

THE IRIS



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

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Spring 2012



Redshank by the late Colin Smith FRPS



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Photographic
Society

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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.

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Nature Group Exhibitions

Copies of Nature Group Exhibitions dating back to 2000, are available to book for camera clubs/photographic societies. 2000 to 2007 are available in slide format. Since 2008 a CD of the Exhibition has been produced and is available for purchase. For more information please contact the Secretary, details above or go to our website: www.rpsnaturegroup.com

Editorial

Its been a funny winter - its currently early February and its freezing. Not particularly unusual for this time of year, but until a few days ago it had been quite mild. Indeed, there have been spells so mild that temperatures got up into double figures and on January 12th I heard a Song Thrush singing for the first time this year. However, its a very different story today with five inches of snow fallen overnight - the trees and bushes, which until a few days ago were still laden with berries, are now being stripped by flocks of hungry Fieldfare and Redwing. I cannot claim to enjoy the British winter and I will not be sorry when its over - the light is there at the end of the tunnel - only 6 weeks before the Spring Equinox!

Thank you to all members who responded to my plea for articles. Some of these are included in this issue, others will be used in the Summer edition. Please keep them coming - its always good to have articles in reserve.

In this issue a variety of subjects and subject matter are discussed - some excellent points are raised in 'Unnatural Selection?' and echo some of my own opinions, especially on nomenclature. There are interesting accounts of members overseas photo-trips to Bulgaria and Africa. Other members share nature's spectacles closer to home - one which occurred in Lancashire last summer and another annual event in Gloucestershire. Another item describes the delights of using a tilt and shift lens and two members with a flair for AVs describe their approach.

There are also notices of four field meetings coming up soon and, printed at the very back of this issue the announcement and booking form for the Nature Photographers' Joint Convention.

On a sad note, this issue also contains obituaries for Committee Member and past A&F Distinctions Panel Chairman, Colin Smith FRPS, and Harold Hems FRPS a past member of the A&F Distinctions panel for over 20 years.

Finally, please do support the Spring Meeting, 36th AGM and 2012 Annual Exhibition by attending the joint meeting on Saturday 31st March 2012 at The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury. (Details on page 4). Its always an excellent day out.



From the chair

This morning, as I sit at my computer, I'm looking at a brisk winter's day with the temperature just above freezing, but at least it is bright and sunny.

My moth trap has been singularly unproductive so far this year – just two specimens in four nights' trapping for the national Garden Moth Scheme survey. Although I have heard reports of Red Admiral sightings they aren't around here, but there have been one or two Buff-tailed Bumblebee queens on the winter-flowering Honeysuckle.

I'm keeping an eye on a male Blackcap which is flitting around in next door's Mistletoe-covered apple tree and eating the berries. My wife has just told me that she wants photographs of it eating the berries and then wiping its beak on a branch, for her talk on fruits and seed dispersal. A challenge for me as I'm not a bird photographer!

My thanks to everyone who supported my Chairman's Day at Smethwick – a full house in the end, and we managed to do slightly better than break even. I'm very grateful to Andrew Gagg and Spike Walker for their excellent presentations, and to the staff and volunteers at Smethwick P.S. for their excellent catering and organisation.

Thanks to the few members who responded to the request from Tony Bond and myself for your thoughts on the future of field meetings; at our last Committee meeting we spent a considerable amount of time discussing them. In summary, two replies came from members who were interested in (separate) fungal foray meetings – and were the only potential attendees. Others quoted time and travel costs to distant locations and two members criticised one choice of venue, remarking that they considered it to be lacking in natural history interest. Yet another comment was that too many field days seem to be focussed on close-up and macro photography, which seems to be of less interest to many of our members.

A further response was from several members who have organised field trips during the coming year and I'm very grateful to all of them for their efforts. These include two meetings for bird photography. I hope you will agree that the last comment above has begun to be addressed. Full details of all the meetings are given elsewhere in this issue.

This year's residential weekend at Malham Tarn Field Centre is now fully booked and I'm grateful to Len Shepherd for his efforts in organising it. The residential weekend for 2013 will be in August, at the Field Studies Council's Preston Montford Field

Centre near Shrewsbury; full details will appear in the Winter edition.

It is with great sadness that I have to report the death of Harold Hems FRPS. I'm grateful to Tony Bond for his tribute, which appears in this issue. Some of Harold's images – achieved with what would now be considered primitive equipment – are of a standard which is still hard to achieve with the modern technology at our disposal.

The Nature Group Spring Meeting – a talk by Richard Revels, the opening of the Exhibition and the AGM, will take place at Smethwick P.S. clubrooms on March 31st. I'm very grateful to Richard for stepping in at short notice – our original speaker is ill and unable to give his talk. Please come along and enjoy the talk and the exhibition – and the chance to have your say at the AGM (which only occupies a small part of the day!).

On the subject of the Group Exhibition, we viewed the 2011 images at Taunton Camera Club a couple of weeks ago and the audience – a very critical bunch – were unanimous in their praise of the quality of the images and the standard of the presentation which Ashley Lawrence and Jim Hartje had produced. We all felt that it was the best exhibition presentation we had seen for a long time. My thanks, on behalf of the Committee and the Group, to all the successful exhibitors and to Ashley and Jim.

One topic to be raised at the AGM is the issue of focus stacking. This was discussed in depth at the January Committee meeting and the general feeling was that stacked images are different from photo-montages in that they consist of multiple exposures of the same subject taken (more or less) at the same time. We propose to allow their submission in future exhibitions. Please think about this and, if you are unable to attend the AGM, let your Committee know your feelings on the subject.

Finally my thanks to my fellow Committee members for their continued support – my task would be impossible without it.



PS – I've just managed an image of that Blackcap eating a Mistletoe berry – study window open, easterly wind blowing in, gilet and waterproof on! It's far from exhibition standard but perhaps OK as a lecture 'slide'.

The 36th Annual General Meeting, Spring Meeting and Annual Exhibition Opening of the RPS Nature Group

to be held at:

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

Saturday 31st March 2012

Timetable:

10.30hrs Assemble for 10.45hrs start

11.00hrs Richard Revels FRPS "Wild about Bedfordshire".
Richard will show the wildlife from his favourite local stamping grounds.

12.00hrs Break for lunch.
Light lunches* will be available in the clubhouse. (*Ploughman's or Jacket Potatoes).
Lunches must be ordered in advance. Please advise the Secretary at least ten days
before the AGM if you would like to order a lunch. A dining area is available for those
who wish to bring their own packed lunch.

13.00hrs 36th Annual General Meeting

- Agenda**
1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of the 35th AGM 2011 (printed in issue 110 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 37th AGM 2013

13.45hrs Opening of the 2012 Exhibition

Presentation of awards
followed by a showing of the accepted projected images.
Accepted prints will be on display for the duration of the day.

Directions:

Leave the M5 at Junction 2 and follow the signs to A4034 for West Bromwich. After a few
hundred yards turn left at traffic lights into Park Street. At the T junction turn right into
Churchbridge. The Old Schoolhouse is on the left just before the end of the road.¶

Field Meetings 2012

Birds of Prey event

Date & time: Saturday 12th May 2012. 10.00am for 10.30am start.

Venue: A private Nature Reserve at Potton, Bedfordshire.

Meeting Place: Full details of the venue will be forwarded to those booking for this event.

Leader: Richard Revels FRPS

Tel: 01767 313065

E-mail: richard.revels@talktalk.net

Availability & Cost: Only 10 places available £35 per person, first come, first booked.

Booking: contact the leader, Richard Revels.

Payment: Cheques made payable to RPS Nature Group, and sent to:

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

Cheques will not be cashed until after the event has taken place. Should bad weather necessitate cancellation of the event, cheques will be returned.

Species: Kestrel, Sparrow Hawk, Barn Owl and Buzzard (and possibly another species) will be flown for photography. The birds will also be posed on logs etc for photography.

Other information: Tea and coffee will be available, but bring your own packed lunch.

The location for this event is ideal for photography - it is private and in addition to having many different props being available for perches it has excellent backgrounds for photography.

Buzzard with Rabbit by Richard Revels FRPS



Field Meetings continued

Waitby Greenriggs, nr Kirby Stephen.

Date & time: Friday 1st June 2012.

10.15 for 10.30 start

Meeting place: NY 757086. Park on verge near NY 758087 of minor road; half mile east of Kirby Stephen

Leader: Leonard Shepherd

Tel: 01969 622043

E-mail: shepherdlen@btinternet.com

Cost: free

Main subjects of interest:

Wildflowers, including orchid and insects

Other information:

This event precedes the Nature Group Malham week-end which is currently fully booked. However, this one day event is open to any member.

Steps down the railway embankment are not suitable for wheelchair access but otherwise level walking. Usually sheltered from wind.

Bring packed lunch or take a break in Kirby Stephen.

Pre booking preferred due to limited parking near the entrance.

Ainsdale Sand Dunes, Sefton Coast, Merseyside

Date & time: Saturday June 9th, 2012.

9.45 for 10.00 am briefing.

Leader: Trevor Davenport

Tel: 01704 870284

Mobile: 07831 643844;

Email: trevor.davenport@virgin.net

Please call or email if you require further information.

Meeting Place: The Ainsdale Discovery Centre,
The Promenade, Shore Road,
Ainsdale-on-Sea, Nr Southport
PR8 2QB

Main subjects of interest: orchids and other dune flora and fauna, insects, etc.

Other information:

- Plentiful accommodation in the nearby seaside resort of Southport.
- There are very few natural hazards to worry about but the area is exposed so bring warm clothing and light weatherproofs in case of rain. Sensible shoes or boots are also essential. Bring a packed lunch and water or something to drink.
- Dr Phil Smith, MBE, has kindly agreed to join us on this field trip; Phil is a noted expert on the Sefton Coast and author of 'The Sands of Time' and 'The Sands of Time Revisited' (Amberley Press 2009).

Ainsdale Dunes continued ..

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 with 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. We should expect to find up to six species of Orchid as well as many other botanic species.

Northern Dune Tiger-beetle (*Cicindela hybrida*) - a superbly photogenic insect; and a plentiful array of early butterflies and dragonflies.

The area is also noted for two increasingly rare species: The Sand Lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), and The Natterjack Toad (*Epidalea calamita*), formerly (*Bufo calamita*). Although not easy to locate, we will do some prior research into possible locations.

Brandon Marsh Nature Centre, Coventry, Warks.

Date & time: Saturday 23rd June 2012.

10.00 for coffee and briefing.

Directions: From M6 motorway Junction 2 follow A46 (Coventry/Warwick). At the 3rd roundabout take left turn onto A45 (London). In 150 yards turn left into Brandon Lane. Nature Reserve is half-mile on right and well signposted.

Meeting point: Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Visitor Ctr

Leader: Brian Sherwin

Tel: 01788 817637

E-mail: briansherwin@talktalk.net

Cost: £5.00

Main subjects of interest: Mixed habitat of pools, reedbeds, woodland and open grassland. Birds, Dragon and Damselflies, Butterflies and Flowers.

Other information: Visiting members are free to stay at the site all day. Closing time is approx 7pm. Good footwear for wet and dry (anything suitable for June !!) Long sleeves (for insect bite sufferers). Refreshments: a Tearoom on site provides drinks, snacks, sandwiches, hot & cold meals throughout the day. If you require a hot meal please advise the leader who will provide details of what is available. Further useful information can be found at:
<http://www.brandonbirding.co.uk>
<http://www.warwickshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk>

Unnatural Selection?

by Fiona Mackay ARPS

Natural History, Nature Photography and Photographic Exhibitions

Some time ago now, in the Summer 2008 edition of *The Iris*, an article entitled 'Damn the Judges', by Hazel Grove Hon LRPS, BPEn* (aka D'Arcy Lever, Mavis Enderby), queried whether those who judge the Nature section of photographic exhibitions are qualified to do so. The result of non-nature judges judging nature images was, he (?) wrote, 'too many acceptances of little natural history value'. He (?) also castigated those who do not title their images appropriately. I have seen no response to this, but would like to take it further, as it does raise questions as to the nature and purpose of Nature Photography and the place of photographic exhibitions with Nature sections. Perhaps we, as photographers, are (almost) as much to blame as the judges.

Proportional Representation

There are around 9,708 species of birds on the planet, 4,260 mammal species, 6,787 reptile species, 1,000,000 insect species, 4,000 plant species and around 200,000 described species of fungi, probably many, many more. In rough percentage terms, avoiding multiple decimal points and with a bit of rounding up/down and somewhat cavalierly lumping plants and fungi together as 'botanical', we get 0.5%, 0.2%, 0.4%, 61.7% and 37%. Bear in mind that these figures do not take into account marine life or even most freshwater life, so on a full count those percentage figures would shrink quite a bit, leaving birds, for example, at less than 0.5%. So my 'actual' figures are not actual at all, but, as most nature photography as seen in exhibitions covers these categories, these rough percentages are good enough to give us a flavour of what is happening. So how do these proportions compare with what we get in photographic exhibitions? Here are the figures for one recent international exhibition, compared with 'actual' distribution. (Things are further complicated by the fact that I am working from the catalogue and uninformative titles give no indication of what class of species is being portrayed and some foreign language titles I have been unable to translate, even with the help of on-line translators. Some of these foreign language titles may also be uninformative.)

Actual		Exhibition	
Birds	0.50%	Birds	31.00%
Mammals	0.20%	Mammals	18.30%
Reptiles	0.40%	Reptiles/amphibians	1.90%
Insects	61.70%	Insects/other invertebrates	15.06%
Botanical	37.00%	Botanical	3.40%
		Other (e.g. marine)	4.20%
		Foreign language	1.80%
		Uninformative titles	23.10%

Clearly, in photographic exhibitions, what Bill McKibben, in his article 'The Problem with Wildlife Photography' (Doubletake, Fall, 1997), called 'the charismatic megafauna' are disproportionately represented, while insects and botanical subjects are woefully under-represented. Thus Nature sections in photographic exhibitions can scarcely be said to give anything like a representative view of the world of nature. It is more a reflection of human preferences, birds and mammals being, on the whole, cuter and easier to identify with. They also have more glamour. 'I was in Alaska last week photographing grizzlies' has infinitely more status as dinner party conversation than 'I was crawling through the undergrowth yesterday looking for insects.' The sense of identification, of anthropomorphism, is reflected in the shockingly high number of uninformative titles. Which brings me to ...

Nomenclature

Anyone who is seriously interested in Nature Photography should surely take the time and make the effort to title their images appropriately. However, this is far from being the case. Take these examples of uninformative titles from the acceptance list of another recent international exhibition: Breakfast (and yes, there was Lunch as well); Weatherproof; Go Home; Do Not Be Afraid; Approaching; Kiss Me!; I Love You; Sorry; I am beautiful; Dissonance - 2; Attack; Abundant Attains 3; Go Away; Friend 100; Hello; and The Nut Collector. What on earth is all that about? These are all in English and from entrants in 12 different countries. There are also examples in other languages. Most of these suggest an anthropomorphic and decidedly amateurish approach to Natural History. If photographers are putting these titles to their images, you cannot entirely blame the judges for judging 'pictorially'. Perhaps as a start, all

exhibitions should follow the admirable example of the RPS Nature Group Exhibition and have a rule – but a strict rule – that entries should have the species name only, either in the photographer's native language, or, more usefully, the scientific name, with a possible additional descriptor such as 'mating' or 'nectaring', etc. Trivial, cute and anthropomorphic titles should automatically ensure rejection.

Judging

There will inevitably be a degree of subjectivity in the judging. Judges do not have a lot of time to study the images, so only those with visual impact will stand out, although they might be of little Natural History value. The chances are that a shot of one of the 'charismatic mega-fauna' will have more immediate impact than a shot of, say, a small insect. I have a feeling that if it is a question of 'good' versus 'good' then a merely good shot of a bird or mammal will garner more points than a merely good botanical or insect shot. This, I suspect, has more to do with our feelings about the subject than any objective criteria. It is probably quite natural and unconscious, so if the imbalance in representation is to be corrected to any degree, then a little bit of 'help' along the road will be needed.

Solutions

If we agree there is a problem, then we need to think about solutions, or at least partial remedies. It is not good enough just to blame the judges, as it may well be that the proportions selected for the exhibition accurately reflect the proportions that were entered for the exhibition. If the vast majority of us are 'nature paparazzi', following the celebrity cult of the 'charismatic mega-fauna', then they will continue to predominate. Somehow we need to encourage more photographers to enter shots of subjects other than birds and mammals – and perhaps they will, if they feel that there is more chance of success. Here are some suggestions:

- Have different sections within the Nature section as a whole, each section with its own awards. I know it is more work for the organisers, but it can be done – the RPS Nature Group Exhibition has two categories. Perhaps one for the celebrities and one for the rest of the natural world, with allocated percentages to each category? If exhibitions are dominated by birds and mammals, then that may be what people feel they should or must photo-graph in order to be taken seriously. As things stand, the focus is not really on nature as a whole, but on the bits we like and identify with.

Is this fair to nature, to impose our selection on it and call that 'nature'? If we care about nature as a whole, perhaps we should be engineering things so that photo-graphers are encouraged to work with subjects other than birds and mammals.

- Make it a serious business. Insist on the proper naming of things. In international exhibitions it is perhaps most important that the correct scientific name be used, as that has global validity. Uninformative and silly titles should be rejected or transferred to an Open or General section. Titles such as Sorry and Kiss me! indicate that the photographer is thinking in human terms and imposing human values on the natural world. Can you imagine yourself applying a title like 'I am beautiful' to a botanical subject or an insect?

Ideally, judges should be not just photographers but also active naturalists who can see beyond 'tourist wildlife' to real field-craft, skill and knowledge. They should be able to distinguish between a shot that has merely visual impact and one that informs us about the natural world. They should be able to spot the game farm and captive shots that, according to the FIAP definition, should not even have been entered but which do creep in from time to time, even in exhibitions with FIAP accreditation. The PSA definition is a bit more ambivalent and the use of a box to tick for 'authentic wildlife' suggests captive shots are permitted. But this does not agree with the FIAP definition, giving a problem where an exhibition is accredited by both. However, it is not an ideal world but perhaps a clear check-list of what makes a worthwhile 'nature' shot as opposed to what is merely a 'wow' visual impact image of little natural history value would be a start.

Most importantly, however, it is up to us as photographers to produce quality shots of the vast diversity of the natural world and to enter them in quantity, so that nature beyond birds and mammals can have better representation. If they are not entered, they are not judged, far less selected. I think it is important that there is better representation of other aspects of nature than birds and mammals, otherwise those nagging questions remain... What is nature photography about? What is it for? Is it about us, our preferences and the appeal to our egos of the glamorous bits of nature photography, or is it about the whole of nature, on which we, and the other mega-fauna, depend? What we choose to photograph and select for exhibition may give us an answer. But is it the right one?

Bird Photography in Bulgaria

by Mike Lane FRPS

Poland was the first Eastern European country I visited to photograph birds. At that point it was the most bird rich place I had been to in Europe and I was overwhelmed with the opportunities. It was the year 2000 and when I returned home I promised myself that for the next decade or so I would explore as much of Eastern Europe as I could. I can't claim to have visited every country yet, but I have visited most from Greece in the south to Estonia in the far north. Bulgaria is the only one I have been back to repeatedly. Not only is it bird rich in species and numbers, but it is one of the few countries to have an infrastructure for wildlife photography in the form of especially built hides. As we all know there is a huge difference between the needs of bird watchers and photographers.

Bulgaria has a large range of habitats, from high mountain ranges to lakes, marshes and steppe land. The black sea coast on the east of the country also hosts the second largest migration route in Europe and the spring months can be incredible. Some of the most attractive of Europe's birds are found here. Bee-eaters, Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Rollers. It is also one of the best places to photograph the never easy Wallcreeper and during the winter months the much declined Red-breasted Goose

It is not just the numbers of birds that make Bulgaria attractive for bird photography. The countryside is generally unspoiled, wild and open to exploration. If you see a dirt track, not only can you walk along it, but it is usually permitted to take the car too. Photography from a car window can be wonderful here.

My first visit was to the North Black Sea Coast on a package deal staying in one of the holiday resorts and simply driving out each day to explore the steppe lands, lakes and marshes that all hold so many birds. It was like Lesvos, without the crowds. Subsequent trips have been with a tour company, Spatia Wildlife, to make use of their many hides. I have done Golden Eagle with them twice. Never an easy bird to photograph - long sessions in the hide are always necessary as the photographer has to enter before first light and remain enclosed until nightfall. All told I have done eight such days in Bulgaria and got my eagle shots, as well as visiting Goshawks and Ravens. Golden Eagles are photographed in the winter months when they come down to pre-baited sites in front of one of six hides built for the purpose.





In the late winter Red-breasted Geese start to arrive in the north and this has to be one of the best places to photograph this much declined species. When it is very cold and snowy they can be approachable along with the White-fronted Geese.

At winter feeding stations, also run by Spatia, Hawfinch is a regular visitor along with four species of woodpecker and a host of tits and finches.

Spring is inevitably the best time to be there and offers the most photographic opportunities. Bee-eater colonies are numerous and from canvas hides easy birds to photograph on perches prearranged by their nesting burrows. In flight they are more challenging, but it can be done.

The highlight of my last trip in May 2010 was a Lesser-spotted Woodpecker nest that was low down in a fence post and completely out in the open, catching the sun all day. This opportunity does not occur often and we spent a great deal of time at this site. The young were still very small when we first found it, so the adults had to go inside the hole to feed them. When they emerged they would fly out directly from the hole giving at least a small chance of flights shots. There were five photographers in our group and with no need for a hide we were all able to stand just a few feet away with the birds oblivious to our presence.



A Syrian Woodpecker nest also proved easy to photograph, being equally low down and in the open. I needed to be told it was a Syrian and not a Great-spotted Woodpecker as the difference is not obvious.

Hoopoes are another spectacular bird that attract photographers and we had a perfect site where the feeding parents hovered in front of the nest hole as they fed their well grown chicks. Just two trees away was a nesting Wryneck too, but these birds are not so easy to photograph as their cryptic colouring blends into the tree so well, although they were very tame birds.

Much of the bird photography in Bulgaria centres around drinking pools and Spatia have several setups for this. In such a hot, dry country if you can provide water for birds they will visit in large numbers. Corn, Cirl, Ortolan and Black-headed Bunting are common visitors as well as many finches and even Red-backed Shrike.

On one pool close to a dirt track we spent some time photographing Little-ringed Plovers. As ever the best angle to work from was by lying on the floor in the bottom of the hide with the lens resting at ground level. This produced some lovely reflections and I watched the amazing displays as the male tried to mate with the female. This consists of the males legs being swung high in a military goose step. Unfortunately this display was always too far away for quality photography.

Every other year (don't ask me why) Rose-coloured Starling breed in Bulgaria. They are colonial nesters and there is one quarry where they breed in good numbers. You can work from the bottom of the quarry, where the birds gather in a large, noisy flock or put a hide up on the cliff top, where they are less numerous, but the back grounds are better.

I have often considered living in Bulgaria. On my first visit I remember it was possible to buy a decent house with my credit card! The open access to the land is refreshing compared to trying to photograph in the U.K. and the weather far superior. It can be cold in the winter, but not often dull and grey. The wealth of wildlife makes you realise what damage we have done here in the U.K.

I will probably never make the move and have to content myself with the fact that it is only a 3 hour flight and a number of budget airlines fly there. My favourite, Easyjet, is one of these and has a wonderful web site for booking on line and (importantly) no restrictions on the weight of hand luggage.

In June 2012 I am returning again with a trip for Focus4nature. If you would like to join me contact: www.focus4nature.co.uk



Using a Tilt and Shift lens.

by Richard Revels FRPS

Most new lenses that I have acquired over the years have not create much excitement, as they are often similar to a lens that I already have, maybe a better up-dated version with an image stabiliser, or longer or wider focal length. However purchasing a new Canon TS-E 24mm f3.5L Mk2 lens took me into new territory and put added enthusiasm back into photography for me. I now want to go out and use my new 'toy' as frequently as possible.

I had considered buying Canon's original Mk1 version of this lens some 6 or 7 years ago, but decided not to, as I was told by an architect who used that lens, that the resulting images were not as crisp as he had expected. However, some two years ago while in Cyprus with wildlife photographer Bob Gibbons FRPS, he showed me some pictures (on his laptop) that he had recently taken with his new Canon Mk2 T & S lens, and they were outstanding. He considered this new lens noticeable better than the original version that he had used for several years. The pictures included shots of masses of flowers in their habitats, with everything in sharp

focus from the nearest flower to the distant background. I was so impressed with what I saw, that a few months later, when I received some payments from a couple of publishers for use of some of my pictures, I knew exactly what I was going to spend it on.

The T & S lens is not cheap - around £1700 was the lowest price I could find it for sale from a reputable dealer. However, I often photograph wild flowers in their habitat using a wide-angle lens, and as this is an ideal lens for that job, I placed my order.

Tilt and Shift lenses are not new inventions, with many of the old plate cameras of a century or so ago having them as standard. Today architect photographers frequently use these lenses, using the Shift function to correct converging verticals of building. While I do used the Shift function at times to correct trees and buildings that are leaning due to pointing this wide-angle lens up or down, the Tilt function has been more often used by me in my natural history and landscape pictures. This lens can also be used to create a panoramic view. This is



done by mounting the camera on a tripod, shift the lens to one side and take a picture, then without moving the camera, shift the lens to the other side and take another picture. The two images can then be seamlessly joined using Photoshop. This technique I have still to try, but I am assured works well. The Canon 1.4 x extenders will fit and can be used on this lens, so increasing the focal length.

It is the Tilt function I find most useful, as the plane of sharp focus can be moved around, enabling sharp close up subjects like flowers that may be less than a foot away from the lens, and also get the backgrounds in focus as well. Surprisingly only a little tilt is needed to achieve the desired result. Using the reverse tilt the background can be put more out of focus, should I wish to do so. Not only can the tilt be used vertically or horizontally, it can be tilted diagonally if desired, and both tilt and shift can be used together. This is a very versatile lens, an ideal tool for the more creative minded photographer.

Of course the depth of field remains unaltered, moving with the tilting of the plane of focus. I usually find f11 to f16 quite adequate for just about all subjects, and by not stopping down too much, diffraction which softens images at small apertures, will be avoided.

Almost all the functions can be used either separately or in conjunction with each other, but it is not a quick 'point and shoot' lens, unless you are just using it as a straight 24mm lens. One thing that you have to do before using the lens is to set the exposure manually, as after using the tilt or shift a false exposure reading will be given to the camera's metering system. The lens also lacks auto focus, but none of this should present a problem, and it has the advantage of slowing down picture taking, so hopefully encouraging more consideration to be given when composing the picture.

I often hand hold the camera when picture taking with this lens, as it is quicker and easier to change the angle of view and to compose the picture. It is however often difficult to judge if you have managed to get your plane of sharp focus just where you want it. So after taking a picture I will keep checking the camera's LCD monitor to check the sharpness zone. I don't find using live view quite as good or as easy as looking through the viewfinder when composing and adjusting the tilt and focus. When time permits I will use a tripod, which to be honest is a better option, but usually hand holding or using my camera bag or backpack (resting on the ground) as a support is adequate to get sharp pictures with this wide angle lens.



Both Canon and Nikon have recently produced new versions of their older 24mm T & S lenses that are designed for use with digital cameras, and they produce exceptionally high quality results. To get the best wide-angle effect the 24mm lens needs to be used on a full frame camera like Canon's 5D or 1Ds, or the Nikon D3 or D700. I use mine on the full frame Canon EOS 5D Mk11 camera, which is an ideal combination, and this has now become my favourite wide-angle lens, even when I don't use either the tilt or shift facility, as this lens produces such sharp images. They will of course work on reduced sensor size cameras, but will not give such wide-angle views.

Used on the right subject a T & S lens can produce very good and different results from a standard 24mm lens. However, not every picture will be improved by having the background as well as the main subject sharp, but some will, and it's nice to have that option, and the ability to use the lens to get a more panoramic view is a great bonus. So when you next have some spare cash to spend on new camera equipment, consider getting a T & S lens instead of upgrading to the latest camera body. This lens will last you considerably longer than a new camera body that will too often be replaced in about 18 months by yet another 'improved' model.



A Tilt & Shift lens will open up new photographic possibilities for both landscape and plant photographers, and it should last you a lifetime.

If you wish to view an excellent wild flower book with many pictures taken using a Tilt & Shift lens, I would recommend you have a look at Bob Gibbons latest book '*Wild Flowers Wonders of the World*' published by New Holland. ISBN 978-1-84773-826-4. For those who are not familiar with Bob Gibbons FRPS, he is a Fellow of the RPS and has been a member of the Nature Group for about twenty years, and has recently been appointed a member of the RPS Natural History A & F Distinctions Panel. Bob has been a professional wildlife photographer and conservationist for many years and worked for English Nature prior to turning professional. He has written and illustrated many other wildlife books and guides over the years, mostly about British and European wildlife.

Image details

1. Knocking Hoe NNR in Bedfordshire. This picture was taken last July for use as the cover of the recently published '*Flora of Bedfordshire*'. This 700 page book required an image of its prime nature reserve for the cover. So I searched for a view with a good show of wild flowers in the foreground and the hill in the background. Using the tilt sharp focus was achieved on both the foreground flowers (Common Birdsfoot Trefoil and Self-heal), no more than a foot away, and the hill over 400 yards distant.
2. Alpine Pansies in the Swiss Alps. A lovely display of pansies with both the flowers and the distant mountains sharp. Only a little tilt is require to achieve this kind of result.
3. Oxeye Daisies on the Lizard Peninsular in Cornwall. This is a good example of how a T & S lens can improve a picture. Having all elements sharp was just what I wanted.
4. Lichens on Heathland. I wanted as much as possible of this mass display of *Cladonia portentosa* Lichens to be in sharp focus. The T & S lens was the perfect tool for this job.

All pictures taken using the Canon 5D Mk11 camera and the Canon TS-E 24mm f3.5L Mk11 lens, with the aperture usually set between f11 and f16.

Website: www.richardrevelsphotography.com

In Search of a Crossing

by John Elmitt ARPS

We'd visited Kenya several times, but never to the Mara at Migration time. This had been pretty high on the 'Bucket List' for years, and as 2011 was the 30th anniversary of our first African Safari it was agreed that this was the year!

Our route up, from the southern coast of South Africa, necessitated an overnight in Nairobi and we arrived at a manic Wilson Airport for one of the many 'scheduled' morning flights to the Mara.

The safari experience started with our Masai guide, resplendent in red blanket, full ceremonial beads and stabbing sword. We explained the whole purpose of our visit was to experience a crossing and he set about the task with vigour. He explained that crossings are never certain and are weather dependent. The herd's behaviour is totally governed by the rains. The Wildebeest leave the South of the Serengeti after calving in May/June when the short rains are over and the grass grazed out. Following the rains they move up the Eastern Corridor, through

the various National Parks, Reserves and Concession Areas which make up the Serengeti eco-system. Current estimates are that there are 500,000 Burchell's Zebras, 1.8m Blue Wildebeest and 100,000+ other plains game including Topi, Grants and Thompsons gazelles. At some point they will cross the Grumeti River - which is another holiday - and run the gauntlet of the huge Nile Crocodiles which live there. The slow progression northwards is totally unpredictable and should there be heavy showers in the south the herds will simply turn round and go back even if it means re-crossing the river.

Our camp, situated in a Masai concession at the Eastern side of the reserve, was on the banks of the Mara. The terrain here wasn't suitable for the big herds but the game was still abundant with sightings of Lion, Leopard, and Hyena within a few 100 metres of the camp. Hippo from the river munched their way through the camp every night and, of course there were Cape Buffalo, the always elegant Eland, Water





Top: *Ruppell's Vulture*

Above: *Young Marsh Pride Lion*

Below: *Hyena ritual greeting*

Buck, Wildebeest, Zebra, Thompson, Topi and Grants. Our drive into the reserve took us alongside a boggy marsh for several Kms, passing a Maasai village with their herds of goats and cows and colourful washing hung out to dry in the bushes alongside the water. The marsh soon widened out and formed the center of operations of the famous Marsh Pride of Big Cat fame. Now often split into 2 or 3 groups depending on the season but 25+ in total. A formidable group for the Maasai to handle year round as neither they nor the Lions migrate!

Once on the plains of the Mara you get some idea of the numbers of animals on the move. We saw all the predators, big groups of Banded Mongoose, the very rare Black Rhino, and of course, huge herds of Wildebeest strung out in columns several tens of thousands long, all moving towards the next anticipated rain and new grass. Several times we saw 20 to 30 thousand animals heading for the river, sometimes a sedate procession, other times a frenzied stampede, then standing in the water for what seemed hours, before finally drifting away and dispersing back onto the plains. To be close to such numbers of animals at a full gallop is a never to be forgotten experience. It quite literally impacts all the senses which no photography can truly capture. We did see 2 small crossings a few hundred only whilst in the Mara Concession Area, one actually returning from the Northern bank. There appeared to be no reason for this as there had been no rain - it's just how Wildebeest can be!!



Two features of the whole Mara/Serengeti ecosystem are the huge fat crocodiles sunning themselves on the river bank and the number of dead animals with only Vultures and Marabou Storks in attendance. The early season crossings get ravaged by Crocodile but by August the insatiable carnage has subsided and the fat sluggish crocs now gorged to a standstill show little inclination to move. The land predators were similar, with so much food available the last scraps were not worth fighting over. The Mara/Serengeti has the highest concentration of Vultures in the world at this time of year. Ruppell's with their pale yellow eyes, Lappet-faced and White-backed had all congregated for the feast. Many animals just die of drought, exhaustion or old age, and around every carcass there are the Vultures, with the occasional Black-backed Jackal and Hyena close behind.

Large family groups of Elephant were constant visitors to the river and the drinking, dust baths and playful juveniles provided wonderful photographic opportunities. As did all the Plains game

Bird life in the riverine areas was prolific, and we saw Wire-tailed Swallows, Purple Grenadiers, Sacred Ibis, Yellow-billed Stork, Egrets, Egyptian Geese, and Hamerkop. Away from the river Lilac-breasted Rollers presented the eternal challenge for a perfect image, and there were Starlings, both Blue-eared and Superb. On the open plain Oxspeckers were gorging themselves on the bounty of the migration, Ground Hornbill patrolled with dignity and there were the ever-present scavengers and raptors.



Top: Black Rhino
Above: Elephants at the river

Below: Eland and Oxspeckers



We chose to start our trip in Kenya and chose to use Alex Walker's Serian Mara and Serengeti North camps. The Serian Serengeti North camp, set up in June and moved back to the south of the reserve in October, was excellent. Well sited and well managed. Driving out to the vast plains of the Northern sector of the reserve brought home the huge area covered by the Tanzanian side of the eco-system. Whilst remaining focused on the river we did venture for some part of the day into the more remote corners and, apart from the huge numbers of plains game, we saw Klipspringers in the Kopjes, Black Rhino (big male and female with calf) close to the track; many families of Warthogs; three big male Cheetahs, lethargic between meals; a Hyena sitting in a deep pool, apparently cooling off; elegant Giraffe browsing the umbrella acacias and a very good sighting of the Sand River pride of Lions, quite active for the time of the morning. And we got our big crossing!

Herds of Blue Wildebeest cross the Mara river.

We had been out since 5.00am, moving up and down the Mara searching for some activity. Finally we decided to move a little way downstream where there were Elephants and Zebra on the far bank and big pods of Hippo everywhere. Whilst having our mid-morning coffee break we were forced to move by the approach of a large female Crocodile who obviously considered us a threat to her nest just below the rim. As we retreated we saw dust a couple of Km away and raced towards it. We were very lucky - a herd of around 20,000 was starting to cross the river, and as the only vehicle there, we had excellent views of both banks. After scouting the bank for Crocodiles our guides allowed us out of the vehicle to witness one of nature's truly great spectacles. The compulsion of the herds to cross the river is quite extraordinary.

Continued on page 34



Wildflower images in AV sequences

by Jenny and Malcolm Gee LRPS

In 2001 we took our first walking holiday in the Swiss Bernese Alps. We particularly enjoyed all the alpine flowers that could be found at an altitude of around 1000-2000 meters. We were also very keen producers of audio visual (AV) sequences. One of our future productions was to be based around our Swiss walking holidays as, after our first venture into the mountains, we were sure we would have many more.

We had, and still use, Olympus OM system film cameras with an extensive selection of Zuiko prime lenses, including an f3.5 50mm macro. However, it soon became apparent that this lens was not ideal for close-up photography under these conditions, as frequently we were unable to fill the frame without casting a shadow on the subject. As we were keen to include an alpine flower section in our AV sequence, a solution had to be found! We obviously needed a longer focal length macro lens and, as Olympus Zuiko lenses were no longer in production, we looked around the camera dealers, and eventually located a

second-hand f2.0 90mm macro Zuiko lens in mint condition. Another problem was that our current tripod, which was 25 years old, rather heavy and due for retirement, would not allow the camera to be positioned lower than 66 cm off the ground. On a trip to Focus On Imaging the following year, we visited the Hasselblad stand, and found the Gitzo 1348 Mk 2 tripod, which has legs that swing fully outwards, allowing it to be placed flat on the ground. When used with a Gitzo GH2780GR centre ball head, the camera lens optical axis is then only 24 cm off the ground. As the tripod has carbon fibre legs, carrying it on daylong walks in the mountains, is also much easier! Although our OM3Ti cameras have excellent spot metering, we still tend to use a Weston Euromaster exposure meter plus Invercone to determine the exposure, making appropriate adjustments for magnification and any filters used.

All the images taken during our annual walking holidays in the Bernese Alps were shot on colour



Yellow rattle – *Rhinanthus minor*



Alpine pasque flower – *Pulsatilla alpina* subsp. *apiifolia*



Crimson-tipped lousewort - *Pedicularis oederi*

reversal film, using Kodak Ektachrome 64 Professional film stock, which was sadly discontinued at the end of 2007. We did however buy up as much as we could find storage room for in our freezer, and our stock should last us a good few years! The resulting transparencies were scanned using a Nikon Super Coolscan 9000ED scanner. By ensuring that exposure is spot on and that focusing and framing are at their optima when taking images, we have found that they require very little post scan treatment in Photoshop. The use of the Shadow/Highlight adjustment can sometimes be beneficial to reduce the high contrast you obtain from a scanned transparency. Most AV competitions now use digital projectors with a resolution of 1400 x 1050 pixels, however 35mm film has different proportions so we crop our scans to 1400 x 934 pixels, which gives a slightly smaller image size (on the vertical axis) when projected.

Not being experts on the identification of alpine wild flowers, we always had a copy of the Collins Pocket Guide to Alpine Flowers of Britain and Europe in our rucksack, to help with identification in the field. As we returned annually to the Swiss Bernese Oberland, our collection of alpine flower images slowly built up, and we started to think about how to put together this section within our AV sequence. Meanwhile the AV world had embraced digital technology, and we realized that we faced a problem



Harebell - *Campanula rotundifolia* and Fragrant orchid - *Gymnadenia conopsea*

with some portrait images that we wished to include. Mixing portrait and landscape format within a digital AV sequence causes a visual break, as the projected image size is reduced and then increased again. We eventually came up with the solution of creating composites, within the defined projected canvas size. Two scanned portrait format images were dropped onto a third slightly de-saturated and blurred image of a field of wild flowers using Adobe Photoshop. Their edges were then blended into the background. Obviously this required some standardization of style when taking the upright studies of the blooms. The camera was dropped low enough to allow the flower to be shot virtually side on. This necessitated the use of a right-angle Olympus VarimagniFinder, which we had purchased many years previously, but had rarely used. Its only drawback is that it laterally inverts the image, so that in aligning the subject in the viewfinder, an opposite sideways adjustment has to be applied to that shown in the VarimagniFinder! For landscape format images, the framing and composition criteria were not so rigorous.

After a total of eight holidays in the Swiss alps we finally assembled our AV sequence during 2009, and after passing through a number of development versions, it was ready to be submitted to the 19th RPS AV Festival held last year in Cirencester.



Purple crocus – *Crocus vernus*

We were delighted when our AV was accepted for projection, and it has since been selected to be shown at a number of both national and international AV festivals.

The digital age has revolutionized photography and AV production, and although many people now regard film cameras as an old out-dated technology, it is possible to have the best of both worlds by scanning transparencies and using a computer to produce the sequence. Until we empty our freezer, film still lives on as the primary step in the production of our images!

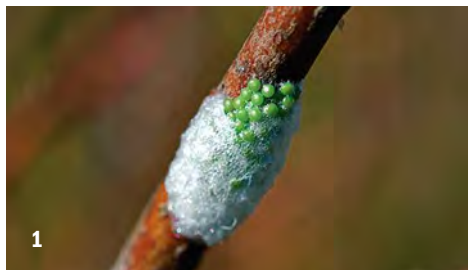


Mountain Sainfoin – *Onobrychis montana* and Round-headed Rampion – *Phyteuma orbiculare*

Irruption of White Satin Moths

by Trevor Davenport ARPS

During the Spring of 2011 we noticed a remarkable number of caterpillars on scrub willow bushes in a small area - about 200 metres by 150 metres - in the dune slacks near the Ainsdale Discovery Centre on the Sefton Coast. These were found to be caterpillars of the White Satin Moth (*Leucoma salicis*). This is quite an attractive moth with a white satiny sheen to the wings. Listed in moth literature as 'local', meaning it has been recorded from between 101-300 10 km squares in Great Britain since 1 January 1960, most of these records occur in the Southern part of the British Isles.



The caterpillars pupated, and beginning in late May, they started to emerge in ever increasing numbers until many of the scrub willow bushes and reeds in the nearby slacks were covered in individuals and mating pairs.

In early June - which is listed as quite early for the species - there were estimated to be several thousand moths in various stages of development. A tally count in a small section produced a count of 700+ on June 7th by the vice-county moth recorder. A little research showed that this moth is known to be an 'outbreak' species, with accounts from as far afield as Wyoming in the USA; and I was informed that there had been an outbreak in Lytham St Annes some time ago.

Nevertheless, it was a truly unforgettable experience to be walking in a veritable snowstorm of attractive, fluttering white moths during daylight hours. A local 'fixed dune' expert informed me that he had never before recorded an event like this on the Sefton Coast. It was a superb opportunity to spend photographic time with these moths in all the stages of their life cycle.





With such a huge influx of insects in a very small area I would have expected a high incidence of predation, especially by birds; however, this did not appear to be the case although there were small patches of wings in some parts. I never noticed an increase in bird activity though, which may indicate that the moths are unpalatable.

It's interesting to speculate what causes these irruptions but the reasons for insect population dynamics are complex and, in the case of the White Satin, much under-studied. I shall look forward to the Spring of 2012 with great interest to see if the moths re-appear, and, if so, in what numbers.

Image Captions:

1. White Satin eggs
2. White Satin caterpillar
3. White Satin pupa
4. Emerging from pupal case
5. Early phase of expansion
6. Third phase of wing expansion
7. Mated pair of White Satin Moths
8. Final phase adult White Satin on Horsetail



Autumn colour at Westonbirt Arboretum

by Paul Sievers ARPS

The Westonbirt Arboretum is of international importance and is situated in Gloucestershire 3 miles from Tetbury about 20 minutes drive from both the M4 and M5. Highgrove, the home of HRH Prince Charles, is a near neighbour and indeed Prince Charles sought advice from John White, a retired director of the arboretum, when he was planning the planting of his own arboretum.

Westonbirt was established by Robert Holford in 1829 and, after his son and nephew had carried on the ownership, it was later handed over to the Forestry Commission in 1956. The family home on the opposite side of the A433 was converted to a boarding school for girls in 1927.

The arboretum comprises some 16,000 trees and 3000 different specimens coming from the British Isles, North and South America, China and Japan. The whole area extends to 600 acres and is conveniently split in to two main sections – the Old Arboretum which contains the more exotic and

rare trees and the Silkwood which is more representative of a working woodland but still has an abundance of National tree collections. There are 17 miles of paths, some with a gravel base, and electric buggies are available for the less fit photographers with heavy bags and tripods!

Walking boots or wellingtons are advisable as it tends to get muddy on the popular trails and be warned you will not be alone as 350,000 visitors are attracted each year. Having said that it is a very large area and for much of my time there I did not find it to be crowded, particularly in Silkwood. The gates open at 0900 hours but you can go in earlier and pay an extra charge for car parking which is normally included in the ticket price (varies according to season from £6-£9 with £1 concessions). I found it advantageous to start in the Old Arboretum before most people arrived as this is nearer the car park and the more popular.



Westonbirt has much to see and photograph all the year round and having a vein of acid soil running through a part of the area rhododendrons and azaleas bring colour in the spring but the most spectacular season is unarguably the Autumn.

My last visit was in 1999, in the pre-digital age and I have a small collection of slides taken with my Canon EOS 1 N which I still use, albeit rarely, with a few remaining rolls of Fuji Sensia 100 slide film way out of date but still producing good vibrant accurate colours. My mission this year was to try and capture the whole range of autumn colours on my Canon 5D with images which would be suitable for a presentation to our Newbury Gardening Club and might have other uses at our local Camera Club. However following my first visit on October 25th in quite a mix of sun, cloud and a short shower, the winter edition of *The Iris* arrived with an editorial note that articles were needed as a matter of urgency for future editions of *The Iris*. This prompted a second bite at the cherry on November 1st and armed with the same gear but with a notebook and pen in addition I tried to visualise what might make suitable material for my first foray in to producing something for *The Iris*. It was a day to remember with wonderful weather but definitely more challenging than the predominantly overcast conditions on my initial visit.

Botanical photographers generally do not like sunny weather particularly with digital capture where the yellows and whites tend to burn out so easily but with a close eye on the histogram and some rescue work in RAW processing most of the perceived trouble was averted. I used a 24-105 mm L and a 100-200mmL lens for the majority of the images all on my trusty Gitzo tripod (and forgot to turn off the image stabiliser) and a polarising filter was essential to cut down the glare which was surprisingly noticeable even in overcast conditions. Contra-jours images were taken where there was a dark background in shade to avoid the inevitable intrusive highlights. Although the photography was undoubtedly easier without the sun, I was pleased to have had sunny conditions for one of the days – the colours seemed to really zing and the shadows gave more depth to the longer range shots.

At Westonbirt there are 129 species of Maples (Acer, derived from the Greek word meaning sharp, referring to the characteristic points on the leaves) in the arboretum most of which are native to Asia but also coming from Europe, Africa and N.America. It contains the National Japanese Maple collection and in 2007 a new area was planted among the





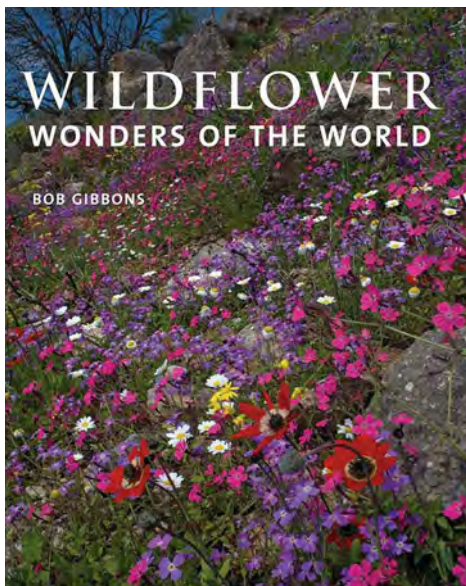
larch trees with specimens having impossible names such as *Acer palmatum shime-no-uchi*, *Acer palmatum shinobuga.oka* and *Acer palmatum koto no ito* (you can understand why I needed my notebook and pencil although it was pointed out to me later that a photograph of the label would have saved a lot of time). The trees are beautifully labelled and any tree with a blue label – I took one shot of the Chinese beech (*Fagus engleriana*) where you can see the label which indicates a Champion tree in the U.K. defined as being either the tallest or having the greatest girth at a height of 1.3 metres. There are 80 champion trees throughout the arboretum.



As I was about to leave I came across a notice board which gave details of guided walks to identify the numerous fungi thriving on dead trees and also the autumn fruits and berries. With the potential of interesting spring shrubs and flowers and the National collection of lime trees in Summer it occurred to me that a yearly subscription to the friends of Westonbirt arboretum at a cost of £30 , £25 for concessions, could prove a very worthwhile investment for anyone living within reasonable striking distance giving unlimited access to a beautiful arboretum and a massive amount of photographic material.



Book Review



Wildflower Wonders of the World by Bob Gibbons

Published by New Holland.
ISBN 978-1-84773-826-4.

From the image on the front cover to the very last picture, over 150 in all, this book delights the eye. The Author and Nature Group member, Bob Gibbons, states his mission as “to find and show some of the most beautiful and flowery places that are still left in the world.” and he certainly has done that. Bob describes his book as “a personal selection of the places that I find the most flowery, spectacular and inviting to visit”. Starting with Europe, the book is divided into continents, subdivided into countries and then sites. 28 sites from 14 European countries, 9 in North America, and others in continental Africa, Asia and Australasia. A few of the sites covered are quite remote but the majority are destinations that can be visited without too much difficulty.

A foreword by Richard Mabey sets the scene, the ‘flowery feast’ that awaits the viewer. Each site is described enthusiastically by the author who also gives useful information on the location, its status and the best time to visit. There is also a listing of useful contacts, tour operators, and a species list at the end.

If you are an active photographer of flora (or not) this book will provide you with lots of inspiration - the images within its covers are truly mouthwatering!



Obituary - Colin Smith FRPS

1937 - 2011



Photograph courtesy Phil Kirk

Colin died peacefully in Chorley and District Hospital after a short illness. Tributes have poured in from all over Britain and Ireland.

Born in the village of Coppull near Chorley, Colin lived in the area for the whole of his life. It was in the countryside around the village that he became interested in the natural world. Colin was 13 when he extracted his first camera from a relative's bin. On leaving school he was called up for National Service and found himself in an RAF Photographic Reconnaissance Unit in Malta. This experience was to have profound consequences. Firstly, he received a thorough training in photography, much of the work involving the processing and printing of aerial photographs, but secondly he undertook the 'grip and grin' photographs. Something else he acquired which never left him was a love of the Mediterranean.

On being demobbed he attended a training college in Loughborough and was awarded a teaching diploma. The whole of his working life was spent teaching in Chorley. His subjects were CDT and geography. He also got an O level course in photography off the ground. Much of the equipment and materials had to be



begged or borrowed as the budget was very small. Despite these difficulties, some of his pupils went on to make careers in photography. During this time Colin married Joan and daughter Janet duly followed. After 28 years of teaching Colin took advantage of a very generous offer of early retirement and obtained much more freedom to pursue his interests.

Colin was also a keen sportsman; he played cricket for Chorley Cricket Club and was a useful and very accurate medium pace bowler and a reliable tail-order batsman. He also enjoyed table tennis and after retiring from competition still met with a group of friends every Thursday morning right up to his death.

A country boy at heart, Colin used his photographic skills to record the natural world. He joined the RPS in 1973 and achieved his Associateship the same year. A Fellowship followed in 1990, the theme of which was the natural history of Majorca - he and Joan had well acquainted with it as a result of spending many Easter holidays there. Colin also developed an interest in AV. Using his practical skills he created a sliding shutter device to do the fade in/fade out, a tape recorder provided the music and Colin gave a commentary tailored to the audience. The whole operation was purely manual, the only snag being that it required two people and Colin was fortunate in enlisting the help of fellow teacher John Walsh. The shows were immensely popular in the North West among photographic societies, natural history societies, Womens Institutes and indeed any group requiring an entertaining evening illustrated by good natural history photography. The stories he told of his experiences were hilarious, like the occasion at a W.I. when a member arrived with lots of champagne and insisted on everyone, including Colin, helping her to celebrate. 'Jerusalem' never sounded better! The D.I.Y. kit was replaced after many years by a Royale projector and, more recently, by a digital projector.

I first became aware of Colin when I saw his name among successful Associateship applications printed in *The Journal*. When he next visited my local ornithological society I introduced myself and the rest, as they say, is history. We ranged over North-west England and North Wales with occasional forays into Derbyshire, the Yorkshire Dales and Scotland. There were also overseas trips to the Mediterranean, Switzerland, Iceland, Florida and the Falklands. Colin had a holistic approach to nature - birds, mammals, flowers, fungi and insects were all subjects for his camera. He studied his subjects intensively and had a large library of books to help him. He also enjoyed building things - his last project was the modification of a shopping trolley to transport his 500mm lens.

Colin was a member of many photographic and natural history bodies during his lifetime. He was a member of the 35 Postal Club for as long as I knew him and attended their annual convention as late as September 2011. He was also a member of the Nature Photographers' Portfolio slide folio for many years until he ran out of slides. He and Joan were also members of Bolton RSPB and Chorley Natural History Society which he set up with six other people in 1979 and was their programme secretary right up to his death - both of these groups benefited from his lectures which, naturally, were given free of charge. Surprisingly, for most of his photographic life he did not belong to a local photographic society. This changed in 1990 when Colin joined Wigan 10 and found an outlet for his other photographic interests, particularly sport (naturally), landscape and people. Not simply a natural history photographer, Colin was proof of my hypothesis that a good, all-round nature photographer should be capable of making a decent job of almost any subject. He supported all the activities of Wigan 10 and made a significant contribution to their success.

Colin soon found himself on the judges lists of both the L&CPU and the PAGB and in demand to judge at all levels from club competitions to international exhibitions, often to judge both nature and open sections, as at the RPS Projected Image Exhibition of 2008. He was L&CPU photographer of the year on several occasions and placed on their roll of honour in 2004. A member of the PAGB judging teams which award PAGB distinctions, Colin recently became a mentor for the L&CPU Mentoring Scheme to help prospective PAGB distinctions applicants. He also advised many people on their RPS distinctions applications. Despite giving so much of his time to help others Colin continued to enjoy success in national and international exhibitions. In 1992 he was invited to join the Nature A&F Distinctions panel and became its Chairman from 2002 to 2005. As Chairman of the Nature panel, Colin became an ex-officio member of the Nature Group committee and continued as the group's field meeting coordinator after he resigned from the panel.

During his illness he derived a lot of comfort from the many cards and messages he received from members of the Group. When heading home from any meeting of the Group he would always confide 'the Nature Group consists of such very nice people'. As usual, he was right.

Tony Bond FRPS

Obituary - Harold Hems FRPS

1921 – 2012

Harold was born in Sheffield in 1921. His father had returned from WW1 having lost most of his right leg as a consequence of a sniper's bullet. As a result, the family lived just above the poverty line. Harold was a bright boy and went to grammar school from the age of 10 and for the next 6 years. Unfortunately, the family finances were such that he was unable to go on to university so he joined the Civil Service. This was not his choice, but as he said, in those days beggars could not be choosers.

In 1941 at the age of 19, he was conscripted into the Army and joined the 113th Special Wireless Section of the Royal Corps of Signals where he was trained in the mysteries of Enigma messages. He then went on to join the North Africa campaign, was in the first intelligence unit to land at Salerno and took part in the battle of Monte Cassino. At the end of 1945, Harold was granted leave allowing him to see his parents for the first time in three years. He bought his first camera, a Leica, during a visit to Venice.

Following demobilisation in 1946, Harold trained as a teacher and later had special training in biology. His first teaching post was in Dronfield. His interest in nature photography developed and he bought a quarter plate camera as a result of meeting Alan Faulkner Taylor in the Spring of 1947. The two of them scoured Derbyshire for subject matter, particularly birds and mammals. It was during this period that Harold took a photograph of a badger sow reversing into the sett with a ball of bedding. This created huge interest among badger experts and photographers alike as this behaviour had never been seen before, let alone photographed.

He joined The Society in 1951, achieved his Associateship in the same year and Fellowship in 1953. He was a member of the Society until his death. In those days the two big exhibitions at Princes Gate were the open and the nature exhibitions. This was long before the formation of the Nature Group and the nature exhibition looked very different from ours today. For a start, it consisted of monochrome prints only, these being taken with equipment which nowadays would be considered unusable. Nevertheless, it was keenly contested by all the top nature photographers of the day, such as Eric Hosking FRPS. Harold was

delighted to win the exhibition medal in 1956. His winning panel included the badger shot. As an old soldier, he was even more delighted to be presented with his award by Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke. He continued to serve the Society by membership of the Nature A & F Distinctions panel from 1966 to 1991.

Harold and Margaret were married in 1955 and in 1961 they moved to Norfolk where Harold took up the post of head of mathematics at Cromer High School. He was soon revelling in the natural history of his adopted county. He was a true polymath with a keen interest in all aspects of nature and an enthusiastic gardener with a particular interest in Alpines. He was proud to be the first person to photograph Collared Dove at the nest in Britain, in Norfolk of course. He joined the Nature Photographers' Portfolio and the Zoological Photographic Club and was a member of both for many years. Many photographers benefited from his firm but fair comments. He was always quick to praise good work but never afraid to say if something could have been better, just like a true teacher. He moved with the times, replacing his quarter plate with medium format, later 35mm SLR and digital equipment. Norfolk provided Harold with many opportunities but he and Margaret were also frequent visitors to Wales and Scotland. They ventured further afield to Portugal, Norway and Tanzania. Nature photo-graphers were always made most welcome at their home and I was only one of those who benefited from their hospitality.

Harold is remembered in Norfolk principally as a teacher and also for finding the West Runton Elephant on the 13th of December, 1990. The weather forecast the night before predicted an overnight storm and, coupled with a high tide he knew that there was the possibility of interesting finds on the beach. So Margaret and Harold went down to the beach early next morning armed with some gardening tools. They found a newly exposed cliff face and protruding from the base was a large object which later proved to be the pelvic bone of a Steppe Mammoth, *Mammuthus trogontherii*. They were joined on the beach that day by Martin Warren, then curator of Cromer Museum who helped to excavate the bone.

The find provoked huge interest locally. The animal roamed Europe 600,000 – 700,000 years ago and must have been a formidable sight, standing 15 feet tall and weighing more than 10 tons, twice the size of a present-day elephant. Complete excavation had to wait until 1995 when 85% of the skeleton was recovered along with many other interesting plant, bird, mammal and reptile remains. These have enabled the experts to build up a picture of a Norfolk very different to that we know today. The narrative which has been developed is that the unfortunate animal was suffering from a leg injury when it made its way to a river where it died. The corpse was scavenged by hyenas as shown by the imprint of a tooth and fossilised hyena droppings nearby. The skeleton is the most complete example of the species in the world and is now preserved by the Norfolk Museums and Archaeological Service at Gressenhall. Scientists from the universities of Manchester and York were able to extract some protein from the bones and produced the collagen sequence for a fossil species for the first time. The story was told in a programme on BBC Radio 4 in which Harold described his remarkable find. The site is now marked by a plaque and the road signs as you drive into West Runton proclaim “home of the West Runton elephant”.

Harold suffered a stroke in 2006 and was not expected to survive. However he did and although he was confined to a wheelchair his mind was as acute as ever. He used to boast that the carers and nurses who came to attend to him were all former pupils of his. Photography was now restricted to what he could do from the house. He spent many evenings photographing a fox and cubs which Margaret managed to attract into the garden. He celebrated his 90th birthday on Trafalgar Day, 2011. Those of you who were in Norfolk that day and saw all the flags probably thought it was something to do with Nelson! Unfortunately, shortly afterwards he suffered another stroke and this time he did not recover, dying on the 9th. of January. His funeral was widely reported by the local media, including regional television and an obituary was published in the Daily Telegraph on the 23rd of January.

For reasons I will never know Harold did not join the Nature Group but I am certain that members would wish to offer condolences to Margaret and family.

“They don’t make them like Harold any more!”

Tony Bond FRPS

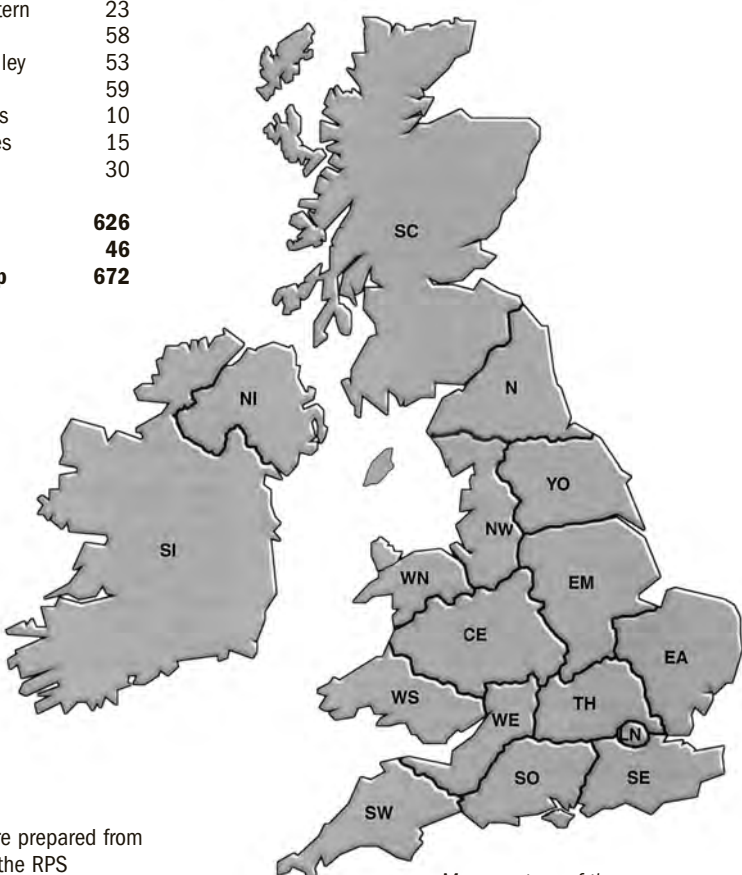
Photograph by Harold Hems FRPS, reproduced by kind permission of Margaret Hems.



Members

Shown Below are Nature Group members per RPS region together with regional codes and other statistics

CE - Central	67	Distinctions	
EA - East Anglia	58	Honorary FRPS	4
EM - East Midlands	47	FRPS	85
LN - London	19	ARPS	232
NI - Ireland (North)	1	LRPS	171
SI - Ireland (South)	5	Non-Distinction Holders	180
NO - Northern	15		
NW - North Western	55		
SC - Scotland	27	Total	672
SE - South Eastern	84		
SW - South Western	23		
SO - Southern	58		
TH - Thames Valley	53		
WE - Western	59		
WN - North Wales	10		
WS - South Wales	15		
YO - Yorkshire	30		
Total UK	626		
Overseas	46		
Total Membership	672		



These statistics are prepared from data supplied by the RPS Membership Department 20th January 2012

Map courtesy of the RPS Journal January/February 2001 revised 2006

Fit for Purpose?

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

Since my article "Beware - your new camera may cost you more than you bargained for!" appeared in the last issue of *The Iris*, lots of you have been in touch - many of you with similar complaints regarding new cameras, others with complaints about a variety of other kit.

I have not mentioned the names of any members and have only hinted at the name of the kit and/or manufacturer - you can draw your own conclusions. Some of these tales might put a smile on your face, if it were not for the fact that all these items cost a considerable amount of someone's hard earned income.

Here are some of your experiences:

- One member returned home from an overseas vacation only to find that all the images they had taken with their new camera were 'soft'. After reading *The Iris* they visited the dealer from which the camera was purchased. He kept the camera for a few days and then reported that the problem was solved - he discovered that it was back focussing. Although it seems okay now the member says they have lost confidence with the camera and "they sold me something which was not fit for purpose, and as a result I wasted £2000 on a photo trip resulting in 100% out of focus pics." A call was placed to Trading Standards who said there was no legal redress at all against the manufacturer and that although a complaint could be sent to them, they were not obliged to respond. The only course of action would be a claim against the dealer for consequential loss because the pictures from the trip were out of focus.
- Another member acquired a new tripod last year; a replacement for an earlier model which although looking the worse for wear was still giving good service. The tripod in question is one widely used by nature photographers due to its versatility - inexperienced users have often been heard likening it to an octopus or a set of bagpipes. The old version was given away to a friend, for spare parts. After a short period of infrequent use it developed a problem - the tripod would slowly collapse no matter how much the handle was tightened. It was returned to the distributor. They told the member they had fixed it and sent it back shortly afterwards, but the problem had not been fixed and it was returned again. This time the member was told that they could find nothing wrong with it and suggested that it was something he was doing wrong, like using it with a camera and lens combination that was too heavy. A Canon 5D and either a short zoom or a 150 macro lens can hardly be called too heavy! Finally another member, hearing of this problem, stepped in and offered his assistance and the problem has now been resolved.
- Yet another member reported a tripod problem "Shortly after I bought it and while on an overseas tour, a leg dropped off. The retaining pin which was the only thing holding the leg in its socket had come out and was lost. When I got home I found that another leg was about to do the same, although it still had its pin. I removed both legs, smeared the tops with Araldite and replaced them. I reused the pin and replaced the other with a self tapping screw in the original hole. My tin of odd items turned up trumps again! I have used the tripod extensively since then without any problems.
- Take the case of a member who purchased a very expensive ball head of American manufacture from a dealer in Norfolk. One day, while in a meadow photographing flora, the tensioning knob just flew off. There was no hope of finding it. The ball head was returned to the dealer who told the member that they could do nothing about it and he would have to contact the manufacturer, in the USA. The manufacturer, with a name reminiscent of a Starship captain, confirmed that the only place in the world the head could be fixed was at their plant. It was duly packed up, despatched, repaired and returned but at considerable cost and inconvenience to the member for shipping.

Continued on page 34

- Another member reports having had to repair a certain Pro Ball head - it now incorporates the brass ball from the end of the ignition advance and retard lever of a vintage 3 litre Bentley. This stops the locking mechanism falling apart after the plastic bit on the end of the locking lever failed.

Without a doubt, some of these problems are the result of manufacturers having a successful product and then seeking to reduce the cost of production. Inevitably this results in a reduction of the quality.

Fit for purpose?

"I don't know how they get away with it - if you bought a vacuum cleaner which didn't pick up dirt you would get the money back."

Editor: Do you have an experience you would like to share about some piece of kit which gave less than the service you should expect, please let us know.

In Search of a Crossing by John Elmitt ARPS

continued from page 18

There were animals everywhere, pushing others over the high river bank, flinging themselves into the water below, oblivious of other animals in the urgency of their descent, thrashing about in the water, scrambling and swimming to the far bank then clambering over others, desperate to get out of the water and up the bank. Their continuous excited honking sounded collectively like a large swarm of angry bees, and there was noise and dust filling the air for what seemed like hours as they swarmed up and fanned out on the hillside opposite, there to revert to normality, disperse into smaller groups, heads down again to sample the new grazing. It was long minutes before any one of us could speak. What we'd just witnessed had simply blown us away, and has left an indelible, wonderful memory of a lifetime. We'd achieved our objective way above expectations and we were very, very happy.

Visiting this part of the world at migration time is one of the great wildlife experiences. Get the time of year right, choose a well positioned camp, take advice from an experienced tour operator, invest in that lens you've always wanted and have a great time. Our visit was arranged through Okavango Tours and Safaris. Based in London, they are a thoroughly professional and reliable company and we have travelled with them over many years.

Over a sundowner one evening John and his guide, a white Tanzanian with 25 years guiding experience, discussed the fragility of the whole Mara/Serengeti eco-system. Three major threats affect the future of the Migration:-

- The Maasai, traditionally nomadic have, over the years become ever more pastoral, and are landlords over large tracts of the land. Their huge herds of cattle, flocks of sheep & goats are over-grazing the Concession Areas to a level of unsustainability, so to annually feed some 2 million migrating grass-eaters on a total area of 1510sq.km is high impossible. And no part of the Mara has National Park status. The Serengeti is, at 30,000sq.km, a huge area comprising National Park, Game Reserves and Concession Areas, so the threat there is less severe.
- Not only over-populated by domestic animals the sheer volume of tourist vehicles, many self-driven further disrupt the animals' behaviour patterns. There can be 30/40/ 50 cars & minibuses congregated at a likely crossing point, and should one vehicle break the line of the columns the animals can abandon their attempt and disperse. Rainfall patterns are changing slightly, with less rain in the north and earlier rains in the south. Guided purely by their instincts to find grass more of the animals, whilst still moving North in June/July to follow the rains don't cross the rivers any more. Whether this is just the normal cyclical pattern or Global Warming is anyone's guess but it is still happening.
- Probably the most destructive threat of all is man made. Bowing to commercial pressures to ship minerals necessary to sustain the economic miracles of the East, the Tanzanian government proposes to build a road from Uganda & Lake Victoria across the Serengeti to Arusha. The Government has said this is on hold (as of now) and would only be a gravel road anyway. Locals are far less optimistic. 50 ton trucks full of cobalt ore would not last a day on dirt in the rains. Despite an offer by the Frankfurt Zoological Society to fund a tar road around the south of the whole Serengeti eco-system, benefitting villages along the way, the plans and contracts are in place. It is probable the road would need to be fenced. Left open the carnage is impossible to imagine.

Current info from: www.savetheserengeti.org

The Nature Photographer's Joint Convention

October 19th- 21st, 2012.

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire DE55 1AU

The 2012 Joint Convention will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick, in the heart of the Derbyshire countryside. Keynote speakers will be Mark Hamblin and Robert Thompson.

As an RPS Nature Group member, you would be made most welcome at this event.

There is a limited number of rooms available and you are strongly advised to book as soon as possible after March 1st, 2012. Until that date priority will be given to past delegates and members of the major postal portfolios i.e. the NPP, NPS and ZPC. To take advantage of this offer and secure your place you need to book as soon as possible .

The package is all-inclusive and non-negotiable. All rooms are of a very high-quality with ensuite bathrooms. All meals from afternoon tea on Friday, October 19th, to Sunday lunch on Sunday, October 21st, are included. The centre is set in its own spacious and beautiful grounds with ample parking adjacent to the accommodation.

I have been asked by the management to stress that no pets of any description are allowed anywhere on the Hayes site and residential vehicles cannot be parked overnight on the centre car parks.

John Tinning, Conference Organiser

THE NATURE PHOTOGRAPHERS' JOINT CONVENTION, OCTOBER 19th- 21st, 2012.

BOOKING FORM

Name:

Address:
.....
.....

Postcode: **Telephone number:**

Email address:

Accommodation Required [Please tick one box only]

☐ I wish to book a room for two persons @ £175 per person i.e. £350 all-inclusive.
Name of partner/guest:

☐ I wish to book a place in a shared twin-bedded room @ £175 per person all-inclusive.

☐ I would be willing to share with:

☐ I wish to book a room on a single-occupancy basis @ £185 all-inclusive.

☐ I wish to attend as a non-residential delegate @ £120, with all meals, except breakfast, included.

Congratulations

Congratulations are due to the following Nature Group members who recently achieved an Associate distinction in the Nature category.

Associates

Gerald Griffin ARPS	Stafford
Ralph Snook ARPS	Bristol, Avon
Andrew Chu ARPS	Welwyn Garden City, Herts
Hai Poh Lee ARPS	Singapore
Rebecca Nason ARPS	Woodbridge, Suffolk
Ray Cooper ARPS	Chathill, Northumberland
Steve Price ARPS	Biggleswade, Beds
Michael Loizou ARPS	Warwick, Warwickshire
Michael Durham ARPS	Dumfries, Scotland

David Robert Smith ARPS

**Mansfield Woodhouse,
Nottinghamshire.**

10.09.1947 - 20.11.2011

We are sorry to advise members of the death of Nature Group member David Robert Smith.

On behalf of the group we extend our sincere condolences to his wife and family at this sad time.

A confirmation of your reservation and an outline programme will be sent by email or 'snailmail' to the address you have provided overleaf. Please note that no monies can be refunded for cancellation after June 1st, 2012.

Special Requirements

- ☐ **Dietary?** [Please specify]
- ☐ **Disabled access / room required?**
- ☐ **Any other?** [Please specify]
-

Exhibitors

- ☐ My presentation will be digital images
- ☐ My presentation will be slide images
- ☐ I wish to show 50 images. [10 minutes maximum]
- ☐ I wish to show 25 images. [5 minutes maximum]

To ensure your place, please return this form with a cheque for the full amount due as soon as possible. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Nature Photographers' Joint Convention' and sent to:

The Convention Organiser, John Tinning,
Brockwood House, 21 Ervin Way,
Queniborough,
LEICESTER, Leicestershire,
LE7 3TT

Images by the late Harold Hems FRPS

Reproduced by kind permission of Margaret Hems.



The RPS Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2012



Order your copy of the 2012 Exhibition CD/DVD now.

Priced at £10 for the CD and £12.50 for the DVD including postage & packing.

Cheques, payable to 'RPS Nature Group' should be sent to:
Nature Group Secretary, Margaret Johnson LRPS,
53 Mapperley Orchard,
Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8AH



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