sitting and waiting (often for many hours) but the reward of a hare running towards me was worth all the waiting. I watched them, sometimes very close, waking, stretching and carrying out their meticulous washings. I love to photograph them with the sun behind them as it is setting. I carried on through the summer and soon was rewarded by my first view of a leveret hiding in the grass. I have had many close encounters with leverets as they will often come and sit right beside me, seemingly unaware of my presence, whereas the adults will become cautious much earlier. I have never used a particularly long lens to photograph the hares. My 300mm lens is more than enough and often too long. If the hares are further away I can have the bonus of the surrounding countryside to add to the image.

In July 2016, late one evening, I was watching two leverets sitting by the edge of a path. The sun was going down rapidly and my ISO was up to 5000 - time to go home. From the far end of the field I noticed another hare approaching so I thought I would just wait for a few more minutes. As she came close the leverets ran towards her and started suckling.

It lasted only two minutes but was without doubt one of the highlights of my wildlife photography experiences. I discovered during the coming few days that you could set your clock by her appearance. The leverets would come out about 30 mins before she arrived sometimes from different fields and would greet each other with a nose sniff and washing each other. They would play for a bit but as time came for her to appear they became quite anxious and would cuddle up together. But night after night she came and fed them. I realized that I had been witness to something not seen by many people. The leverets are only fed once a day at dusk so I was incredibly lucky to have been there to witness it. I felt very privileged and it was only ten minutes from home.

This last year I searched in vain for the same sightings until late August by which time the harvest was well underway. One evening I thought I would investigate a new path. As I came around a corner I saw three leverets sitting together. I was sure they were waiting for their mother as they were behaving exactly the same way as the leverets of the previous year. Two nights later I waited and while there was still some light their mum came down from another field to feed them. The following night a rival gang of leverets came in for a bit of fun. The three leverets have continued to do well despite the constant harvest traffic.

It is hard to say why I go out day after day and never tire of watching hares. I still have a lot to learn about their life but the last few years have brought me some very special moments with them and I feel I am just starting to know a little of their secret lives.



Leverets



Hares at play



Hare grooming



Hare suckling leverets



Hares boxing

The constant need for a challenge

by **Conor Molloy ARPS, DPAGB.**

Photography distinctions may not be for everyone but they are definitely for me. Having grown up through school, university and corporate life with annual tests and work appraisals, I found that after taking early retirement suddenly I had no annual test or evaluation of what I had done during the year.

So, as a rather competitive newcomer to photography I was in need of some assessment of how I was doing and, yes, for a while Camera Club competitions served that purpose but the variations in judging performance left me quite unsatisfied. When I heard of distinctions at both the RPS and the PAGB it was an easy decision for me to get 'stuck in'.

My first experience at the LRPS was not a good one and I didn't pass - one of my images had a magenta colour cast and another appeared over-saturated. However, my sense of injustice was overcome by an appreciation that it was the view of six judges who examined my work carefully and did so against the standards of photography that they

were determined to uphold. I also took my dear old father-in-law with me who was great at calming my emotions and telling me to 'knuckle down and have another go' at a time when I was wrecked with disappointment - competitiveness doesn't cope well with knock backs.

For the first crack at LRPS I had thought it best to show some variety in my images thus I presented a mix of landscapes, nature and people images. After a few months had passed I thought about having another go but this time I was determined to stick to my area of strength - birds. So, I prepared a panel of ten bird images. Some folk are mistaken in thinking this would not provide the variety of subject matter that is required at LRPS level, however, a close reading of the rules and a brief check with the Distinction guys at Fenton House proved quite clear in indicating that so long as there was a variety within a single subject category then that was fine i.e birds doing different things, images taken in different light etc.



Waxwing

Thus, a year after my first unsuccessful attempt, I went back down to Bath with my ten bird images. I won't dwell on the nervousness of the process as everyone who has attended a distinction day knows all about sweaty palms and increased heartbeat as your panel enters the room for assessment. The judges did their usual close inspection by pulling individual images off the display and scrutinising them whilst muttering some quiet words to each other. I passed and it was a moment of pure joy when my name was called out by the Chairman of the panel. The joy, however, was tinged with sadness as my father-in-law passed away during the year and wasn't there to see my eventual success.

Planning ahead, I gave myself two years to get my work to a standard that I thought would compete for the next level - the Associate. This level is category specific, so it was a no-brainer that I would be entering the natural history category - birds again, but the standard would undoubtedly be quite a bit higher.

Trips to Finland, Romania, Iceland, Scotland and South Africa in those years was, I thought, bound to yield a good range of images to select from and the aiming point of an ARPS application was not far from my mind during these photo-shoots. I found this helped me to concentrate on the quality of the work I was producing.

One thing I did do differently for my 'A' panel was attending an 'Assessment Day' - a sort of a mock exam where some of the Associate judges give you a preview of their thoughts on your panel and how the images work together. I was very glad that I did this as they gave me some precious feedback including a dreaded magenta colour cast on one of my images - I'm beginning to think I am colour blind to magenta! Other good points that they made were to do with cropping too tight and one image they thought was not printed well enough. So, when you give up your time to get this sort of feedback it would be stupid not to listen to it. I duly took all the points on board, changed a couple of images and re-processed others.

One week later, I was back in Bath again for my real assessment. Yes, I realise that I left only a one week gap between my 'mock' and the real thing. This is too short a time and if there had been something seriously wrong then perhaps I would not have been able to find the time to rectify the matter - however, I was reasonably confident in my work to think that I could adjust things in line with the feedback within the week that I had allowed.

I always prefer it when my panel comes up earlier in the day, it just eases the stress of waiting. So, luckily enough I was fourth on. Unfortunately the



Black Tern



Avocet swatting flies



Kissing Bee Eaters



Puffins



Great Grey Owl



Black-winged Stilt



Preening Roller



Herring Gull with fish

three previous entrants had all been unsuccessful so the nerve ends were getting a bit frayed. I think it was fortunate that two of the judges on the day were also judges on my mock and they recalled my images - they also recalled what they had asked me to do to them and thankfully I had acted accordingly. I knew this because after they announced that my panel would be recommended for the Associate award one of the judges remarked about seeing my panel the previous week and said he was grateful that the "applicant had listened and taken the feedback on-board and been rewarded with a success" - nice to hear that.

So there we have it, a journey of a couple of years striving to reach a standard had paid off. I remember thinking to myself as I went home from Bath that maybe, just maybe, I can now call myself a 'proper' photographer - whatever that is. I have also followed the PAGB route which is quite different in style but I have managed to achieve both the 'certificate' and 'distinction' levels - my need for being tested knows no bounds!

The Fellowship will be my next target but once again the standards notch up considerably and I will have to give myself a few years and more travel and adventure before I can get close to it. I do find that having something to work towards and aspire to is a major incentive to enhance my own photography - the letters after your name are all very nice but its the improving quality of your work that is the biggest prize.

Panel Layout

The Love





Kingfisher

Statement of Intent

The Love of Birds

Handling my Father's racing pigeons from the age of ten started my lifetime love for birds and the observation of their behaviour.

My panel is a representation of my love of birdlife. It covers portraiture, flight and behavioural action. It covers portraiture, flight and behavioural action. I am extremely fortunate to be able to travel to photograph these wild birds in their natural habitat. It requires more patience than I ever thought I was capable of but delivers more joy than I ever imagined.

I hope that my panel demonstrates the colour, beauty and variety of activity that make photographic encounters with birds so enjoyable.



Crested Tit



Bullfinch



Roller



Osprey with fish

of Birds

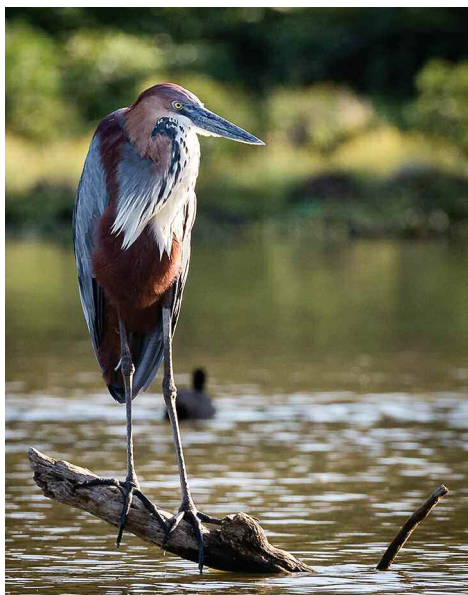
Conor Molloy LRPS



Lake Naivasha & Elsamere

by Andy S Hayes ARPS EFIAP CPAGB

Lake Naivasha is situated north west of Nairobi, approx two hour drive, near the town of Naivasha and is at the highest elevation in Kenya's Rift Valley. The lake has a surface area of 139 sq km and surrounded by a swamp half this area. The average depth is six meters. Between 1937 and 1950 the lake was used as a stop over by the Imperial Airways flying boats travelling from Southampton to South Africa. The main activities are now Floriculture, fishing and tourism.



While in Kenya I always try to fit a couple of days at Lake Naivasha into my itinerary. This three week trip started in Meru then I headed for Samburu, Buffalo Springs, Aberdares, Lake Naivasha and finally Maasai Mara.

After a long journey from Treetops, through the Aberdares, to Naivasha it was comforting to be welcomed, like an old friend, by the Elsamere staff. I've been visiting Lake Naivasha for the last three years and always stay at Elsamere, the old home of George and Joy Adamson of Born Free fame. I can remember, as a teenager living in Kenya, reading the books and seeing the films. In many ways they sparked my interest in wildlife and to some extent photography. While at Meru I took the time to visit Elsa's grave. It was a difficult exercise and required an armed guard because some Somali tribesmen were causing problems in the south of the park where Elsa's grave was located.

I stayed at Elsamere for two nights staying in one of the comfortable cottages, named Penny, Pippa and Pati. It should be noted that this is not a 5 star hotel but more like staying with granny, warm and welcoming but a little nostalgic.

Arriving Sunday lunchtime I was in time for the famous Sunday curry, something not to be missed. After unpacking I grabbed my camera and took time to walk around the beautiful gardens which teem with wildlife. The bird life around the gardens is extensive with hundreds of species.

In the afternoon a troop of Colobus monkeys, usually with young, come to the gardens for a feed. They are well accustomed to visitors and almost pose for the photographers.

Dinner is at 7:30pm prompt, an Askari guard, escorts you to the dining room to join the other guests. The Askari is to protect you from the wild animals that roam the grounds. Hippo, Zebra and Giraffe are commonly seen. Dinner is a very homely experience with everyone sitting around the dining tables, the same tables that George and Joy sat at and discussed animal conservation. After a pleasant dinner the conversation needed to be stopped or I would never get to bed for my early start.

The next morning was a very early before dawn start, a quick cup of tea and a biscuit, then

down to the small jetty at a location nearby, to meet the boatman, now with a modern motorised fibreglass boat. Just as we approached the jetty an African Harrier-Hawk flies and lands in a tree in front of us, a good omen for the day. On with the life vests, lift in the cameras and food then out on the lake at the start of a six hour expedition. It's worth pointing out that the quality of the boats, equipment and boatman can vary and I recommend that you make sure that all of these are up to the job. The weather at Lake Naivasha can change very quickly, become very stormy and it's easy to lose sight of the land.

It was my lucky day - the weather was perfect a little cloud breaking up the beautiful blue sky. As the sun rose we headed along the edge of the lake looking for kingfishers and wading birds. The low sunlight spread across the lake and quickly brought warmth with it.

The lake is famous for its African Fish Eagles. They are not difficult to find, their loud and distinctive calls echoing across the lake and with their beautiful russet feathers, white head and tail, adorning the skeletal trees around the edge. Besides these beautiful birds there are numerous other species of bird and several other animals ranging from Hippo, Buffalo, Zebra, Wildebeest and other Antelope to Coyote and Python.

The types of bird life change every year. This year I didn't see any Malachite Kingfishers. My boatman says that it's due to the disturbance caused by an increase in fisherman around the lake's edge. Finding employment in Kenya is difficult and erratic, as a consequence many locals resort to fishing and sell the fish to the markets in Nairobi.

It's not long before we see groups of Pied Kingfisher hovering over the water and diving to catch fish. I always find this fascinating and struggle to capture the moment that they dive and hit the water. This year I found several groups of three or four working together until one caught a fish and then noisy squabbling would start. The one with the fish raced away while the others chased it with aerial manoeuvres that were equal to that of a fighter ace in combat. As we continued around the lake we came across large groups of Cormorants perched in skeletal trees and later a breeding colony on the southern edge of the lake.

There are various types of Heron - Goliath, Purple, Squacco and Black - all well within the reach of a modest camera set up. This year I was fortunate to see and photograph several Giant Kingfishers, a rare sight last year, at very close quarters.





Most boatmen are very knowledgeable and point out a great variety of wildlife. Sometimes a little too enthusiastically, pointing out otters, (coypu) and a sleeping python, (a large plastic bottle).

With regard to equipment, good results can be achieved with lenses in the range of 300 to 400mm and fast shutter speeds. Light is normally not a problem but the weather can turn stormy very quickly, so keep an eye out. It's important to monitor your exposure. Opportunities appear in all directions and in all kinds of light from bright sunlight overhead to dark shadow around the tree lined shaded edges of the lake.

Always wear a hat and use sun screen, the sun in Kenya can be very fierce and combined with the reflection from the lake you need to take care.

The African Fish Eagles are my main reason for visiting Lake Naivasha due to their abundance around the lake edges. They tend to be found in pairs, in the tops of the tall acacia trees at the waters edge, or in the old skeletal trees in the waters of the lake. Here they sit majestically with their beautiful plumage, gleaming white head, breast and tail, chestnut shoulders and underparts and mostly black wings, calling out across the lake with their powerful distinctive voices.

I've encountered a number of problems photographing these birds. Exposure and shutter speed. Shutter speed is easy, I rarely go below 1/2000th sec. Light and exposure are critical. I learnt my skills with Osprey at Routemarch, in the Scottish Highlands. Photographing from commercial hides are a good way of learning how to deal with technical issues before embarking on an expensive trip to foreign places. The main issue is getting the exposure right between the contrasting black of the wings and the white of the head, breast and tail. With Osprey it's even more critical. When the Osprey hits the water, in the early light, it's fairly dark but as soon as it attempts to rise out of the water it lifts its powerful wings and shows vast areas of white under the wing. Unless you are prepared for this by under-exposing, you'll end up with blown whites and loss of detail. With the African Fish Eagle it's not quite as difficult as the white areas are there for all to see but I still tend to underexpose and correct this in post production.

In my view, the best time to capture these magnificent birds is just before and after dawn. I identify a bird or pair and get the boatman to position the boat, parallel with the expected line of flight, 100m to 150m away from the birds with the sun behind me. The boatman whistles to attract the bird and throws the fish at right angles to the boat about 15m to 20m away. While he does that I check my exposure at the point

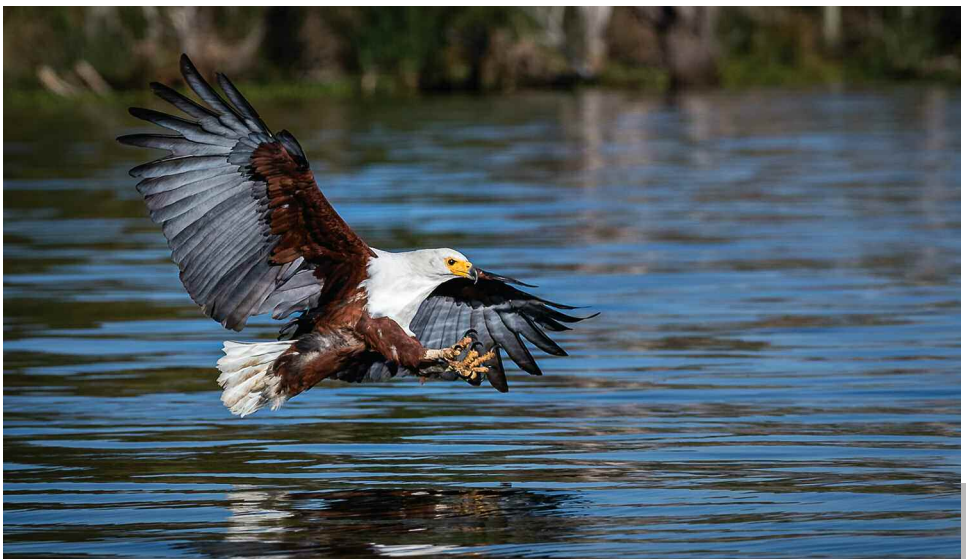
where the fish is then pan back to the birds in the tree and focus on them. Usually one and sometimes both birds start their long graceful flight towards the fish. I pan with the birds trying to get a focus lock, which can be difficult due the very busy background. Eventually I get locked on and fire off a series of bursts following the bird through the pick up and flight away. Watch out for shadows across the neck of the bird or under the wings. As always, there's an element of luck in getting a great image. If you're lucky you'll get several individual birds coming in at different locations so time to make any necessary setting changes.

Anyone interested in Elsamere, as a base, can find them through their newly updated website that now has a great 360 degree image system.

Link: <http://www.elsamere.com>

360 images: <http://360.hotlist.co.ke/elsamere/>

If you need more information please feel free to email me at : andyshayes@btinternet.com



My Associate path

by Douglas Neve ARPS

My interest in natural history photography started during the late 1970's in Salalah, a small town in the southern province of Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman, where I was employed by the Oman Government. The local terrain was varied and ranged from a coastal plain supporting grazing and arable farming to arid gravel plains and desert. During September and October each year the coastal plain receives heavy monsoon rainfall which is hugely beneficial to the local flora and fauna providing excellent opportunities for natural history photography. I was interested in all aspects of the natural history of the region, however tended towards photographing the many species of Arachnids, Coleoptera and Lepidoptera that could be found there.

I later took up a position with British Aerospace in Saudi Arabia where I continued photographing natural history subjects. The terrain was generally more arid than that of Oman, however sufficient subject material was normally available. I was particularly interested in photographing the Lepidoptera of the country,

however this was restricted by the low number of species present. Dragonflies were also of interest and several species could be found near lagoons formed by the discharge of wastewater from sewage treatment plants. A colleague taught me how to process colour prints and slides in a darkroom provided by the company and after a short time I was successfully processing my own material.

In 1985 I returned to the United Kingdom and joined the RPS and a local camera club. I was soon working towards an LRPS, eventually producing a panel of butterfly and orchid images on slides. This was unsuccessful when first presented, however the feedback was helpful and I was successful on my second attempt. I was pleased to be the first recipient of an RPS distinction in my club.

Following a relocation to a Sussex coast town I joined a well established photographic society with many competent and distinguished photographers amongst

Douglas Neve LRPS,

British & Continental Butterflies

07.03.2017.



its members. Although I'd had an interest in photography for some time, I soon realised my photographic output did not match that of the more proficient members. I was keen to improve my photographic skills and after discussing techniques with fellow members, competing in competitions and listening to judges' appraisals, the quality of my images began to improve.

After a while I began to think about working towards an ARPS. By this time almost all of the images I was producing were of butterflies, and therefore an obvious choice for the theme of my prospective panel. I tried experimenting with a dual flash system, which was successful to some extent, but often resulted in dark backgrounds and strong shadows across the subject. I soon persuaded myself that I should only use natural light. I also tried using macro lenses of various focal lengths and found that the Sigma 150mm lens, although relatively heavy, was ideal for my needs, allowing a greater distance between the lens and the subject.

At the time I felt it would be beneficial to attend an RPS ARPS Advisory Day being held close to my home town. The panels presented and the feedback given were not specifically related to natural history and I felt the event was of limited benefit to natural history photographers.

Early in 2016 I noticed that the RPS had arranged an ARPS/FRPS Advisory Day for Natural History to be held in March of that year at Foxton near Cambridge, and enthusiastically registered for the event. Fortunately I had plenty of time to prepare a panel of fifteen images and by now had a good understanding of how this should be presented.

The Chairman of the Assessment Panel at Foxton commented that the general layout, size of the images relative to the frame and diffused backgrounds of my panel were good, but most of the images were not sharp enough for a successful Associate panel. I mentioned that the images presented were taken using apertures of between f:5.6 to f:8 and an ISO of 100 - 200. I was advised to use smaller apertures and a higher ISO. It was clear my technique required improvement and that I needed to follow the advice given to hopefully produce sharper images. I anticipated entering for an ARPS in March 2017 and began working towards a new panel.



High Brown Fritillary



Large White



Clouded Yellow



Orange Tip



Green Hairstreak



Marbled White



Glanville Fritillary



Comma

Following the advice given at Foxton I began using apertures between f:12 and f:14, being well aware of the need for diffused backgrounds. I avoided increasing the ISO much above 320 to keep noise levels as low as possible. The use of smaller apertures would of course require longer exposures and therefore I avoided handheld exposures whenever possible, particularly in low light conditions.

When photographing butterflies I sometimes use a tripod, especially during early mornings or evening when they are less active. At other times a tripod may not be practical as it is likely to disturb the subject when being set up. To provide more stability when using longer exposures and when the use of a tripod is not practical, I use a monopod with a tilt head. This is not as stable as a tripod but an improvement on handheld exposures. To improve the stability of the monopod a friend suggested using a stick angled away from the monopod and then gripping the two together, which also allowed for a quick set-up. With practice in the use of this technique image quality improved, even with exposures of 1/60th second or longer. Eventually I replaced the stick with a carbon-fibre golf club shaft, which was lighter and provided a better grip. Most of the images comprising my successful Associate panel were taken using this technique.

Life cycle of Brimstone Butterfly



Baton Blue



Swallowtail



Meadow Fritillary



On 7 March 2017 I presented my panel at the Assessment Day held in Bath. Initially I intended to post this to Fenton House, however later decided to attend the event in person, which I'm glad I did as it was interesting to hear the comments of the panel members on both my own submission and those of others. Fortunately my submission was successful.

Black-veined White



Marsh Fritillary



Brimstone



Micro Four Thirds has come of age.

by Mike Lane FRPS

In the 47 years I have been photographing wildlife I can think of four milestones in camera technology. The first was the power winder, which when introduced gave what then seemed an incredible 2.5 frames per second. Then came autofocus cameras, a huge development that changed photography drastically. This was followed by image stabilisation lenses and finally, the big one, digital cameras.

What these developments had in common was that I did not predict them and when each was announced I thought of them as a gimmick with no practical use. My track record on the future of wildlife photography equipment is obviously poor and what I am about to say you may be best advised to ignore, but here it is:

"The DSLR camera is doomed, but the future is bright, the future is mirrorless."



Robin



Starling

I am not new to mirrorless cameras. I am on my fourth Micro Four Thirds (MFT) body. They have had their uses and advantages over my Canon gear, but were also irritating and difficult to use. I never considered selling my Canon cameras and used the MFT sparingly only when I needed their features.

However, that has all changed with the latest Olympus MFT, the E-M1 Mk2. In the few months I have used it, it has become my camera of choice and now my Canon gear is being used sparingly.

It has so many advantages and features that it makes any DSLR look limited. What does Micro Four Thirds mean? Firstly it has a small sensor with a 2x crop factor, so a 300mm lens is equivalent to a 600mm on a full frame camera. The four thirds part is the ratio of the picture: 4 x 3 instead of a 3 x 2 on a 35mm film or DSLR camera. I no longer notice this slight change in format.

The camera bodies and lenses are much smaller and lighter than DSLRs. I am now far more likely to carry my Olympus camera when I go for walk as I hardly notice the weight.

The fact that the cameras are mirrorless enables huge strides forward in their features with up to an incredible 60 frames per second. When I tell people this verbally I always feel the need to say "that's six zero frames per second" or they will assume I just said 16 fps. The fastest shutter speed is 1/32,000th and best of all, this is from a camera that is totally silent.

Focus stacking can be done in the camera, creating a single image made from a series where the focus has been automatically changed between shots. In HDR mode it will automatically combine images in the camera. It has up to 6.5 stops of image stabilisation which means hand holding with a large lens is easy.

My Canon gear has a switch on the lens to limit the focus to predefined distances, which are inappropriate and so rarely used. The Olympus allows the focus to be limited in the camera to any minimum and maximum distances you chose.

My favourite feature is the ability to take a picture before you fully press the release button. This I am addicted to and constantly looking for the opportunity to exploit. Olympus call it Pro-capture, but Pre-capture would seem more appropriate. When in Pro-capture mode and the release button is half depressed the camera starts taking pictures at

up to 60 fps, but does not write them to the memory card. It does however keep the last 14 images in a buffer and when the button is fully depressed starts to write pictures to the card, including the 14 in the buffer. Keep in mind that although taking pictures at 60 fps the camera is silent.

All these features are wonderful to have, but the most important issue with any system is how does it perform? Can a small sensor produce the quality we need? It is impossible for me to describe quality. All I can say is you will not be disappointed. The A3 prints I have produced are excellent.

Noise levels have always been an issue with small chipped cameras at higher iso levels, but this is now drastically improved. During the first few weeks I was shooting at 400 iso, but over time this has increased and now rarely come below 1600 iso. All of my flight shots are at 3200 ISO and the noise or grain is hardly noticeable in most situations.

Autofocus was unreliable on the earlier MFT cameras, but the E-M1 Mk2 is on a par with my Canon gear. It uses a combination of contrast and phase focusing and is very fast. My success rate with birds in flight is about the same as with my Canon cameras, but my Olympus is far less likely to jump on to the background, which Canon is very prone to do.

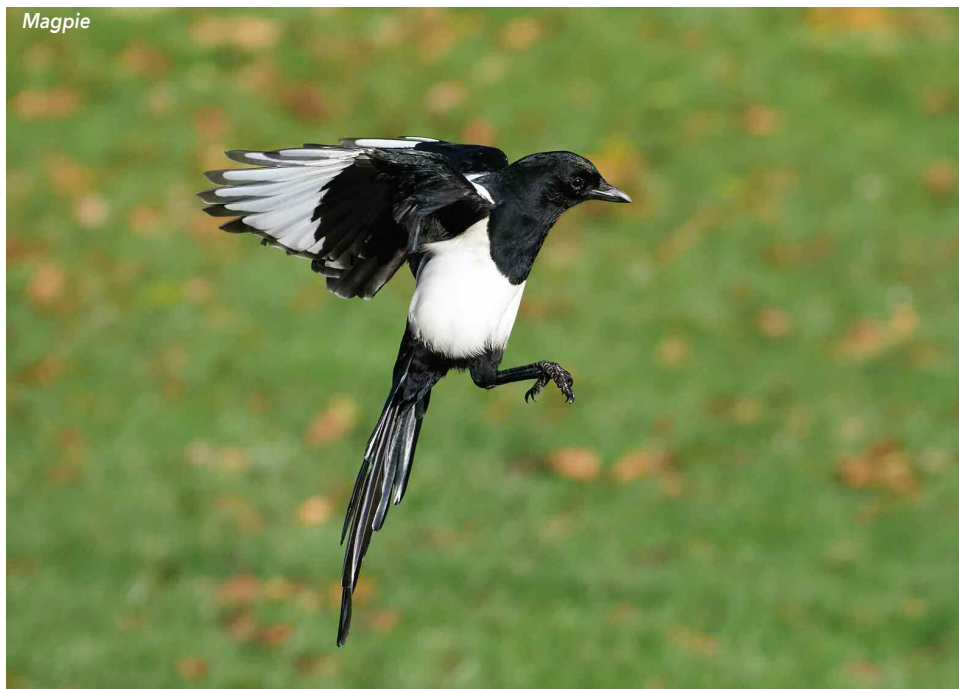




Brown Hare running



Nuthatch



Magpie

There is no need to worry about micro adjustment of the AF system either. With contrast focus, back or forward focusing can't occur. A time lag in the electronic viewfinder was another reason flight photography was so difficult with earlier MFT cameras, but this has also been eliminated. The E-M1 Mk2 viewfinder shows the image in real time.

Currently I use the Olympus 70% of the time, but have not yet made the decision to sell my Canon gear. I have the Olympus 300mm f4 lens and the 1.4 extender, which is excellent, but I would really like a larger lens before I swap. It is rumoured that bigger telephotos such as a 200-500mm are on the way.

An improvement I would like to see is a better electronic viewfinder. The image is not as clear as with an optical viewfinder, but it is said that the electronic viewfinder on the mirrorless Sony A9 camera is so good you would think it was optical. Also there is no black out with the Sony camera between frames. That must make it so much easier to follow a bird in flight and I hope we will see this on the next generation of MFT cameras.

When news of a larger telephoto lens appears I expect I will begin to sell off all my DSLR equipment. I just hope there are still people out there who want to buy it!

RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting 42nd Annual General Meeting Opening of the Annual Exhibition

Saturday 21st April 2018

Smethwick Photographic Society

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

(for directions see below)

Programme:

- 10:00hrs** Doors open, tea and coffee available
- 10:30hrs** Welcome and introduction
- 10:40hrs** 'Life Behind the Lens' - Robert Thompson FRPS, FIPF, professional wildlife photographer and author, will give a wide ranging talk covering a variety of natural history subjects.
- 12:45hrs** Break for lunch
Please bring your own packed lunch as lunches will not be available.
There is a dining area. Tea, coffee and drinks will be available at the bar.
- 13:30hrs** **42nd Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group**
Agenda:
1. Apologies for Absence
 2. Minutes of the 41st AGM 2017 - printed in issue 128 of The Iris
 3. Matters arising
 4. Chairman's Report
 5. Treasurer's Report
 6. Secretary's Report
 7. Any Other Business
 8. Date and Venue of the 43rd AGM 2019
- 14:15hrs** **Opening of the 2018 Exhibition**
Presentation of the Awards
Projection of the accepted images.
The accepted prints will be on display.

16:30hrs Close

Directions:

From Junction 2 of the M5 follow the signs for the A4034 north towards West Bromwich.

Once on the A4034 stay in the left hand lane and after about 1/3 mile turn left at the first set of traffic lights into Park Street.

At the end of Park Street turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac).

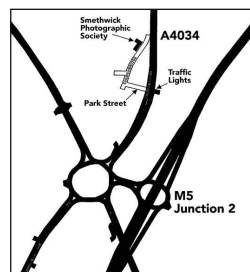
The Old Schoolhouse is the last but one building on the left.

For SatNav use postcode: B69 2AS

Google Maps Coordinates: 52.497771, -2.019776

Please note: there are currently major road works between Junctions 1 and 2 of the M5 plus delays at M5 Junction 4a northbound.

Please allow extra time for your journey to Smethwick if using the M5.



Membership Statistics

Shown below are Nature Group members per RPS region as at January 2018 (and January 2017) together with other statistics

Regions	Jan 2018	Jan 2017	Distinctions	Jan 2018	Jan 2017
1 - Central	71	68	Honorary FRPS	04	04
2 - East Anglia	82	83	FRPS	79	78
3 - East Midlands	52	55	ARPS	232	242
4 - Eire	09	11	LRPS	216	224
6 - London	88	75	No Distinction	466	434
7 - North Wales	10	12			
8 - North Western	68	70			
9 - Northern	30	23			
10 - Northern Ireland	03	04			
11 - Scotland	57	49			
12 - South Eastern	82	91			
13 - South Wales	22	23			
14 - South Western	37	33			
15 - Southern	82	94			
16 - Thames Valley	74	67			
17 - Western	78	69			
18 - Yorkshire	50	47			
			Total	997	982
Total UK	895	874			
Overseas	102	108			
Total Membership	997	982			

These statistics are prepared from data supplied by the RPS Membership Department January 2018.

Map courtesy of the RPS website January 2018

Ainsdale Dunes Field Meeting, Ainsdale-on-Sea, nr. Southport, Lancashire

Date: Saturday, June 9th, 2018
Time: 10:00 am.
Location: The Ainsdale Discovery Centre,
The Promenade, Shore Road,
Ainsdale-on-Sea,
Nr Southport, PR8 2QB

Main subjects of interest: Orchids and other dune flora, amphibians, reptiles and rare insects etc.

Leader: Trevor Davenport ARPS
Tel: 01704 870284
Mobile: 07831 643844
Email: trevor43davenport@gmail.com

Dr. Phil Smith, MBE, has kindly agreed to join us again on this field meeting; Phil is a noted expert on the Sefton Coast and author of *'The Sands of Time'* and *'The Sands of Time Revisited'*.

Additional Information:

The sand-dunes of the Sefton Coast provide the largest sand-dune complex in England, covering an area of approximately 2100 ha. It is a fascinating and ever-changing habitat offering many photographic opportunities throughout the seasons; however, early summer is usually a period when the dunes are richly rewarding for both botanic and entomological subjects. This year we have timed the meeting for early summer orchids and insects. These are always dependent upon seasonal weather; (last year was exceptionally dry but so far we have had a wet winter with plentiful rain). Unless we have a very dry period from now on we should find Bee Orchids and varieties of Marsh Orchids with hybrids. There are many other botanic specialties to be found in the dunes and on the 'Green Beach' at this time of the year. If the day is warm we should find the Northern Dune Tiger-beetle - a superbly photogenic insect; and there should be a plentiful supply of early butterflies and dragonflies. The frontal dunes and the 'Green Beach' are also well known for sightings of migratory birds and there may be some latecomers passing through. The area is also noted for having two increasingly rare species: the Sand Lizard and the Natterjack Toad. These are not easy to locate, especially the Sand Lizard, but we will do some prior research into suitable locations. In addition to the flora and fauna the Sefton Coast is itself very photogenic with sand, sea and dune landscape opportunities. The dunes are always changing, physically and with both subtle and dramatic lighting, and there are locations where 'sand blow' has scoured large 'Devil Holes' further down the coast.

There is plentiful accommodation in the nearby seaside resort of Southport.

This is a popular field trip with a maximum number of fifteen so early booking is important.

Items to bring: There are very few natural hazards but the area is exposed so light warm clothing and waterproofs are ideal in case of rain.
Stout shoes or wellingtons are required.
There are no charges but a packed lunch and something to drink is advisable.

Starting Out Pt 2 - British Wildlife

by Sue McGarrigle LRPS

It was a bit of a baptism of fire following the successful visit to the Farne Islands with Ruth and Nicky, which started their journey into Nature Photography. Since then we have visited some specific places within the UK to continue the practice - some of these were places that had originally given me the opportunity to hone some of my techniques before 'going wild'. This gave them time to further explore different aspects of fieldcraft but also how to cope with photographing a variety of species at different and best angles as well as depth of field while dealing with fluctuating light.

To get a more natural feel while practising static and moving subjects, I chose two venues, 1) the Cotswold Barn Owl Centre at Gloucester which is run by Vince Jones, himself a very experienced photographer and 2) The British Wildlife Centre at Lingfield. I remembered my visits, several years ago, when as a beginner I picked up lots of a tips from friends who had a lot of experience under their belts and how enjoyable it was to feel that close to nature.

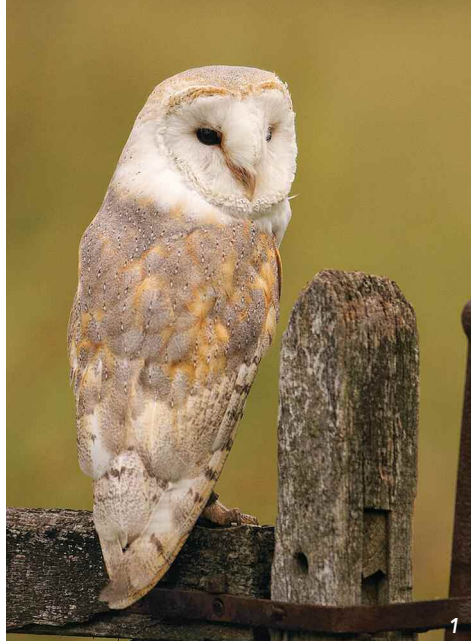
The Barn Owl Centre is set in 12 acres and they have our native species in their natural surroundings for the photo days. They are a charity and funds are used for conservation and preservation of wild Barn Owls and other British species. Also, they promote and encourage biodiversity and conservation of all wildlife. It also serves as a sanctuary for the rescue and rehabilitation of injured or abandoned birds. Cost for the day £80 plus take your own lunch. They have a particularly tame Buzzard called Leighton (someone has a sense of humour), as you can see from the image there are no jesses (anklet straps) on him.

More diversity can be found at the British Wildlife Centre with about 40 different species including Deer, Fox, Red Squirrel, River Otter, Badger, Pine

Marten, Vole and Owls. The centre was set up to educate the public and children on school visits about native species and the challenges they face living in the wild in Britain today. They are also involved in conservation and rehabilitation as well as breeding programmes. For photographic days they close the centre to the public providing a peaceful environment for amateurs and professionals alike. Cost varies dependent on the time of year. Sitting on the riverbank watching the otters and other river inhabitants was a highlight.

Other key practice areas we have visited include the magnificent Bluebell woods which include expanses of wild Garlic at Austy, near Henley-in-Arden, Warwickshire, a breath-taking walk even without a camera. These woods are open for a very short period during the early part of May, again for charity. Bluebells can be quite challenging for the novice and it was interesting to see their perspectives in photographing them. Another learning curve was fungi. We have some lovely woods in Worcestershire and so after warning them that they might be doing the job 'lying down' they donned some waterproofs and started to explore macro photography, a whole new ball game.

Where to next? Orchids maybe and back to Gloucestershire, or a local patch in Worcestershire. I am keen to visit Swifts Hill near Stroud, a local landmark with its distinctive double 'bump' situated in the beautiful Slad Valley, immortalised in Laurie Lee's 'Cider with Rosie'. The limestone grassland supports over 130 species of wildflowers of which there are 13 species of orchid that include the rare Frog, Bee and Early Purple Orchids. We just need a decent day for learning the ins and outs of flower photography. In the meantime, pottering locally but come Spring, whatever we decide, near or far, the opportunities are endless, and the enthusiasm continues to grow with each learning curve.



1



2



3

- 1 Barn Owl
- 2 Common Kestrel
- 3 Little Owl
- 4 Buzzard
- 5 Buzzard
- 6 Tawny Owl



4



5



6

*Further images from Sue Godfrey-Green's
successful Associate Panel*

*Opposite: Male and female lion resting
between mating cycles.
Masai Mara.*



*Above left: Jackal with lungs taken from a zebra
brought down by the Marsh Pride of
Lions. Masai Mara*

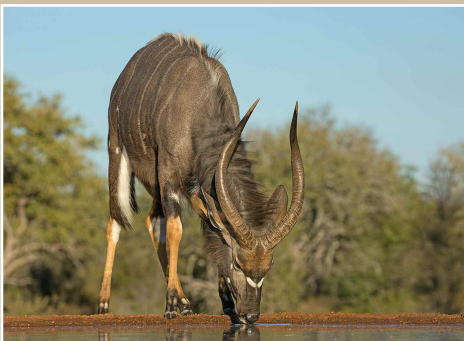


*Above right: Caracal with a recently caught Hare.
Masai Mara.*

Opposite: Wildebeest mating. Masai Mara



*Below left: Nyala Antelope at a waterhole,
groomed by an Oxpecker.*



*Below right: Elephant leaving a waterhole.
Kalahari Desert, Botswana.*

