



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS  
Issue No. 146 / Summer 2023

# THE IRIS



# Otters, Eagles and Seabirds Photography Tour

## A Mull Wildlife Spectacular

Eight days: 11 - 18 June 2024

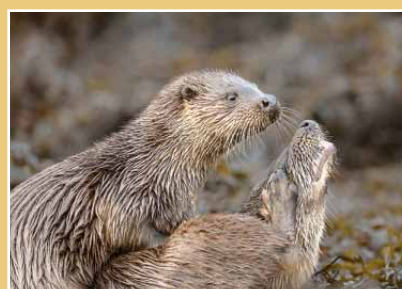


Mull and its adjacent islands offer the most engaging and spectacular wildlife photography experience in the British Isles. Enjoy magnificent white-tailed sea eagles taking fish from the water, playful otters fishing along the shoreline and dolphins leaping at sea. Nearby Lunga is one of our finest seabird colonies, with attractive clean backgrounds for photography and few visitors.

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*All photos by Robert Harvey taken on previous Natural World Photography tours to Mull, except where stated*

*Photo by David Wilkinson*

*Photo courtesy of Jim Muller, participant in Natural World Photography tour to Mull in 2023*

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- Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send typed or hand written copy.
- Digitally captured photographic images to support your article (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied as 8bit jpg files, 216mm (2555 pixels) on the longest edge, at 300 pixels per inch, quality 12, file size approx 5 MB. Please send images via WeTransfer.
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### Cover Image:

**Male Broad-bodied Chaser**  
by John Nash ARPS

from successful Associate Panel -  
page 18



## Committee

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### Officers

**Chairman: Duncan Locke ARPS**

Worcester. WR5

E-mail: duncan.locke@btinternet.com

**Hon. Secretary: Greg Lovett ARPS**

Saltford, Bristol

E-mail: greg.lovett@sheol.co.uk

**Hon. Treasurer: Peter Ward**

Ashbourne, Derbyshire CM23

Email: peter.ward448@btinternet.com

### Committee Members

**Vice Chairman: Position to be filled**

**Editor of The Iris: Dawn Osborn FRPS**

Breckland, Norfolk,

Email: natureeditor@rps.org

**Exhibition Secretary: Ralph Snook ARPS**

Bristol BS32

E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

**Membership Secretary: Christine Holt LRPS**

Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

E-mail: chrisandged93@gmail.com

**Programme Co-ordinator: Ann Miles FRPS**

Cambridge,

E-mail: annmiles70@gmail.com

**Webmaster: Ralph Snook ARPS**

Bristol BS32

E-mail: natureweb@rps.org

**Residential Weekend Advisor: James Foad LRPS**

Ramsgate, Kent

email: jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com

**Facebook/Competition Admin: Julia Wainwright FRPS**

Aldwick, West Sussex

Email: julia@julasimagesuk.com

### Ex officio Committee members

**NG Immediate Past Chairman: David O'Neill LRPS**

Reading, Berkshire

Email: david.oneill\_nh@outlook.com

**President of the Society;**

**Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Society;**

**Hon. Treasurer of the Society;**

**Chair of the Natural History Distinctions Panel**

### Nature Group Exhibitions

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme.

Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above.

## Editorial

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I can't believe where the year has gone. As I sit here, tapping away at my computer and putting The Iris to bed, the Summer Solstice is just a few days away. In my corner of East Anglia we have had no precipitation worthy of calling rain for over a month now. According to the science (or is it Technology) we call meteorology we were due for extreme rain - 100% chance by 1700 hrs, possibly accompanied by thunder, lightning and hail. Now 2115hrs and no sign of anything resembling a shower yet. I do hope we don't have to endure another summer like last year.

This issue will be of great interest to those members who are working towards an Associate or Fellowship Distinction. Congratulations to Paul Shilliam who gained his Fellowship at the Spring Nature Distinction Assessment and also to Greg Lovett, Jane Barrett, John Nash and Nigel Bampton who all achieved the ARPS. Their stories and the images that earned them their distinction are all in this issue.

Robert Galloway LRPS has provided an update on the seasonal variations of the Red Squirrels visiting his garden in the Highlands of Scotland.

Also in this issue is a superb in-depth report on Nikon's mirrorless flagship camera, the Z 9 released at the end of 2021 by regular contributor, Robert Thompson FRPS.

Lists of all the accepted images in the Nature Group's Annual Exhibition, plus all the entries that won awards. Congratulations to everyone who had images accepted and especially to all those award winners.

Finally, the minutes of the AGM that took place at The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, in April.

I hope you all have a very enjoyable summer and that you find many suitable subjects to photograph.



Dawn Osborn FRPS - Editor

# From the Chair

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## Introduction:

I took over as Chair from David O'Neill on the 1st April; hopefully the date is not significant! Quite a daunting task: not only in following on from a long line of distinguished predecessors, but also well aware of the challenges that face the Group over the next two years.

Firstly, I would like to thank David for all of his time and hard work as Chair over the last two years. I must also thank the Committee for their hard work and I am pleased to say that all have agreed to stay on. Finally, I would like to warmly welcome Greg Lovett ARPS as the Group's new Honorary Secretary.

From 2017 to 2023, I was Honorary Secretary of the Group and one question that I asked many times during my time on the Committee is: what do Nature Group Members want from their Group? More on this later!

## Background:

Having spent over 40 years as an Electrical Power Engineer, a technologist, I'm very excited by the way that technology is enabling us to photograph the natural world more clearly and comprehensively than ever before. However, technology does have its challenges. More on this subject later!

For me photography has always been a hobby, starting at a young age, helped by my mother being a professional photographer. I took my first picture of a Bee Orchid in the long hot summer of 1976, the year that the Group was formed. More recently I have been an active nature photographer since 2011.

## Spring Meeting and AGM:

About 40 Members attended our Spring Meeting and AGM at Smethwick on the 1st April. In the morning David Keep FRPS gave an excellent talk on Underwater Photography. After lunch we held the Group AGM, followed by the prize giving for the Annual Exhibition and a viewing of the accepted digital images. The accepted prints were displayed at Smethwick P.S. clubrooms throughout the day. Congratulations to all Group Members who had their work accepted and particular congratulations to the award winners. All are listed elsewhere in this issue of The Iris.

## The RPS Website:

Those of you who were at the AGM will recall that there was much disquiet expressed at the continuing problems with the RPS Website. A motion was passed unanimously for me to request a meeting with Dan Jones (RPS, CEO) to seek his assurance of improvements within a measurable timeframe. This meeting has yet to take place. However, I attended a meeting of the Members

Committee on 20th May, where Dan Jones gave a detailed explanation of the issues with the RPS Website.

A serious underlying issue is that the RPS bought a structured software package and tried to impose it on their existing rather ad-hoc systems. Those systems should have been analysed and simplified before the software was even specified. The RPS is working hard to sort out the issues, but it will be some months before they are all resolved. Training of both RPS staff and volunteers to use the new software is also a significant issue. The next Members Committee Meeting is on the 29th July. Based on the level of progress reported at that meeting, I will seek a meeting with Dan Jones.

## Distinctions:

Thanks to Ann Miles we now have two Distinction Advisory Days each year. The next is via Zoom on Saturday the 19th August.

Congratulations to those Group Members who achieved Distinctions earlier in the year. Their panels are either featured in this issue of The Iris or will be included in the next issue.

## Going Forward:

The Nature Group has considerable strengths: its Members; The Iris Magazine; the Annual Exhibition; an excellent programme of Field Meetings organised by Ann Miles; Residential Weekends run by James Foad; a very active Facebook Group. Plus we will shortly be announcing our quarterly Photographic Competition.

But back to my earlier question: What do YOU want from YOUR Group? One Group aim is to enable Members to develop their skills in Nature Photography by actively encouraging their participation in a programme of Meetings and Workshops. Would you welcome Workshops on getting the best out of the increasingly complex technology in your camera? Or photography of particular subject matter? We have already run a number of Zoom talks on image processing, but what about presentation of your images to others? Work is already underway to provide Members with constructive feedback on their images. Please let me have your thoughts.

Last but not least the big one: Artificial Intelligence! How do we police competition entries to ensure that only genuine photographs are submitted? We are working on this and will try to ensure that only genuine images are accepted in our Exhibition and Competitions.

Enjoy your Nature Photography.



Duncan Locke ARPS

# Along the Fellowship Road

by Paul Shilliam FRPS

## When it started

The road to a fellowship distinction started for me in the spring of 2015 when I attended my first advisory day as a spectator for ARPS and FRPS distinctions in natural history. We were first treated to a display of past print panel successes along with a few examples that would not make the grade.

The main emphasis was advice on those who had submitted their panel for critique this totalled about 25 panels in all. The lesson I learnt that day was if you had to ask yourself "what else can I include to make up the numbers" then you were not ready to submit.

Not one of the 25 ARPS panels that day were recommended to go forward for assessment and the main reason was that it appeared the photographer had only about 7 or 8 images which could be considered up to standard and then had looked around to see if they could find others to make up the number - sadly the others did not make the grade.

You must have sufficient images, so the question you ask yourself is "which images should I leave out" because if you have more than enough images to fill a panel you can therefore be selective.

We were not allowed to attend the FRPS advisory session, only those with panels were admitted but we were shown past examples of successful natural history Fellowship panels. My disappointment that day was that not a single successful ARPS or FRPS panel based on my

intended subject was shown. I knew, even at that early stage, what my Fellowship panel would be based on. There were plenty of insects, birds and even fungi, none of which were particularly helpful to me, but no African mammals.

## First distinctions

So off I went planning my next step and in the following autumn I gained my LRPS followed by my ARPS in Travel photography during spring 2018. It may seem strange that a wildlife photographer did not attempt his ARPS in his favoured genre of photography. Naively, I thought I would save my best images for the Fellowship but hindsight has subsequently taught me very few of those images were of the Fellowship standard.

Now my quest was that Fellowship distinction and no matter how hard I tried I could not find a successful panel based on African mammals. During that period Fellowship Advisory Days in natural history were few and far between. I was desperate to find out how ARPS and FRPS standards differ in the subject of African mammals. Also what does 'distinguished and distinctive' actually mean in terms of a photographic image. This period was like fishing in the dark.

Eventually I secured a one to one in Bristol with Clive Rathband to discuss my Fellowship print panel. The result was not too positive but I was able to draw out some important elements to improve on.





## Covid

Then came Covid and assessment of print panels was suspended, so the only option going forward was to change to a digital submission. At this point I also decided to present my panel as a set of monochrome images. I believe monochrome can sometimes project powerful looking images and I wanted the subjects to stand out and "hit you in the face". I knew monochrome could achieve this for me.

Then my saving grace, a successful Fellowship panel appeared on the RPS website and, guess what, it was based on African mammals. To see this was so helpful. I could now compare this to where my panel was heading and actually see images that were 'distinctive and distinguished'. It solved one particular problem I was having and that was should my submitted images only be an animal in its' environment or could I include artistic images that were more creative - head shots and such like. I could now continue in the direction I wanted to head.

## First assessment

I missed out on the next available advisory day by not keeping my eye on the RPS website. My only available option was a one to one which proved more than helpful. I submitted the panel for a Fellowship assessment in the spring of 2021 it was a remote assessment presented over Zoom but mine sadly failed. As you would expect, I was extremely disappointed. It was considered that three of the images were not up to fellowship standard and some of the images were let down by the conversion to monochrome.







### Work to do

So that meant I had some work to do. Up until that point I had never spent too much time on processing my images, I felt that it was inappropriate for natural history images. I approached my photography with the view that you should get it right in the camera and not spend hours in post processing. So my skill level was quite basic and that needed to change.

Prior to Covid I found most Youtube Photoshop tutorials were not very good when it came to post processing of wildlife photography but that has since changed. During lockdown a number of enterprising professional wildlife photographers found employment by producing informative training videos around Photoshop and wildlife photography and I found them key to improving my skill level. Then came Dr Ian Wilson with his series of RPS zoom lectures during lockdown, particularly the ones about wildlife processing work flow, that was another source of Photoshop knowledge.

I've now realised that not only do you need to be a good wildlife photographer to achieve a natural history Fellowship distinction but you also need to be skilled at post processing too. Consequently, during lockdown I made best use of my time by improving my post processing skill set. All I needed now was a few more distinctive and distinguished photos.

### Off we go again

After the disappointment of my failed first attempt I put my fellowship images to one side for a while but when the world started to open up again and travel was becoming possible, I began to gain my interest back in those photos once more. Studying them I realised the failure was not as bad as I first thought. Three were not the right standard but eighteen were, so I must be on the right track and not far off the standard required. What did I need for the replacements? The images to remove consisted of two lions and one elephant. It could not be a like for like replacement, each had to be of the right standard but also had to fit into the existing panel that was virtually complete. Fortunately the two trips to





Africa I had planned were postponed and not cancelled. The trip to Masai Mara in Kenya was ideal for Lion photography, while the other, a self drive to Etosha in Namibia, was ideal for Elephants. The trips were both reinstated during 2022. This time I felt I had a clearer understanding of the standard needed and knew what distinguished and distinctive meant. Both trips were successful and I knew I had the images I needed.

### Second attempt

I booked both the Advisory Day and an Assessment day to follow. All I had to do now was complete the panel. I reprocessed every single image using the original RAW file and applying my set work flow to every image. I used the 'NIK Collection' add on for Photoshop to produce the monochrome conversions. I replaced five of the original images - a risk, but I was confident that the extra two were of a higher standard than the ones replaced.

The Advisory Day achieved a thumbs up. However, I decided to make one more small change and arranged a 'one to one' to check it over. Then the day arrived. When my panel came up for assessment every panel member seemed to want to have their say. Most comments were positive but there were also a few negative remarks - fortunately these were insufficient to influence the final decision - Fellowship granted.

### My advice

If anyone is contemplating a Natural History Fellowship there are a few things you may wish to consider. At this level, as mentioned previously a high standard of post processing skill is essential. Not to create an image that was never there in the first place but necessary to make a really good image stunning.

Secondly, I think you need to be passionate about the subject. Your passion will drive you to create better images. You need to be particular; consider every detail of what you present, perhaps even to the point of OCD.

Think twice about submitting your favourite image, it may not be as good as you think, get someone with knowledge to critique it.

If you are submitting a digital panel give some thought to the sequence layout, treat it as if it were a print panel where the layout is a vital part of the submission. I chose twenty one images mainly because I felt I could create a more cohesive and balanced layout than I could with just twenty images, although it did mean I had one more image to select. I feel the sequence layout is important - it is viewed by the assessors a number of times, so needs to be good.







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## Fellowship Presentation Layout



### More than you think

You will need more images than you think. I suggest a target for a Fellowship should be a minimum of thirty images if not more. It is more than just putting twenty one images together - the mixture of portrait and landscape formats can be important, duplication will impact, blend of colouration and subject matter. For instance when I was searching for images for my resubmission my quest was for three images to make replacements, in reality I knew I needed at least a dozen images of a fellowship standard, as it turned out I used five - I also had spares which gave me choices.

### Help

You will need help. If you can find someone with experience in your chosen subject to be your mentor that would be ideal but I suspect that may be difficult. I never found anyone who had experience and expertise in my subject at this level, if I had I am sure it would have made a difference. A second opinion is so important. You should also submit your panel to an 'Advisory Day' - an essential part of success especially at this level (and also at ARPS) - and maybe a 'One to One' or two may also be needed.

### Finally

Achieving a Royal Photographic Society Natural History Fellowship is unlikely for most wildlife photographers. It is a challenge that requires commitment, determination

and a high level of photographic skill. Selecting African mammals as my chosen subject took this challenge a step higher. Few awards have been given in this particular sector of natural history and that is why this award means so much to me.

### Statement of Intent

*I first travelled to Africa over 20 years ago, it was there I developed my obsession for African wildlife photography. Africa was the start of my photographic journey and it is only appropriate the aim of my portfolio is to depict my passion for photography in Africa.*

*Existence in the African bush is about life and death, some of the key elements of survival are reproduction, predation and the reliance on water, my objective was to include these aspects in my panel. I chose monochrome as I believe it can create powerful images that help focus attention on the subject whilst creating mood and interest.*

*It took me nine years to achieve the variety of photography, subject matter and settings that were suitable. Travelling to the open savannahs of Kenya and Tanzania, riverine areas of Zambia and the dry arid lands of Namibia.*

# An Avalon Marshes Associateship

by Greg Lovett ARPS

I achieved my LRPS in 2021, at the time I saw it as the culmination of a photographic journey of self improvement begun in 2015 when I decided to undertake a 365 project. I did this via Blipfoto, an online daily photo journal and social networking service which allows people to save a record of their life in pictures; sharing their photographs and telling their stories one day at a time. My aim was to make myself use my camera and in the process, hopefully, become a better photographer. In perpetual search of a daily image I gradually became drawn to photographing the natural world more and more. I learned a lot in the process, and I am still actively 'blipping' over 8 years later.

Having achieved my LRPS, I initially felt liberated by the prospect of being able to work on a panel of images for the Associateship distinction. But first I had to decide on the genre.

While I did consider pursuing a Landscape panel, I soon realised that I was spending most of my time photographing wildlife. I was even beginning to begrudge those early mornings that had a landscape focus as potentially lost wildlife opportunities. The decision had made itself. I was going to seek Associateship in the Natural History genre.

As for the subject of my panel, well I already knew that it would be things that fly, as those were the things that I was naturally drawn to and most fascinated by. I had a number of tentative projects in mind. Every now and again I would take a shot and think that it might be suitable for one project or another. At the same time, I found I was enjoying being out in the Somerset Marshes and wanting to spend more time there.

I'd first come across the marshlands of the Somerset Levels when visiting the Glastonbury area for work some 30 or so years before. Over the years I'd been keen on cycling and had regularly taken part in long distance events cycling south over the Mendips to Glastonbury and back. Despite this, the marshes were areas I'd travelled through, rather than spent much time in.

It was the dragonflies that first drew me to the Avalon nature reserves for photography, but it was the birdlife that brought me back over and over again. From those first few trips I still remember the sense of

discovering a strange new environment and the feeling of peace that I experienced when lost in my explorations of that world. I realised that my subject had found me: I would concentrate on showcasing the avian wildlife of the Avalon marshes. Although a relatively small area, the Avalon marshes are blessed with a large number of nature reserves, so there was no prospect of my getting bored!

There were some obvious ground rules for my project. I wanted to feature the variety of birdlife, so there could be no duplication of species. I also wanted to improve my fieldcraft, so there could be no set-ups. Where possible I felt that I should show the birds in their environment and with some variety in the seasons. Finally, I wanted to illustrate bird behaviours. I soon learned that getting the right amount of environment into the shot without it detracting from the bird itself was not so easy. But more than that, finding 15 good shots of different birds that met my criteria and fit together in a panel was a challenge. But it was one that I happily settled into.

After a while I found I was just enjoying the process of being out in the field observing and taking photos. It takes about 45 minutes for me to drive to the Avalon Marshes. I visited regularly, with early morning starts, almost whenever the light conditions looked promising. In hindsight, taking the time to enjoy being outdoors close to wildlife was very rewarding and therapeutic. As I drove to the Marshes I would be thinking about the position of the sun and the direction of the wind, considering what I was likely to see while planning the areas that I would visit and in what order, so as to maximise my opportunities that day.

Over time I sought out the quieter areas away from other people, the parts of the reserves that are slightly more off the beaten track, the less popular hides that are visited less often, the places where one environment transitions to another and still provides a clear view. I soon realised that if I sat quietly on my own and let the birds come to me I stood a better chance of coming back with decent images.

My persistence paid off and in late Spring I managed to see a Barn Owl reasonably frequently. Eventually I got close enough for a sequence of shots of its hunting





behaviour. On a cold week in November I was lucky with Bitterns, seeing them quite clearly for several days. In January the lakes were frozen and I was fortunate to see Snipe on the frozen marsh. In this part of the world Herons will often build their nests in the reed beds in the late winter, giving rise to the sight of herons flying through reeds with sticks in their beaks.

Of course, I also visited nature reserves in other parts of the country. Every now and again I would feel immensely frustrated when I'd taken a promising image of a bird that could easily have been included in my project, if only it had been taken on the Avalon Marshes.







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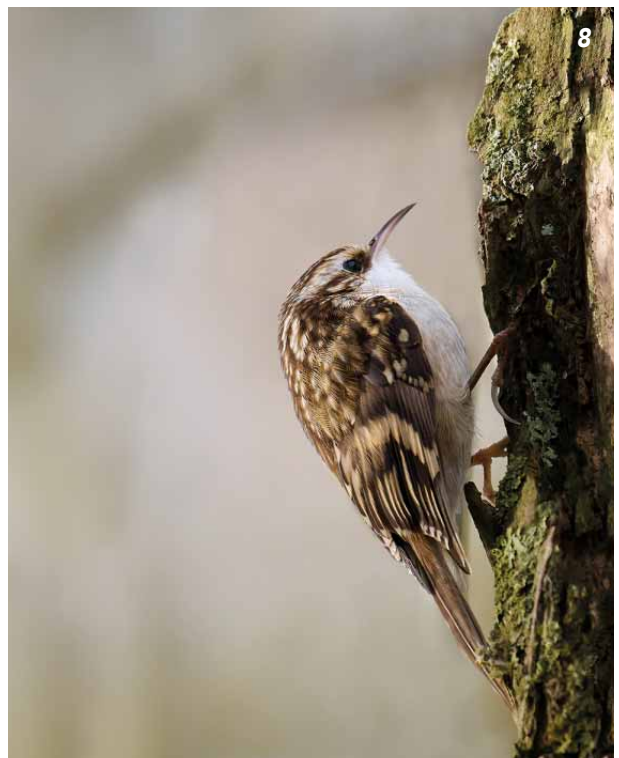


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Having realised the benefit of observing advisory days and assessments when applying for my LRPS, I sat in on available advisory days as an observer whenever opportunity allowed. But you can only learn so much from observing, it's easy to watch, but when you have skin in the game it is different. Feeling I had sufficient suitable images in my portfolio and a clearer idea of the requirements, I booked my own assessment and the next available advisory day.

Why did I do it that way round? If assessment places were more frequent I might have waited. As it was I felt my project was coming to a head and I wanted the pressure of getting it ready for assessment. While I felt that I had sufficient images to form a panel, if anything I had too much choice. Getting my selections to fit together in a panel was tricky. I needed some feedback and hoped to get this at the Advisory Day. If necessary I hoped to squeeze in a one to one after that. In the event the advice provided by Mick Durham was really helpful. Seeing things through his eyes made me realise that, despite my best efforts, I had retained emotional attachments to particular images, these had coloured my judgement and affected my draft panel selections.

Mick indicated that the draft panel images were in the main close to being up to standard, but suggested that I replace 3 images. He also offered some helpful processing advice for some other images. I went away



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from the day recognising that I had nearly made a stupid mistake and could most definitely do better. It was time to review my portfolio, again, but this time without the emotional attachments, paying attention to the little details. Ultimately my panel of 15 images was to include only 7 of those originally submitted for the Advisory Day.

The other thing that the Advisory Day brought home was that I needed to rewrite my Statement of Intent and remove the irrelevant filler.

I spent the next 8 weeks regularly revisiting the panel. Images were reviewed in great detail to check for flaws. Layouts were changed and then reviewed afresh after a few days to see what I thought. I could have tried to arrange a one to one, but it was my critical eye that I was trying to develop and I didn't feel that I could shortcut that process. Eventually with the deadline fast approaching I settled on the final form of my submission, for good or bad. The die was cast, now all I could do was to wait and try not to be too anxious.

My LRPS assessment had been over Zoom, but this time I was determined to attend the assessment at RPS House Bristol in person. There were 10 print panels scheduled in the morning and mine was the 3rd DPI panel after lunch. It was clear from the morning's results that the assessors were setting a high bar; the sense of anxiety from other candidates present was palpable. Finally it was my turn. With my heart pounding and my nerves in pieces, I sat through the assessors comments, trying to keep calm. Fortunately the Fellows undertaking the assessment were complimentary and those flaws that they did identify were not enough to hold me back. Eventually Mick Durham, the panel chair, summed up with the confirmation that I was now ARPS. The sense of relief that I experienced was enormous.



### Statement of Intent

My aim in creating this panel is to showcase some of the many varieties of wild bird species that make the Avalon Marshes their home for some or all of the year. In so doing, I have sought to open a brief window onto the lives and typical behaviours of the featured birds, covering such matters as: courtship, nest building, the rearing of young, and of course hunting or foraging for food. At the same time I also want to provide some sense of the landscape and environment comprised by the Avalon Marshes.

Lying between the Huntspill and the Mendip Escarpment, the Avalon Marshes form an important wildlife haven. Despite the relatively small size of the area, this man-made environment continues to provide an important contribution to the conservation of many significant species.

After the assessments had finished, while enjoying a coffee and chat with other new Associates and some of the assessors, my success finally sank in. One of them asked me what I was planning for my F panel, he was joking, but it made me realise that my photographic self-improvement journey still had a way to go.



# My Journey to ARPS - A Study of Local Birdlife During Lockdown

by Jane Barrett ARPS

For as long as I can remember I've always had a camera in my hand. My dad was a keen amateur photographer so he actively encouraged me from an early age, and I loved the fact that a photograph could capture that split second of action and freeze time. My first camera was an Olympus OM30 with a Miranda 28-70mm and 70-300mm lens bought from Dixons on the High Street. At that time, I was only shooting colour negatives so always got the images back as prints, I hadn't yet discovered the wonders of monochrome. I love action and sports, so when the Canon EOS 650 with its whizzy autofocus came out in 1987 it was a no brainer to upgrade. I still use Canon and Olympus cameras but

they are both digital and mirrorless. Thank goodness I don't have to pay for film!

In 1988 I joined my first camera club and learnt the magical art of darkroom printing. I can still vividly remember the first time I witnessed my image appearing as if by magic in the darkroom, and even today although the technology has changed I still find it immensely rewarding to see my image in print.

Although I've tried my hand at most genres of photography, capturing wildlife wasn't something I actively went out of my way to do. This all changed after a tour of South Africa in 2017 where I was captivated by the animals and in particular the wonderfully colourful birds.

I decided to learn more about photographing wildlife, so later that year I went on a short break where I first met Andy Parkinson and wow was that a definitive moment! It's amazing to think that although I knew photography was about capturing light I hadn't really thought about how you can use natural light to craft images. I had been doing it all my life without realising it, but it was that aha moment where everything suddenly became clear and made sense, enabling me to fully take control of how the camera captured the image I really wanted.

I love the challenge that wildlife photography gives me; it's rewarding to get a good image, but then I strive to capture a better one, it's a never-ending process that continually pushes my photography to improve. Much of my focus is now on capturing the natural world, normally abroad until 2020 when all that suddenly changed. I had been meaning to do my LRPS for a number of years but never found the time, now with the covid pandemic and enforced lockdown it seemed too good an opportunity to pass up, so I applied for the first assessment as soon as it became available and gained my LRPS on 27th May 2020 as a PDI submission.

Like most people at that time, I didn't expect lockdown to go on for as long as it did. Living on my own it was important to find another project to focus on in order to give me motivation not only for my photography but also for my daily mental health. I began to consider putting together an ARPS panel but on what?





Many of my usual photographic interests such as sport, travel or portraiture were not available. However as the weather had been particularly good, my neighbour and I had been spending a lot of time in the garden listening to and watching the birds. Often we would exchange texts backwards and forwards when an interesting bird visited the feeders, giving me new appreciation for the common British birds that we see every day.

I began to consider the idea of doing a panel on the birds in the garden, but only having a small urban garden even if I included the usual suspects (sparrows, starlings and pigeons) it wasn't going to give me the variety of birds that I would need. Photographically the backgrounds were not ideal and with limited access to resources at that time it was difficult to create anything that would work, besides I really wanted to escape the house environment not spend more time there! So, I decided to include the local parks or nature reserves that I visited on my daily walk or cycle ride which also improved my motivation to get out and take pictures. In all I only regularly visited three local locations (plus my back garden) during the lockdown, but luckily as I live close to the coast we are blessed with a wide variety of migratory birds that visit during the year.

Seeing the variety of birds was one thing - creating good images was a totally different challenge! All the locations were public places, often with lots of people around, keen to find out what I was photographing and wanting to know about the birds. As with most nature photography, considerable patience was required and many times a bird I had been tracking disappeared as people approached, often before I had pressed the shutter. It was nice however to have face-to-face conversations, so the interruption were soon forgiven before trying to find the bird again.



The project gave me a great deal of appreciation for the sheer variety of local birds and it never ceased to amaze me how visiting the same places time and time again can still surprise and enthrall me even now. You just can't anticipate what you may see.

Two years after I started photographing images for my ARPS I had my first trip abroad since the pandemic and for me this signalled the end of the project and the beginning of collating everything together into a







coherent presentation. My original fear of finding fifteen different species certainly wasn't a problem, in fact when putting the panel together it was more difficult to decide what to leave out. Once I had the first draft of the panel and a Statement of Intent, I booked a one to one session which I found incredibly helpful, especially having a fresh set of eyes on something that had become very familiar to me. Even at this stage I wasn't sure if the idea was suitable for submission, but the assessor thought it was worth pursuing with a few changes (which I made) to help tweak the arrangement and remove silly processing errors that I had missed. It is always difficult to spot errors on something you have put a lot of work into, so I always like to have a 'time out' from what I think is my finished work for at least a couple of weeks before looking at it again. It always surprises me what new things you spot that need correcting. Putting an ARPS submission together is certainly a marathon not a sprint!

I really wanted to present the panel as prints, for me there is a nice feeling of completion from the initial capture to presenting the completed image as a print, it also meant I had more control over the final image, particularly with the very white birds where feather detail can be easily lost in projection. Finally, my work was submitted to the RPS for assessment.

I was extremely proud to receive my Associate Distinction. It was also a nice caveat that something so positive came out of a difficult time in all our lives.





## Associate Presentation Layout



01



02



03



04



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### Species List

- 01 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
- 02 Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)
- 03 Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*)
- 04 Dunnock (*Prunella modularis*)
- 05 Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
- 06 Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*)
- 07 Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)
- 08 Whitethroat (*Curruca communis*)
- 09 Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)
- 10 Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)
- 11 House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)
- 12 Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
- 13 Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
- 14 Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)
- 15 Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

### Statement of Intent

#### A study of local birdlife during lockdown.

This panel aims to illustrate some of the bird life I've found throughout the two years of lockdown in my small corner of South-East Essex, either in my garden or during a daily walk or cycle ride.

During this period of restricted travel, I found that aside from the birds that are relatively easily seen, there is also a wider range of species that are more elusive to the casual spotter. The limited local area meant that I got to know the environment thoroughly, and because they were all public spaces, I had to develop my field-craft skills in order to achieve effective bird images.

My objective was two-fold, firstly to provide a focus and motivation for photography when living alone in lockdown in order to maintain my mental wellbeing, and secondly to capture fifteen different local species of birdlife in their natural habitat.

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# My Photographic Journey to ARPS

by John Nash ARPS

My photographic journey started in 1974 when I bought my first camera, a Zenith B. I read a statistic somewhere which stated that 50% of all cameras sold in Britain at that time were Zeniths and I know many photographers who started their own photographic journey with a Zenith. The Zenith B was totally manual, had limited shutter speed choices and did not have any form of metering or focussing aids. Like a great many of my contemporaries I learned how to take photographs by trial and error. To help with exposure I bought a cheap exposure meter which I think was called a Leningrad. I soon learned that pointing it at grass would usually give the correct exposure, or thereabouts. In the 1970s the importer of Zenith cameras held an annual photography competition. In 1979 I won the first prize of a silver plated cup and £500, a not inconsiderable sum in those days. This money enabled me to buy a new camera with both a built-in light meter and a split screen focussing aid.

Since then I have owned many cameras of various makes and I eventually settled on a Nikon D810 full frame camera and various lenses, including a macro lens and a 150-500 telephoto for taking wildlife photographs. However, a persistent golfing injury to my elbow made me think about giving up serious photography as the weight of a full frame body plus large telephoto lens was becoming difficult after an hours' use. My future changed when I read an article by Mike Lane FRPS in the Spring 2018 edition of *The Iris*, where he described his purchase of an Olympus micro four thirds camera, the EM1 Mk2. This was a revelation and I now own one plus four lenses, all much lighter than my Nikon gear. And yes, I now have a macro lens and a long telephoto which I can happily use for long periods. The macro lens is amazing as it is very light, can fit in a shirt pocket, and produces excellent photographs.

I have moved house many times around the country and have therefore been a member of many camera clubs. From such memberships my skills increased and I began entering club competitions with increasing success. I was also inspired by speakers at the clubs, both internally and visiting. One such visiting speaker introduced me to the idea of obtaining distinctions as a measure of one's photographic ability. I subsequently discovered that there are different routes to obtaining photographic distinctions and began submitting photographs to the organising bodies to gauge my progress. One of these bodies was, of course, the RPS where I learned about its three levels of distinction.

With advice from club members and attendance at several advisory days I applied for an LRPS. I was not entirely comfortable with the 'L' as it appeared to require photos from different genres to gain the award. I have, from the beginning, been a nature photographer with a particular passion for insects. I failed the 'L' and was on the verge of leaving the RPS. I am, however, a member of the RPS Nature Group and enjoy reading the articles in *The Iris*. Luckily I was re-reading some old copies of *The Iris* and one article caught my eye. In the Winter 2016 edition Darron Matthews told of his journey to ARPS. He described how, like me, he photographed nature and decided to bypass the 'L' and go straight to the 'A'. At the time I did not realise this was possible





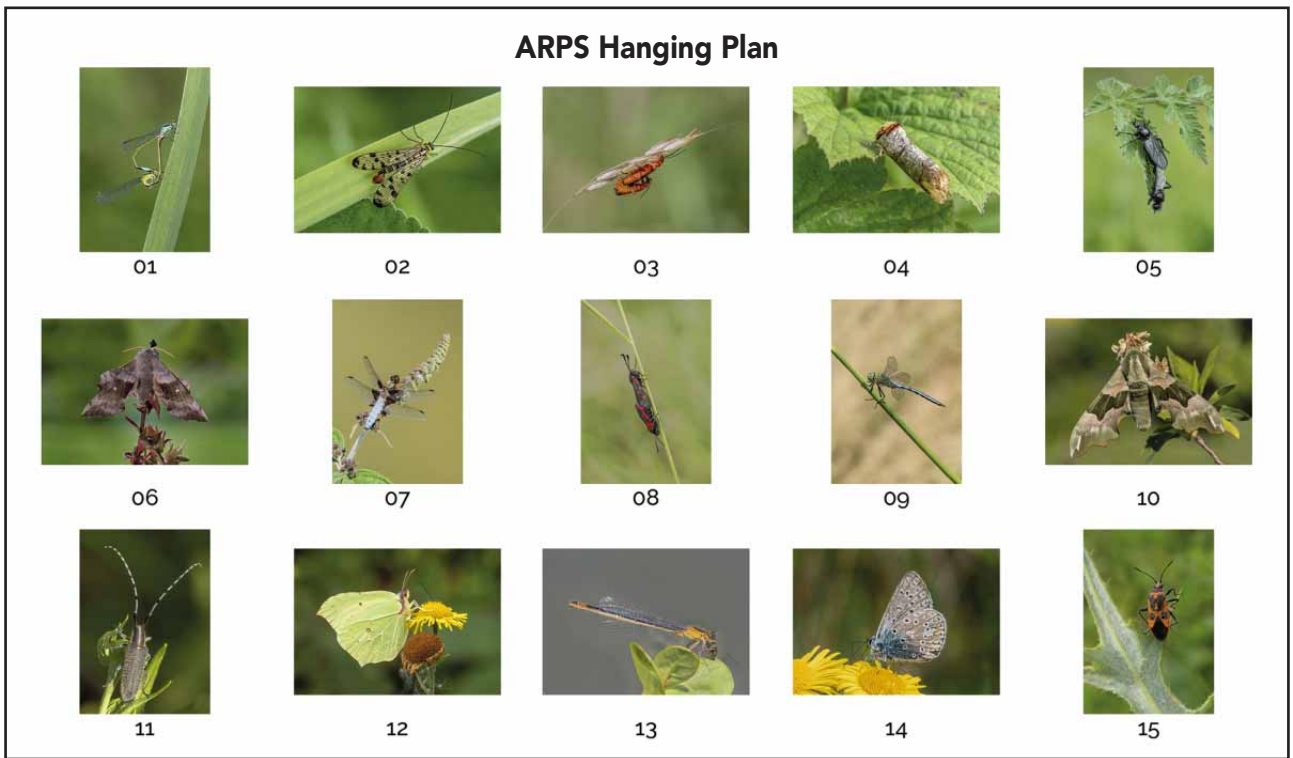
but it was confirmed when I watched the first talk Mick Durham gave to the RPS Nature Group via Zoom on how to gain a distinction. I decided to follow Darron's example and go for the Associate Distinction.

After much research I realised I did not have enough images of the required standard and would need to take more. The other important requirements are that the 'Statement of Intent' should match the photos and vice versa and that panel should be harmonious. I found that writing the Statement of Intent was straightforward but I tried 24 versions of the panel before I was happy with the layout. I felt that I was ready but needed advice from a panel member before submitting. However, due to Covid this could only be undertaken via Zoom and I knew, from the experiences of others, that the panel member would only see digital copies of my images and not the prints I intended to enter. Lady luck intervened again and I applied for and was accepted for the first print Advisory Day to be held in person since Covid locked us all away with meetings only on Zoom.

I travelled with my wife to Oldbury in the West Midlands in September 2022 for the Advisory Day. The advisors that day were Mick Durham FRPS, chair of the Nature Distinctions Panel, and Ann Miles FRPS. My panel was the first to be seen and comments by Mick and Ann were generally supportive. I was told that I had a very good Statement of Intent with the aims and objectives clearly defined. Of my panel I was told that I had "a good range of subjects with a thoughtful layout in terms of shapes, colours and orientation". However, on an image of an Orange Tip butterfly some white scales were deemed overexposed and this image should be corrected or replaced. I could not successfully correct the overexposure so, for safety, I replaced the image with a Common Blue butterfly. Ann also advised to check that sharpening on all images was appropriate, e.g. not sharpening the background. If you think they do not check the Statement of Intent – they do. Ann also pointed out that one image had been wrongly identified. Just before the Advisory Day I swapped one print in my panel but forgot to change the Statement. It was noticed so be warned!

I made the amendments suggested and felt ready to apply for the Assessment. This was booked for early April 2023 and my wife and I travelled to RPS House in Bristol to observe the proceedings in person rather than via Zoom. On the day my panel was the first to be seen. It was nerve wracking watching the panel members examine each photograph at close quarters before resuming their seats to vote on whether the panel met









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the standard or not. There are two votes. The preliminary vote follows the viewing and each panel member shows the Chairman a red or green card and the result noted. Panel members cannot see each others vote and neither can the audience. Two panel members are then invited by the Chairman to comment on the panel. Other panel members can also comment if they wish to add a different view. The Chairman then sums up the comments and asks for the second binding vote, followed by the verdict. If unsuccessful, the name of the candidate is not read out but he or she will receive written feedback from the Chairman detailing why the application failed and to offer guidance for a future application.

If successful, the Chairman announces the person's name and states that the person is immediately an ARPS. I was pleased and relieved when my name was read out and I received a round of applause from the other applicants present. Later I was asked if the RPS could retain my panel to use on Advisory Days and I was pleased to agree.

What next? I stated earlier how Darron Matthews inspired me to go for the 'A'. Darron is now FRPS so perhaps I should go for the 'F' too.

### Statement of Intent

*I have been interested in insects for many years. Their lifestyles and habits and their body structures and colours are fascinating and are often missed by passers-by or visitors to my garden. The aim of my panel is to show a small selection of those I have photographed in my garden and within a short distance of my home. I have included common insects and some which are less often seen or photographed.*

*The objective of my panel is to display their natural behaviours including resting, feeding or mating. All photographs have been taken handheld in natural light.*

### Species List

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 01 Blue-Tailed Damselflies mating                       | ( <i>Ischnura elegans</i> )              |
| 02 Male Scorpion Fly                                    | ( <i>Panorpa germanica</i> )             |
| 03 Red Soldier Beetles mating                           | ( <i>Rhagonycha fulva</i> )              |
| 04 Buff-Tip Moth  | ( <i>Phalera bucephala</i> )             |
| 05 St. Mark's Flies mating                              | ( <i>Bibio marci</i> )                   |
| 06 Poplar Hawkmoth                                      | ( <i>Laothoe populi</i> )                |
| 07 Male Broad-bodied Chaser                             | ( <i>Libellula depressa</i> )            |
| 08 Six-spot Burnet Moths mating                         | ( <i>Zygaena filipendulae</i> )          |
| 09 Male Emperor Dragonfly                               | ( <i>Anax imperator</i> )                |
| 10 Lime Hawkmoth  | ( <i>Mimas tiliae</i> )                  |
| 11 Longhorn Beetle                                      | ( <i>Agapanthia villosiviridescens</i> ) |
| 12 Brimstone Butterfly                                  | ( <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i> )             |
| 13 Female Blue-tailed Damselfly eating Pondskater Nymph | ( <i>Ischnura elegans</i> )              |
| 14 Common Blue Butterfly                                | ( <i>Polyommatus icarus</i> )            |
| 15 Cinnamon Bug   | ( <i>Corizus hyascyami</i> )             |



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# My long learning curve to the ARPS

by Nigel Bampton ARPS

My path into photography came in a rather unexpected way. Living in the East Midlands in the 1960's it was normal for the school gates to close behind you for the last time and then to walk straight through the open gates of one of the many large engineering companies in the area, in my case Brush Electrical Machines in Loughborough. I worked for this company for 34 years in several positions lastly as a Laboratory Technician. On my first day in the Laboratory I found that part of my duties would be to take, develop and print photographs for technical reports, this rather unnerved me as I knew very little about photography and in the early days I made many mistakes but gained valuable experience and knowledge along the way until I was producing images of the right quality.

Fourteen years later I retired from my working life, and left with a set of new skills in photography. I now found myself free to explore new avenues and enrolled on a C&G 923 Photography Course as I still wished to

continue learning about something that I had now come to love. I really enjoyed this experience and eventually passed this first module but decided that my days of taking classes in further education had come to an end. I now longed to spend more time outdoors trying to capture images of the wildlife I came across on my travels. I was now a regular visitor to the local nature reserves armed with my newly acquired Canon 7D mkII camera and 100-400mm f4.5-5.6 L Lens.

It soon became clear wildlife photography was very different and challenging from anything I had done before; it shouldn't have come as a surprise to me that nothing stays still for long in nature with most subjects preferring to keep as far away from you as possible. Part of the answer was a longer lens so I purchased a Sigma 150-600mm f5-f6.3 Contemporary lens to go with my Canon kit. This proved to be an excellent purchase as I now rarely used my 100-400mm Canon lens.





Basic equipment now sorted I now needed to learn new skills. I had to find out much more about the different species habits and more importantly where they could be found and the best way to approach them. A bit of a tall order for a newcomer to this type of photography. It was at this time I became interested in the Royal Photographic Society and after a bit of research felt this could be the way forward as I had learnt that they had specialist groups you could also join within the society one being nature. This clinched it for me and I joined the RPS in 2014.

After several years I found that I had learnt one way or another so much more and was now able to capture the wildlife images that I had always wanted to, with the added bonus that my general photography had also improved. Now it is only human nature to wonder at what level you have eventually arrived at in photography, so my thoughts turned to the RPS Distinctions and wondered if my images would be good enough for them, I decided that there was only one way to find out and set about producing a set of ten mounted images of various subjects suitable to submit for the Licentiate and after two attempts, and to my absolute joy, I was awarded my LRPS in 2019.

Now time and tide waits for no man and as I got older I found carrying heavy cameras and lenses around all day was no fun and it started taking the enjoyment out of a day's wildlife shooting. Luckily a chance meeting in a bird hide with a fellow photographer, who was using the Olympus Micro 4/3 system, caught my eye. Just looking at his kit, which was half the size and weight of my own, made me go home and read everything I could on Micro 4/3 cameras and lenses. After much thought I decided to trade in all of my old equipment for an Olympus EM-1 mkII and a Panasonic/Leica 100-400mm f4-f6.3 lens. I did have many misgivings on my purchase initially but I now have to admit that it is a decision that I have not regretted one bit, and I am still using this system to this day, upgrading the camera and lenses whenever I could.

Unfortunately Covid and the lockdowns now came into all our lives, like us all I found the lack of human contact difficult and it was at about this time a friend suggested I might like to join a local camera club that had continued with their meetings by Zoom on the internet, I readily agreed to this and joined as soon as possible. I have been a member of the Shephed & District Camera Club now for some time and have loved making new friends and, once Covid restrictions were lifted, enjoyed attending the weekly meetings at the club where I have had the chance to see many wonderful





images and attend talks given by visiting speakers. Once again I found myself thinking could I ever achieve the same level in wildlife photography as many of the club members and guest speakers had already achieved.

With this in mind I eventually decided to try for the RPS Associate distinction in Nature. To get a feel for what I would need to achieve I viewed many successful submissions. This made me realise that this project would take time, patience, planning and much thought to produce twenty or more images of the quality required to choose for my entry. I then had to decide what wildlife I would base my submission on and chose a mix of birds and insects that hopefully displayed some aspects of their behaviours.

Next up was where to go to get the images. I decided that nature reserves which had been reclaimed from old industrial sites would be particularly suitable - such as Attenborough and Lount - as they showed how wildlife, when given the chance, could once again thrive in these areas. The east coast also lay within easy reach which broadened my choice of subjects to include the coastal birds to be found at Bempton and the many nature reserves of North Norfolk. I chose the title "East of England Wildlife" for the project and then during the next 18 months or so I captured a selection of images I thought might be suitable to select my submission from.

I managed to get images of birds in flight, catching prey and even two Curlews disputing over territory which I was particularly pleased with. The Lount Nature Reserve in Leicestershire was excellent for capturing Dragonflies and Butterflies - all were taken with my trusty 100-400 F4-F6.3 Panasonic/Leica lens with its close focusing ability.

When I had produced enough images I applied for the Associate Assessment leaving plenty of time to take advantage of the one2one service offered by the RPS. This is a Zoom meeting on the internet with one of the RPS Assessors to comment and give advice on your submission. I would recommend everyone should consider doing this, in fact I would say it is essential.





After booking my one2one I was contacted by Ann Miles FRPS to arrange a date and time suitable for both of us and arrange for me to send my images to her along with my panel layout and my Statement of Intent. On the day of the one2one I was a bit apprehensive as to what Ann would say but I found the whole experience to be extremely useful. Ann commented on which images worked strongly in the panel and ones that didn't including the reserves but always stressing that the final choice would be up to me. This resulted in one image being removed altogether and several having to be reworked. The panel layout I thought looked acceptable but Ann advised trying to match the image colours to give a more pleasing look overall which worked much better. Finally Ann looked at my Statement of Intent and suggested wording it differently to more clearly state the aims of my panel. When I had revised the submission to take into account the advice that Ann had given me I then sent it all back and she finally commented that she thought it was now of a standard that could be submitted but it would be down to the assessors on the day to decide if it met the criteria.

On the day of the Associate assessment I was on edge all day waiting for the email which would let me know their decision. Later in the afternoon I received the news by email from Simon Vercoe of the RPS that I had been waiting for, and to my great relief found that I had been awarded the Associate Distinction. The feelings I had on being told this news was one of pure elation and something I will always remember.



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**Statement of intent - East of England Wildlife**

The aim of my panel is to show some of the wildlife that can now be found in the once industrial regions of the East of England now they have been returned to nature. Having worked in heavy engineering for most of my life it has given me great pleasure to witness the old coal mines at Annesley and Lount being carefully turned into nature reserves where some of these images were taken. I include the behaviour of subjects: flying, displaying, singing and with prey.

**Associate Panel Layout**



# Red Squirrels in a Scottish Highland Garden

Robert Galloway LRPS

In issue 140 of *The Iris*, Summer 2021, I wrote specifically on the range of colouring and patterns shown on the tail's of the Red Squirrels that visit my garden.



I am writing now concerning other important aspects of the appearance of the Red Squirrels as photographed over 5 years in the same garden.

Image 1. A typical Red Squirrel in June. Of note are the short ears, the whiskers which are quite long compared to the width of the head, the sharp claws on the fore paws which show clearly against the background of the white underbody while the rear claws are holding on to the tree. The tail, in shadow, is much less noticeable than in many views of a Red Squirrel including many which follow.

In contrast, image 2 shows a close up of the head of an inquisitive Red Squirrel looking from behind a tree. Taken during May and showing very visible and quite long tufts of hair on top of its ears.

Are long tufts of hair on ears common or not on Red Squirrels?





Image 3, taken in May of a different year shows the whole body of a Red Squirrel climbing vertically down a tree stump, and it also has prominent ear tufts.

Image 4, a very detailed and attractive side view of the animal, also in May, shows whiskers, long tufted ears, paws with significant claws and the characteristic tail.

In image 5 we have a Red Squirrel photographed in June. Here we see all the typical features but in this case with short ears and no tufts as seen in image 1.

Moving on into August, we continue to see short ears without tufts along with the usual whiskers, claws and characteristic tail. In September these features are still visible in a frontal view of a Red Squirrel, Image 7.

Image 8, shows a Red Squirrel happily on snow and tufts have started to appear on the ears. Image 9, taken in March, shows a lucky Red Squirrel with well tufted ears who has found a well stocked bird feeder in the snow.

Of the nine images discussed, five show ears with tufts during December, March and May while four show ears with no tufts during June, August and September so we may conclude roughly speaking that ear tufts are present in Winter months and ears are short and smooth in Summer.



4 Another Red Squirrel in the month of May.



5 A Red Squirrel in June.



6 A Red Squirrel in the month of August.



8 Red Squirrel on snow in December.



7 A frontal view in September



9 On snow in the month of March.

# The NIKON Z 9

## The Ultimate Photographic Machine

by Robert Thompson FRPS

*The following review of the Nikon Z 9 has been reduced significantly to accommodate the available space in The Iris. To read it in full, including information on the various key features go to:*

[www.robertthompsonphotography.com](http://www.robertthompsonphotography.com)

### INTRODUCTION

Back in March 2021, after much hearsay and chatter, Nikon finally revealed the development of their flagship mirrorless camera, the Z 9. For many, the announcement had been a long-time coming. It's a well-known fact that Nikon never rushes to be first over the line with any new emerging technology and this was certainly true with the Z 9.

In typical Nikon fashion, little was given away on specifications other than its release, which was scheduled before the end of 2021. Some of the innovations we were told would be revolutionary and a first in the mirrorless

world. I had already been using and testing a Z 7II for several months. It was, for me, my first introduction to mirrorless technology. Up until then I was happy to keep shooting with my D850s, which have served me faithfully since their announcement back in July 2017. Good as the Z 7II is, and I was impressed with the innovation and technology, it lacked a few items which my D850 had that were fundamental to the way that I work.

There is always excitement when Nikon reveals a new flagship camera. Having owned many of them over the years, the launch of the D850 was like that D3 moment for me back in the summer of 2007. I had no doubt the unveiling of Z 9 would be a momentous event, and when it finally came Nikon did not disappoint. I was simply blown away when this camera was revealed, at last, a pro-level mirrorless body with many of the features and characteristics of a high-end DSLR, but with considerable innovative technology under the hood.



**Nikon Z 9 with the Z MC 105mm f/2.8 VR S**



## First Impressions

My first experience with the Z 9 was back in mid-December 2021 when I received a box from Nikon. There is always an adrenaline rush when a new camera or lens arrives. Removing the body carefully from its box, my first impression was its resemblance to the D 6. The camera felt solid in my hands, rugged and highly capable of meeting the needs of daily professional use. Compared to other Z cameras, the Z 9 is no lightweight, but considering what it packs under the bonnet, it's still a little lighter and smaller than the D6. The build quality of this camera emulates a typical flagship DSLR rather than any other Z camera. The ergonomics are typical Nikon design with a nice deep grip which extends around the base of the camera. Historically, all Nikon Pro-bodies have an integrated grip making vertical and horizontal shooting comfortable and smooth. The vertical grip has a dual shutter and other function controls which is why I prefer pro-camera bodies.

## Overview of some Key Features

Nikon introduced numerous new features exclusive to the Z 9 at the time. It is not my intention to list every single one as there are many. Some of the main ones that attracted my attention are listed below.

- Stacked backside CMOS sensor
- Removal of the mechanical shutter
- Autofocus recognition of multiple subjects
- Bi-directional and glove-sensitive LCD screen
- Return of the AF mode button
- Bracketing button
- Low light LCD mode
- A large image buffer
- Dual button card formatting
- Return of the 10-pin terminal, which I missed on the Z 7II
- Integrated GNSS; an absolute must for me
- Proper Memory Banks as opposed to U1/U2/U/3 which I did not like in other Z cameras
- A clutter-free Live view experience via the DISP option button
- 120 Hz EVF refresh rate
- An internal sensor shield to reduce dust and debris adhering to the sensor
- New raw algorithms
- Blackout-free shooting
- The return of 3 D tracking
- Extended battery life and backward compatibility with some previous EN-EL18 units



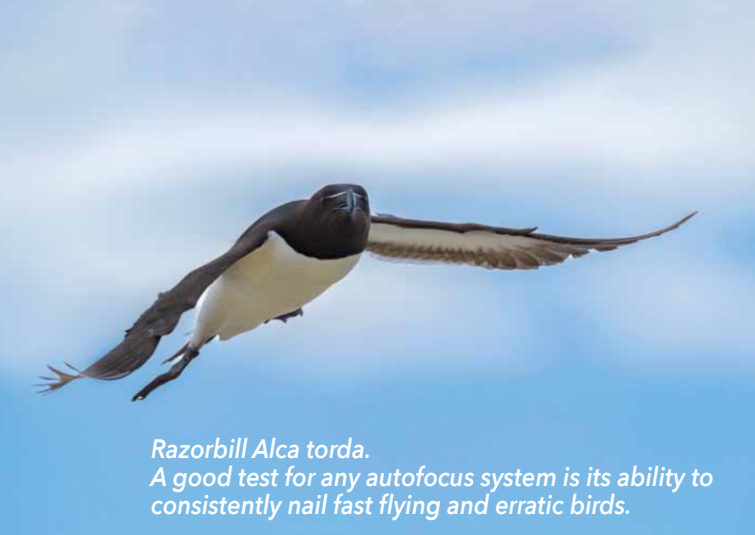
*Fly Agaric Amanita muscaria.*



*Cleopatra Gonepteryx cleopatra. An example of photographing butterflies in flight with the Z 9.*



*Ophrys helenae - Helen's Bee Orchid*



*Razorbill Alca torda.*  
A good test for any autofocus system is its ability to consistently nail fast flying and erratic birds.



*Atlantic Puffin Fratercula arctica .*  
One of the most photographed seabirds and a test for any autofocus system.



*Northern Gannet Morus bassanus*

### **A Brief Overview of some Key Specifications**

The following specifications are brief highlights from the main review. Information on other key features are to be found in full review.

### **Sensor and Dynamic Range**

Prior to the launch of the Z 9, there were many opinions and conflicting reports regarding the resolution and other aspects of the sensor design. Some thought it was a combination of the D850 and Z 7II sensors with a tweak, that is certainly not the case. The Z 9 is a completely redesigned stacked CMOS sensor, a powerhouse able to consistently shoot at 47.7mp with mind-blowing readout speeds. It was reassuring for me that Nikon was able to match the resolution output of the D850 and Z 7II with the same default ISO of 64, which meant no sacrifice on resolution over performance. To be honest, no photographer likes to downsize pixels when other brands are increasing resolution.

### **Image Quality**

Having used the Z 7II for a while, I expected the Z 9 to replicate the image quality and perhaps a little more. I was impressed by just how good the Z 9 is. It appeared to have the edge on the Z 7II, at higher ISO levels and also the EVF. The absence of a mechanical shutter does eliminate in-camera vibration producing very sharp results at slower shutter speeds, this was particularly apparent to me when shooting macro at reproduction ratios above 1:1. I find I need to worry less with this camera when attempting difficult focus stacks of tiny subjects in the field.

### **Monitor/LCD Screen**

Some photographers might be disappointed that Nikon decided not to introduce a fully articulating screen in the Z 9. I'm essentially a stills photographer, so it's not a major concern for me, but some videographers may have an issue. The 8cm (3.2in) 2100k-dot LCD screen design is an improvement over the D850 and will, for the most part, suit the majority of stills photographers. The mechanism is fairly robust and has multi-directional tilt, which makes it easy to deal with high and low-angle shooting. Another new feature is the on-screen information now rotates when you shoot vertically making it easier to read.

### **Sensor Shield**

The Z 9 is the first camera in the Nikon range to have a protective shield for the sensor. It's not activated by





*Coral Slime Mould Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa*

default, but I strongly advise engaging it. The shield is very effective in protecting the camera from dust and other micro particles when out in the field. I have had the camera since December 2021 and have not needed the sensor cleaned at all. The dual-sensor coating seems to be very efficient in keeping dust spots to an absolute minimum. The shield only engages when the camera is switched off. Nikon recommends that you turn the camera off between lens changes . I do this routinely.

### **EVF Viewfinder**

Prior to using the Z 7II, I wasn't an enthusiast of electronic viewfinders. Having used/tried several, I found the colour temperature, lag and the overall experience to be disappointing. However, my opinion changed with the Z 7II. I found it beneficial in low light especially when shooting macro in low light situations. At first glance, you may not appreciate the change in the EVF experience between the Z 7II and Z 9 but there is a noticeable difference. I observed an increase in the refresh rate from 60 Hz to 120 Hz in the firmware upgrade to version 2. This produced an all-round smoother viewing experience similar to an optical viewfinder in a DSLR.

One advantage of the EVF is being able to have the camera's settings visible and confirmed before pressing the shutter. You also have a choice in your viewing experience. The 'apply settings to live view' function allows both the EVF and the LCD monitor to mirror each other in terms of brightness, colour and contrast. Deactivate this function and your experience is similar to looking through an optical viewfinder on a DSLR. I prefer this setting over the former. Image review is also possible when you need to be sure of the shot, another benefit of an EVF. Since moving to mirrorless technology, I frequently find myself using the EVF more

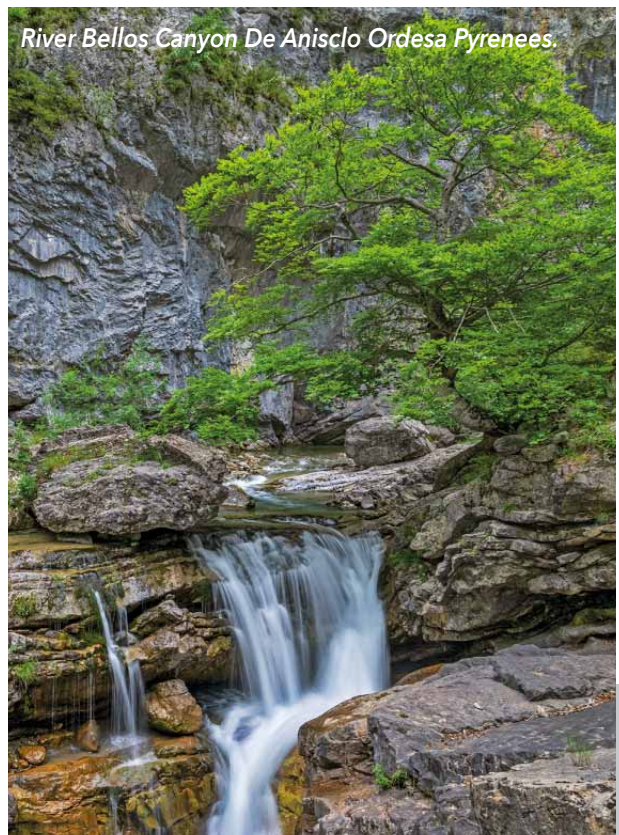


*Wood Hedgehog Mushroom Hydnum repandum.*  
*One of the first subjects I photographed with the Z9.*

than the monitor. I have to admit, every time I used the D850 it became less enjoyable, because the view-finder experience became more of a disappointment. Once you accustom yourself to an EVF it is difficult to go back to an OVF.

### **Autofocus and 3D Tracking**

I could devote a whole review to autofocus but will only touch briefly on this topic as there is already so much information available on the Z 9's autofocus system. Despite the latest improvements there are always some who are never happy about what a camera is capable of. I don't believe there is any camera currently available with impeccable autofocus despite what many claim. How did we all manage to get amazing images 10 years ago when autofocus was much less sophisticated than now? I don't want to arrive at a stage where a camera makes every



*River Bellos Canyon De Anisclo Ordesa Pyrenees.*

single decision for me - I guess that's what some people want - but I fear that's the direction photography is heading in. My current experience with the Z 9 subject detection is pretty impressive. When you consider the ground-breaking speed of the AF calculations that the Z 9 makes, it's simply mind-blowing coupled with deep-learning AI, and gives the user an unparalleled experience. I rarely photograph people, sport or cars, but occasionally I do, and I find it excellent and rarely misses. Subsequent firmware upgrades have refined the autofocus subject detection even more.

I was pleased to see that after much whining and complaining Nikon brought back 3D-tracking to the Z 9. Although it's been around for a long time in DSLRs, Nikon was the first to perfect it. The Z 9 takes it to another level utilising complex algorithms and AI to give more consistent results. Combined with subject detection it performs incredibly well even when the quarry is moving erratically. There are many ways to configure the autofocus system. With subject detection, I assign it specifically to the subject group, that way it is marginally faster. However, nothing is completely fool proof and there are occasions when it drops focus, sometimes due to a sudden change in the background. Nevertheless, in the majority of situations, it's excellent and where the background is clearly defined there seems to be little in the way of problems that I have encountered. Many photographers have their own methods for setting up autofocus and 3D tracking. In my case, I use the shutter button as normal to engage focus and I reprogrammed the back button focus button to activate 3D tracking once focus has been achieved. I find this to be a pretty reliable method in most situations.

## In the Field

From the moment I held this camera in my hands, I knew it would be a transformation for me. I was reminded of that D3 moment I had all those years ago. Any doubts I had about retiring my D850's were quickly forgotten. It was a relatively easy migration, having used the Z 7II I was already accustomed to most of the features on the Z series cameras. My first outing with the Z 9 was to woodland near my home. By the end of the first day's shooting, I felt I had a mirrorless camera that performed more like a DSLR. I was blown away by it and have been ever since. With all new cameras there is a settling-in period as you customise and tweak the camera's settings to your liking and your style of photography. The removal of the mechanical shutter works for me, virtually eliminating in-camera vibration when shooting high-magnification macro and working with larger telephoto lenses. Also, no failure or wear from parts and no limit to the number of images captured by the sensor.

The EVF is a pleasure to use, it's bright, crisp and superb in low light. Woodlands where dense leaf cover shades the ground vegetation is where it excels. It may not have the resolution of some other cameras but its 120Hz refresh rate seems fine. Photographing in the field is a dusty environment and in combination with a breeze produces dust and other micro-particles. Mirrorless cameras are by nature more at risk of having the sensor contaminated due to the close proximity to the mount. I have found the sensor shield in the Z 9 to be extremely efficient, dramatically reducing dust from entering. Images are, in the majority of cases, dust-free.

From the outset, I was impressed with the image quality and its ease of use. Whether I'm shooting landscapes or macro the files look similar to those I got from the Z 7II. My default setting for macro hovers around

*Great Black-backed Gull - Larus marinus*



*Red-crested Pochard - Netta fufina. One of the most challenging situations for autofocus to deal with.*





200-400 ISO. I have no issues in this range at all and I can comfortably rack it up to 800 or even 1600 when photographing at higher magnifications, particularly when working in partially shaded woodland, without any real concerns. The dynamic range drops as you increase the ISO, but that's to be expected with any camera.

Good as the Z 7II is, autofocus in some situations had me reaching for my D850. Tracking small, fast-flying birds with an erratic nature is always challenging. I felt these sorts of situations were better suited to DSLR technology at that time. The Z 9 removed any doubts I had and clearly addressed these and many other issues. I also like the choice of variable frame rates depending on what you're shooting. I don't always want or need to shoot 120fps (frame per second), 30fps jpeg or 20fps raw. The camera (option d1) gives me the choice of reducing these besides, I don't want the tedious task of wading through all of the downloaded files (especially at 120fps) with only marginal differences.

I found a considerable improvement in autofocus performance and it's even better with the latest firmware updates. I put this to the test by photographing different birds. Those that dive and surface continually are among the most challenging for any autofocus system. The Z 9 performed incredibly well only occasionally dropping focus, but quickly picking it up again when the bird surfaced. While running a workshop in northern Spain I did some experiments photographing fast-moving butterflies in flight. Considering the speed these insects move in close-up and the limited depth of field the Z 9 was not always successful, but it did produce some very acceptable images considering AI has not been applied to insects. These types of images could not have been achieved that easily with the D850.

A camera with the bulk and weight of the Z 9 would not normally be the obvious choice for a landscape photographer. The Z 9 transcends that perception in every aspect. Its versatility and high-resolution stacked CMOS sensor allow it to compete across all photographic disciplines. Its low default ISO setting combined with its astrophotography capability make it the most comprehensive of any Nikon camera to date. What I love about this camera is its versatility and adaptability to my photographic requirements in every aspect. The image quality I get from it even at higher ISO levels is excellent. It's endured all types of weather conditions from snow to rain and with no effect on its performance. Nikon has done a really excellent job here with weather sealing. Another useful feature is having the ability to customise the EVF and

*Judas Tree - Cercis siliquastrum*



monitor. When I'm shooting landscapes or macro, I can quickly switch between different screen options via the DISP button to have distraction-free viewing, useful when photographing complex subjects and working at magnifications above 1:1.

Since going mirrorless, I no longer need to keep removing ND filters when recomposing a scene. Being able to see your image on screen, irrespective of filter density, is a real advantage in the field. Also, the extended shutter speed range means no more using my phone for timed exposures. The GNSS in the Z 9 is brilliant, no connection issues and it works on the fly in the back-ground even when the camera is switched off. My 10-pin terminal can be utilised to connect the WR-R11a and WR-T10 wireless receiver/transmitter which works perfectly.

*Dingle Peninsula, Southwest Ireland.*



### Working beyond 1:1 in the field

Another aspect of my work involves photographing at magnifications beyond 1:1. I have spent many years testing and working with various pieces of equipment to obtain the most reliable results. The majority of major photographic brands have virtually neglected this aspect considering pre-digital they designed and made many different specialised pieces of macro equipment. I find the Z 9 camera ideal for this work. Gone are the days of worrying about in-camera vibration, it's no longer an issue with this camera.

It is no secret that I'm an avid user of Novoflex equipment and for good reason, their innovations on the macro front are well-known and respected throughout the world. I've been using the Novoflex BAL-F and BALPRO-1 bellows systems among other accessories they manufacture for the majority of higher reproduction ratios. Novoflex has designed a Retro Reverse Adapter that allows complete automation including metadata transfer with the Z series cameras and lenses. I've also been testing the latest Z MC 105mm f/2.8 VR S and the Z 50mm macro lenses with Novoflex bellows which work flawlessly and produce outstanding results. If you're an occasional macro shooter and own the Z 24-70mm f/4 S zoom, when reversed on either Novoflex bellows systems, magnifications in the region of 3:1 are possible. You can also use the Retro Reverse Adapter on its own with the lens reversed. Shooting macro with the Z 9 has many advantages over the D850.

### A Final Word

The mirrorless sector has seen many changes in the last few years and will continue for some time to come. The professional sector is generally cautious and never quick to act irrationally when it comes to new technology. The

Z 9 will, I believe, be the game-changer for the remaining pro-DSLR users. Many have a considerable investment in F-mount glass and other accessories. The migration to Z lenses will take time and Nikon has gone some way to help with the transition. Do I miss, or have any regrets about moving to mirrorless technology? Not in the slightest. Nikon has produced a camera that has superseded the best that DSLR technology could provide. It has, without a doubt, improved many aspects of my work. The high-resolution sensor defines it as an incredible all-round camera capable of handling just about every photographic discipline from sport to portraits, weddings to wildlife and landscape to macro. Few cameras possess this level of versatility. I think this is the camera that the professional sector has waited for and to be honest the future is mirrorless - if you believe otherwise then disappointment awaits you. Although some see the Z 9 as being costly, it's the least expensive pro-level camera Nikon has produced to date, even cheaper than their competitors. Also to Nikon's credit is their commitment to improving the performance of the camera - they have been proactive with several firmware updates since its launch back in December 2021.

I also recognise the Z 9 is not a camera for everyone, although based on its publicity, I think everyone wants it even for the kudos of owning one. There are no bad cameras these days despite what YouTubers would have you think. Many photographers are too easily influenced by what they hear and watch. In my opinion it's important to define your field of interest, and that will help you make the correct choice. If you are primarily a landscape photographer, speed and fast autofocus are not essential. If sport and action account for most of your photography, then it will have distinct advantages for you/your work. You also need to be aware that any new camera may need additional accessories/equipment that are often overlooked in your budget. Memory cards are one example. If you have been running SDs in a previous camera you will have to purchase CFexpress type B cards. To maximise on the Z 9's speed, you will need cards with a fast read/write speed. A universal L-bracket won't work effectively on the Z 9 because the ports will not be available and it will have to be removed to access them. Or you'll have to purchase a custom-made design adding more overall bulk to the camera. These may be more relevant in the non-professional sector but are worth considering and add to the overall cost. Finally, the question most people want to know is, could I go back to working with a DSLR? The simple answer is no, the camera was worth the wait in every aspect.



*Daffodil Narcissus Le Torch*



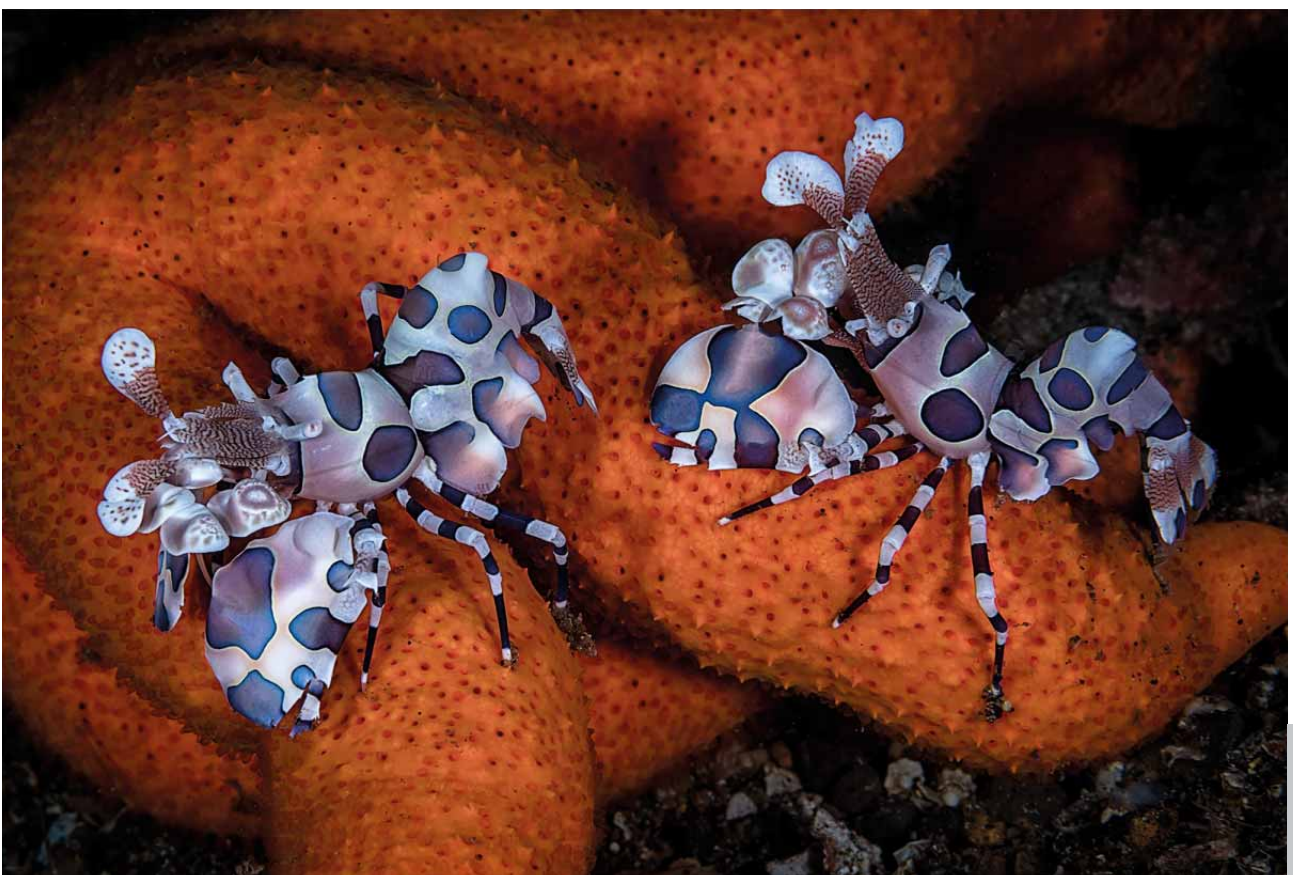
# RPS Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2023

## Medal Winning Images



Above: Gold Medal Print - Male Kestrel presenting prey by Ian Mitchell ARPS

Below: Gold Medal Projected Image - Harlequin Shrimps, Indonesia, by David Keep FRPS







## Bronze Medals

**Above: Glanville Fritillaries on  
Dandelion seedhead  
by Trevor Davenport ARPS**

**Left: Large Red and Azure Blue  
Male Damselflies  
by Darron Matthews FRPS**





## Bronze Medals

Left: *Mycena inclinata* on moss  
by Karin Wilson

Below: Saffrondrop Bonnet with fly  
by Mike Rowe ARPS





Pamela Lane ARPS - Black Browed Albatross courting



Malcolm Blackburn ARPS - Common Blue Damselflies



Roger Hance FRPS - Fly Orchid



Mike Rowe FRPS - Mycena sp



Wendy Ball - Shaggy Ink Cap



Ian Mitchell ARPS - Winter Mountain Hare





Sandie Cox ARPS - Chinese Winter Hazel



Collette Patto LRPS - Malachite Kingfisher

## Selectors' Choices - Projected Images



Keith Polwin ARPS - Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle



Bob Breach - Velvet Shank Fungus



John Simpson ARPS - *Ophrys sintonisii*



Liz Cutting ARPS - Water Vole

# Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2023

## Award Winning Prints

Author	Title	Award
Ian Mitchell ARPS	Male Kestrel presenting prey	Gold Medal
Trevor Davenport ARPS	Glanville Fritillaries on Dandelion Seedhead	Bronze Medal
Mike Rowe FRPS	Saffrondrop Bonnet with Fly	Bronze Medal
Wendy Ball	Shaggy Ink Cap	Selector's Choice
Malcolm Blackburn ARPS	Common Blue Damselflies 1	Selector's Choice
Roger Hance FRPS	Fly Orchid	Selector's Choice
Pamela Lane ARPS	Black Browed Albatross courting	Selector's Choice
Ian Mitchell ARPS	Winter Mountain Hare	Selector's Choice
Mike Rowe FRPS	Mycena species	Selector's Choice
Malcolm Blackburn ARPS	Two Young Giraffes	Highly Commended
Sandie Cox ARPS	Red-capped Lark mobbing Kori Bustard	Highly Commended
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Long-Tailed Tit and frozen berries	Highly Commended
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Mating Pale Clouded Yellow	Highly Commended
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Pink Green-winged Orchids and Cowslip	Highly Commended
Roger Hance FRPS	Pasque Flower	Highly Commended
Roger Hance FRPS	<i>Hericium coralloides</i>	Highly Commended
Ann Ruth Helen Healey FRPS	Female Wolf Spider with Spiderlings	Highly Commended
Koshy Johnson FRPS	Flight of the Bittern	Highly Commended
Bryan Knox ARPS	Pine Marten on fallen tree	Highly Commended
Darron Matthews FRPS	Male Large Emerald Moth on Corncockle Head	Highly Commended
Ian Mitchell ARPS	Growling Pine Marten	Highly Commended
Lesley Simpson ARPS	<i>Ophrys sphenodes Araneola</i>	Highly Commended
Sonja Thompson FRPS	Fruiting Bodies of Powderpuff Bracket Fungi	Highly Commended



### Highly Commended Prints (opposite):

- 1 Flight of the Bittern by Koshy Johnson FRPS
- 2 *Hericium coralloides* by Roger Hance FRPS
- 3 Long-tailed Tit and frozen berries by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS
- 4 Pine Marten on a fallen tree by Bryan Knox FRPS
- 5 Red-capped Lark by Sandie Cox ARPS
- 6 Female Wolf Spider with Spiderlings by Ann Ruth Helen Healey FRPS
- 7 Fruiting Bodies of Powderpuff Bracket Fungi by Sonja Thompson FRPS



**Nature Group  
Annual Exhibition 2023  
Highly Commended  
Prints**







## Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2023

### Highly Commended Prints:

- 1 **Growing Pine Marten**  
by Ian Mitchell ARPS
- 2 **Male Large Emerald Moth on Corncockle Head**  
by Darron Matthews FRPS
- 3 **Two Young Giraffes**  
by Malcolm Blackburn ARPS
- 4 **Mating Pale Clouded Yellow**  
by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS
- 5 **Pasque Flower**  
by Roger Hance FRPS
- 6 **Pink Green-Winged Orchids and Cowslip**  
by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS
- 7 ***Ophrys sphegodes araneola***  
by Lesley Simpson ARPS





Author	Title	Award
Wendy Ball	Mountain Hare	
	Shaggy Ink Cap	Selector's Choice
Peter Alexander Bisset ARPS	Long Eared Owl with Deer Mouse	
	Grizzly and Cubs watching for Salmon	
Malcolm Blackburn ARPS	Common Blue Damselflies 2	
	Common Blue Damselflies 1	Selector's Choice
	Two Young Giraffes	Highly Commended
Maggie Bullock ARPS T	Two Turnstones	
	Brown Hare	
Graeme Clarke ARPS	Parasol Mushroom	
Sandie Cox ARPS	Red-capped Lark mobbing Kori Bustard	Highly Commended
Liz Cutting ARPS	Mayfly	
Trevor Davenport ARPS	Glanville Fritillaries on Dandelion Seedhead	Bronze Medal
	Colour disparity in Male Early Thorn Moths	
	Heath Fritillary with dew	
	Male and Female Banded Demoiselles	
Gary Dean LRPS	Otter enjoying a Flounder	
	Puffin with nesting material	
Chris Ellison ARPS	Tree Frog	
	Single Shaggy Ink Cap	
Kevin Elsby FRPS	Golden Plover, Iceland	
	Waxwing, Norfolk	
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Long-tailed Tit and frozen berries	Highly Commended
	Mating Pale Clouded Yellow	Highly Commended
	Nuthatch perched on Fly Agaric	
	Lesser Redpoll pair in winter	
	Pink Green-Winged Orchids and Cowslip	Highly Commended
Roger Hance FRPS	Starlings in flight - fighting	
	Bittern in flight	
	Pasque Flower	Highly Commended
	Burnt Tip Orchid	
	<i>Hericium coralloides</i>	Highly Commended
	Fly Orchid	Selector's Choice
Mike Harris ARPS	Roesel's Bush Cricket	
	Mayfly	
Stewart Haynes ARPS	Small Elephant Hawkmoth	
Ann Ruth Helen Healey FRPS	Female Wolf Spider with Spiderlings	Highly Commended
	Mating Flesh Flies	
Christine Holt LRPS	Nectaring Tachinid Fly on Mint	
Koshy Johnson FRPS	Flight of the Bittern	Highly Commended
Yealand Kalfayan ARPS	Southern Festoon pair on Bramble	
	Milky Orchid	
Richard Kay FRPS	Blue Morph Arctic Fox in a storm	
	American Red Fox & cub	
Sarah Kelman ARPS	Nutcracker tussle	
	Red Deer in woodland	
Bryan Knox ARPS	Jays squabbling	
	Pine Marten on fallen tree	Highly Commended
	Monkey Orchid - flower head	

Author	Title	Award
Eddy Lane ARPS	Polar Bears, low tide	
Pamela Lane ARPS	Grey Heron with Bank Vole	
	Black Browed Albatross courting	Selector's Choice
	Cheetah in red Dawn light	
	Treading softly in Svalbard	
Adrian Langdon ARPS	European Beaver	
	Garganey	
	Greenshank	
	Fly Agaric	
Darron Matthews FRPS	Male Large Emerald Moth on Corncockle Head	Highly Commended
	Buff-tip Moth on Ribwort Plantain	
	Gate Keeper with dew	
Malcolm McCamley ARPS	Heath Fritillaries	
	Crested Terns	
	Reverdin's Blues	
Dave McKay ARPS	White-crested Helmet Shrike with Cricket	
	Griffon Vulture	
	Warthog at waterhole	
Ann Miles FRPS	Marbled White pair	
	Starling murmuration over Brighton	
	Fly Orchid	
Ian Mitchell ARPS	Otter pulling Octopus Tentacle	
	Male Kestrel presenting prey	Gold Medal
	Winter Mountain Hare	Selector's Choice
	Growling Pine Marten	Highly Commended
David Morement	Stronger Starling winning the battle	
	Starling argument	
	Brown Hare running fast	
John Nash	Cinnamon Bug preparing to fly	
	Pixie Cup Lichen	
Ken Rasmussen ARPS	Reddish Egret (White Morph) hunting	
Mike Rowe FRPS	Root Maggot Fly	
	Incoming Razorbill	
	<i>Helina impuncta</i> on Bracken	
	Saffrondrop Bonnet with Fly	Bronze Medal
	<i>Mycena</i> sp	Selector's Choice
	Common Ink Cap	
John Scholey	Bee Orchid	
Richard Sheldrake LRPS	Spoonbill, sunset shake	
Lesley Simpson ARPS	Avocet with chick and eggshell	
	Redshank feeding	
	Military Orchid	
	<i>Ophrys sphegodes araneola</i>	Highly Commended
Peter Smith	Dipper with food	
	Ringlet on Hoary Plantain	
	Rainbow Eucalyptus with climber	
Sonja Thompson FRPS	Young Pine Marten standing on stone wall	
	Fruiting Bodies of Powderpuff Bracket Fungi	Highly Commended





### Highly Commended Projected Images

1 Darron Matthews FRPS Male Puss Moth

2 Mick Durham FRPS Large Red & Azure Damselflies

3 Ann Mead Marmalade Hoverfly

4 Trevor Davenport ARPS Robber Flies paired

5 Mike Rowe FRPS Long-legged Fly





1



2



3



4



## Annual Exhibition 2023

### Highly Commended Projected Images

- |   |                       |                     |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Adrian Langdon ARPS   | Avocet              |
| 2 | Koshy Johnson FRPS    | Bittern             |
| 3 | Robin Claydon ARPS    | Sparrowhawk at nest |
| 4 | Gordon Follows ARPS   | Corn Crake calling  |
| 5 | Margaret Hocking ARPS | Ptarmigan           |



5



# Nature Group Annual Exhibition 2023

## Award Winning Projected Images

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Author	Title	Award
David Keep FRPS	Harlequin Shrimps, Indonesia	Gold Medal
Darron Matthews FRPS	Large Red and Azure Blue Male Damselflies	Bronze Medal
Karin Wilson ARPS	<i>Mycena inclinata</i> on moss	Bronze Medal
Bob Breach	Velvet Shank Fungus	Selector's Choice
Sandie Cox ARPS	Chinese Winter Hazel	Selector's Choice
Liz Cutting ARPS	Water Vole	Selector's Choice
Collette Patto LRPS	Malachite Kingfisher	Selector's Choice
Keith Polwin ARPS	Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle	Selector's Choice
John Simpson ARPS	<i>Ophrys sintenisii</i>	Selector's Choice
Bob Breach	Tripe Fungus	Highly Commended
Janice Clark ARPS	Young Fox in a meadow	Highly Commended
Robin Claydon ARPS	Sparrowhawk at nest	Highly Commended
Robin Claydon ARPS	Brown Bear cubs playing	Highly Commended
Trevor Davenport ARPS	Robber Flies paired	Highly Commended
Mick Durham FRPS	Large Red and Azure Damselflies	Highly Commended
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Heath-Spotted Orchid in habitat	Highly Commended
Gordon Follows ARPS	Corn Crake calling	Highly Commended
Margaret Hocking ARPS	Ptarmigan	Highly Commended
Koshy Johnson FRPS	Bittern	Highly Commended
Adrian Langdon ARPS	Avocet	Highly Commended
Darron Matthews FRPS	Male Puss Moth	Highly Commended
Ann Mead	Marmalade Hoverfly on Thrift	Highly Commended
Mike Rowe FRPS	Long-legged Fly	Highly Commended
Mike Rowe FRPS	Coral Fungus	Highly Commended
Mike Rowe FRPS	Saffrondrop Bonnet	Highly Commended
John Simpson ARPS	<i>Ophrys lapethica</i>	Highly Commended
John Simpson ARPS	<i>Ophrys kotschy</i>	Highly Commended
Karin Wilson ARPS	Honey Fungus in New Forest undergrowth	Highly Commended

Author	Title	Award
Wendy Ball	Hare's Foot Ink Cap	
David Barrett LRPS	Pied Wagtail	
Paddy Beck ARPS	King Vulture	
David Belton ARPS	Red Mason Bees	
	Red Grouse	
	Fallow Deer Stag	
Jason Boswell	Short-eared Owl hunting	
	White Helleborine	
	Common Spotted Orchid	
Nick Bowman ARPS	Northern Gannet sky dance	
	Barn Owl at sunset	
	Barn Owl with Vole	
Bob Breach	Bee-Fly	
	Sheathed Woodtuft	
	Tripe Fungus	Highly Commended
	Velvet Shank Fungus	Selector's Choice
Colin Brett	Common Blue Damselfly	
	Curlew & Black-tailed Godwit	
Richard Broomfield LRPS	Clustered Bonnets ( <i>Mycena inclinata</i> )	
	Wrinkled Peach ( <i>Rhodotus palmatus</i> )	
Maggie Bullock ARPS	Male Wheatear with insects	
John Bulpitt FRPS	Juvenile Martial Eagle	
Geoff Carr LRPS	Dippers	
Jesse Rene Cason	Common Blue	
Janice Clark ARPS	Young Fox in a meadow	Highly Commended
Robin Claydon ARPS	Sparrowhawk at nest	Highly Commended
	Reed Warbler feeding Cuckoo	
	Brown Bear Cubs playing	Highly Commended
Trevor Clifford ARPS	Short-eared Owl	
	Male Reed Bunting	
Timothy Cossins ARPS	Curlew landing	
Sandie Cox ARPS	Atlantic Grey Seal interaction	
	Chinese Winter Hazel	Selector's Choice
	Thistle seedhead	
Sue Critchlow ARPS	Pelican with reflection on Lake Kerkini	
Christopher Cross	Feeding Oystercatcher	
Liz Cutting ARPS	Common Lizard	
	Water Vole	Selector's Choice
Trevor Davenport ARPS	Spotted Fritillary with dew	
	Robber Flies paired	Highly Commended
	Pine Cone Bonnet	
	Orange Peel Fungus	
Kevin Day ARPS	Flying Kingfisher	
Mick Durham FRPS	Pine Marten portrait	
	Large Red and Azure Damselflies	Highly Commended
Jocelyn Edwards LRPS	Fur Seal pups	
Chris Ellison ARPS	Chicken of the Woods	
Kevin Elsby FRPS	Red Crossbill on Conifer, Canada	
	Military Orchid, Suffolk	



Author	Title	Award
Simon Elsy LRPS	Red-billed Oxpecker and Cape Buffalo	
	Dawn rut	
Ron Evans ARPS	Dusky Langur Monkey	
Wendy Margaret Burton Eve ARPS	Hairy Frogfish	
Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS	Somali Bee Eater with prey	
	Blister Beetles ( <i>Mylabris polymorpha</i> )	
	Heath-Spotted Orchid in habitat	Highly Commended
	Fly Agaric group	
	Sulphur Tuft and spider	
James Foad LRPS	Dunlin <i>Calidris Alpina</i> with mollusc	
Gordon Follows ARPS	Corn Crake calling	Highly Commended
Rosemary Gillies ARPS	Sharknose Goby on Coral	
	Coconut Octopus and shells	
Roger Hance FRPS	Water Vole	
	Fieldfare in flight	
	Corncockle with Cuckoo Spit	
Mike Harris ARPS	Grass Snake	
	Lacewing	
	Long-jawed Orb Spider	
	Shaggy Scaly Cap Fungus	
John Harvey ARPS	Northern Gannets fighting	
	Pair of Silver Studded Blue mating	
Ann Ruth Helen Healey FRPS	Cuckoo in flight	
	Mating Adonis Blues	
Margaret Hocking ARPS	Black-backed Jackal cubs	
	Ptarmigan	Highly Commended
	Yellow Stagshorn Fungus	
Christine Holt LRPS	Squacco Heron	
	African Darter	
Ajit Huilgol ARPS	Tigress carrying deer carcass	
	Tiger Cub leaping over water	
	Two Tigers at lake shore	
John Hunting	Male Bearded Tit perched on frosty reeds	
Jan Jerome ARPS	Curlew	
	Dipper	
Koshy Johnson FRPS	Bittern	Highly Commended
	Purple Sandpiper	
Yealand Kalfayan ARPS	Dark Green Fritillary thermo-regulating at dawn	
	Spanish Festoon Larva on Aristolochia	
	Alpine Broad-leaved Marsh Orchid	
	Cretan Bee Orchid	
Richard Kay FRPS	Female Arctic Fox returns to her den	
David Keep FRPS	Percula Anemonefish defending nest site	
	Harlequin Shrimps, Indonesia	Gold Medal
	Gannet Hunting in Sardine Shoal No. 3	
Sarah Kelman ARPS	Red Foxes courting	
	Black Grouse Lek, Scotland	
	Griffon Vulture harassed by Hooded Crow	

Author	Title	Award
Bryan Knox ARPS	Irish Lady's -Tresses - flower head	
Adrian Langdon ARPS	Common Redstart	
	Avocet	Highly Commended
Greg Lovett ARPS	A foggy early morning flight for the Bittern	
Tracey Lund ARPS	Giraffe by night	
	Arctic Reindeer	
Jack Malins ARPS	Copper Demoiselle	
	Autumn Ladies Tresses	
	Amanita Species	
Andy Marshall	Double-shield Mantis	
Darron Matthews FRPS	Large Red and Azure Blue Male Damselflies	Bronze Medal
	Male Puss Moth	Highly Commended
Malcolm McCamley ARPS	Twin-spot Fritillary	
	Grizzled Skippers	
Peter McCloskey FRPS	Kori Bustard, Etosha	
Dave McKay ARPS	Bald Eagle, Alaska	
Ann Mead	Marmalade Hoverfly on Thrift	Highly Commended
	Pill Woodlice frolicking	
	Wasp dismembering insect	
Mallory Mercer LRPS	Badger cub	
	Common Blue Damselfly	
Gordon Mills ARPS	Great Egret and Frog	
	Southeastern Lubber Grasshopper	
James Moir ARPS	Goosander and chicks	
Chris Moncrieff LRPS	Grey Heron nest building	
	Catch of the day	
David Morement	Young Kestrel taking off from perch	
John Moxham LRPS	Jay in flight	
Jonathan Graeme Mullin ARPS	Dartford Warbler on Horsell Common	
	Great Crested Grebe fishing on Goldsworth Park Lake	
John Nash ARPS	Poplar Hawkmoth	
Dawn Osborn FRPS	Gentoo rockets ashore	
	Long-tailed Tit on a frosty morning	
Collette Patto LRPS	Royal Tern	
	Bearded Tit on Reed Grass	
	Malachite Kingfisher	Selector's Choice
	Porcelain Fungi	
	Magpie Inkcap Fungi	
	Inkcap Fungi	
Keith Polwin ARPS	Dartford Warbler	
	Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle	Selector's Choice
	Male Orange-tip Butterfly	
	Red Deer Stag bellowing	
	Candlesnuff Fungus	
	Angel's Bonnet Fungus group	
Ken Rasmussen ARPS	African Jacana	
Jane Rees ARPS	Henbane	
	Round-leaved Sundew	



Author	Title	Award
Richard Revels FRPS	6-Spot Burnet Moth just hatched	
Mike Rowe FRPS	Bar-tailed Godwit	
	Great Crested Grebe with chick	
	Long-legged Fly	Highly Commended
	Burgundydrop Bonnet	
	Coral Fungus	Highly Commended
	Saffrondrop Bonnet	Highly Commended
Stanley A Saunders ARPS	Hazel Catkins dispersing Pollen	
John Scholey	Blue Tits	
	Common Blue in Cop	
Phil Shaw FRPS	Great Bustard display	
Paul Sievers ARPS	Fly Agaric Fungi	
	Shaggy Parasol Fungus	
	Lilac Bonnet Fungi	
John Simpson ARPS	<i>Ophrys lapethica</i>	Highly Commended
	<i>Ophrys sintonisii</i>	Selector's Choice
	<i>Boletus edulis</i> group in Birch wood	
	<i>Ophrys kotschyi</i>	Highly Commended
Lesley Simpson ARPS	<i>Lycogala epidendron</i>	
	Tawny Grisette	
	Sulphur Tuft Fungi and Lichens	
Derek Trendell ARPS	Giant Kingfisher	
Gordon Uprichard	Albatross courtship	
	Golden Orb Spider with prey	
Martin Vaughan FRPS	Fox and cubs	
Karin Wilson ARPS	Dolphin Gull with Lobster Krill	
	Fur Seal birth	
	Emerging Clustered Bonnets	
	<i>Mycena inclinata</i> on moss	Bronze Medal
	Honey Fungus in New Forest undergrowth	Highly Commended
Lin Wyles LRPS	Buffalos in the dust	
Peter Wyles LRPS	Water Buck	
Peter Yendell LRPS	Sedge Warbler singing on reed	

**Congratulations to all Nature Group members who had images accepted in this years exhibition.**

**Thank you for your support.**



# RPS Nature Group –

## Minutes of the 47th AGM, 1st April 2023

The 47th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group was held on Saturday 1st April 2023 at Smethwick Photographic Society starting at 1317hrs. and was attended by 40 Members.

The AGM Agenda, Minutes of the 46th AGM 2022, Officers' Reports and Programme Coordinator's Report were made available in advance of the AGM and remain available on the RPS website under: <https://rps.org/groups/nature/agm-reports/>

### **Welcome and Apologies for Absence:**

David O'Neill LRPS, Chair of the RPS Nature Group welcomed Group Members to the Meeting. David thanked his fellow Committee Members for all the planning that had gone into making this event possible.

Apologies for Absence had been received from: Malcolm Blackburn, Moira Ellis, Thomas Hanahoe, Christine Holt, Margaret Johnson, Patricia Kreyer, Dawn Osborn, Colin Smith, Dan Jones (CEO, RPS), Michael Pritchard (Programmes Director, RPS) and Laura Gardner (Volunteer and Member Support Co-ordinator, RPS).

Minutes of the 46th AGM 2022 (printed in Issue 143 of The Iris, Summer 2022) are available on the RPS Nature Group Website.

There were no corrections to the Minutes and it was proposed by Greg Lovett and seconded by Ralph Snook that the Minutes be approved. They were adopted by the Members.

**Matters Arising:** None.

### **Chair's Report – David O'Neill LRPS:**

**The RPS Website:** There have been further signs of improvement with the RPS website for both administration and events. It is now less disruptive to Group activities. However, we still have compromises in place for events and there are some aspects of administration that are still causing issues.

### **Photographic Competition:**

We plan to launch our inaugural photographic competition shortly and a more detailed broadcast will be sent out to Members by Julia Wainwright. We will be using PhotoComp software. The main advantage of this is that it has the same look and feel as PhotEx, which means that Members who have entered exhibitions before should already be familiar with the way it works.

### **Events:**

Unfortunately, Nick Bowman needed to step down from the Committee recently and I would like to thank him for the valuable support he has given Ann in planning and running events.

Ann Miles is continuing her work to extend our range of events to as many counties as possible and we are hoping to encourage more Members across the UK to offer to host events in their local areas. If you are a regular visitor to a local nature spot, then please consider organising an event and sharing your knowledge with other Members. If you are interested in doing this, please contact Ann Miles or another Committee Member.

Advisory days have also become a regular feature of our calendar and have proven to be both popular and successful.

We are also looking for Zoom speakers so that we can continue to offer a variety of talks that are available to Members and I would like to encourage anyone who has experience of giving talks on nature to consider presenting a talk for the Group.

### **Young Persons Membership:**

There is now a section on the RPS website for Young Photographers. It can be used to monitor the progress of the RPS' offering. This is planned to include a specific magazine for young people, workshops throughout the year and online digital content for



them to access such as activities and competitions. <https://rps.org/youngphotographers> This includes 'Coming Soon – RPS Young Photographers', which is a survey aimed at Young Photographers between the ages of 12 – 16.

The RPS says: *'The Royal Photographic Society strive to make photography exciting and accessible to everyone. Our education team are looking at ways that they can give young people interested in photography the resources and opportunities that are important to them. We really value the opinions of young people that want to engage with us and our programme, and want to hear what it is that you want from the Royal Photographic Society, and the things that will help you on your journey as a young photographer.'*

The Sharp Shots Photo Club section covers workshops and courses, which includes Duke of Edinburgh awards. There are many other articles on this page including a section on Activities and Resources.

#### **Other Committee Business:**

This is my last report as Chair, so I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone on the Committee for the support that they give to the Nature Group.

**Duncan Locke** as Secretary and Membership Secretary has a strategically important role with organising Committee events and supporting New Members, but is now taking over from me as Chair.

**Christine Holt** will take on the Membership Secretary role, but at the time of writing we still need a new Secretary.

**Peter Ward** as Treasurer looks after our Finances, which is a vital and often overlooked role.

**Ralph Snook** looks after the Website and continues to manage the Exhibition every year - a major event in our calendar celebrating the photographic achievements of Members.

**Dawn Osborn** has managed the transition of *The Iris* into an A4 magazine, which has received a lot of highly positive feedback from Members as the flagship of the Group.

**James Foad** continues to manage Residential Meetings, which despite the setbacks of Covid have all been popular and well attended.

**Ann Miles** who in addition to her work on Events looks after Advisory Days too.

**Julia Wainwright** manages a thriving Facebook community of 285 Nature Group Members in addition to the new Photography Competition.

The Chair's Report was accepted by the Members.

#### **Treasurer's Report – Peter Ward:**

This is included at the end of these Minutes. In response to questions raised by the Members present, Peter explained:

- Problems caused by the RPS membership software updates, inadequate accounting information and delays in the RPS passing on Members subscriptions have made the allocation of costs difficult in the year 2022.
- Considering the outstanding subscriptions due from the RPS, which Peter has been told should be resolved over the next 6 months, the Group's income and expenditure are considered stable and in line with previous years.

The Treasurer's Report was accepted by the Members.

#### **Secretary's Report – Duncan Locke ARPS:**

Committee: since last year's AGM on the 9th April 2022, we have had five well attended Zoom Committee Meetings plus a number of shorter ones to discuss particular issues. Committee Meetings will continue to be held on Zoom at about 6 to 8 weeks intervals unless there is an opportunity for the Committee to meet face-to-face without incurring additional travel costs.

There has been one change to the Committee during the year. Nick Bowman stood down from the role of Assistant Programme Coordinator at the end of 2022 for personal reasons and I would like to thank him for the tremendous amount of work that he put into helping Ann Miles with Field Meetings.

The Committee is elected for two years and the present Committee will stand down at the AGM on the 1st April 2023. At full strength the Committee should have twelve Members and going forward into the 2023 – 2025 period we will have only eight. We are always keen to hear from Group Members who are interested in joining the Committee and helping to run the Nature Group. We are also aware that we have some specialist roles on the Committee and long term will have the difficult task of filling these.

**Nature Group Membership:** I act as Membership Secretary in that I monitor the number of Members in the Group and send a welcome e-mail and a copy of the latest issue of The Iris to each New Member.

The membership of the Group as of the 1st March 2023 was 899 as compared to 960 Members on the 1st March 2022, so there has been a 6.5% decrease in membership during the year. Some of this decline may be due to the ongoing issues with the RPS Membership System, particularly in the summer of 2022.

Over the period 1st March 2022 to 1st March 2023, 125 New Members joined the Group and, based on overall membership numbers, 186 left so there continues to be a high turnover of Members.

As of the 1st March 2023, the Group had 841 Members in the UK, Eire, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands plus 58 overseas Members. The biggest overseas Group is in the USA, with 14 Members. Although the Group membership is down from last year, I am encouraged by the fact that we had 28 new Members join the Group in January and February 2023, which is comparable with past years.

Issues with the RPS Membership System: As many of you may know, the RPS installed a new Customer Relationship Management system in the middle of 2022 and this has caused significant issues with the Membership and Event Booking systems. One area in particular that has been an issue for me is the preparation of the address list for The Iris. A number of Members' addresses have become corrupted on the database, so please let me know if you do not receive your copy of The Iris and do login to the RPS Website and check that your details are correct.

Due to the issues with the Membership System I have delayed handing over the role of Membership Secretary to Chris Holt. This I will be doing in the near future.

What Do Nature Group Members Want? As I said at last year's AGM, I believe that the aim of the Group is to inspire and educate its Members into taking better images of the natural world and so we must organise events for Members to get together and develop their

nature photography. We now have an ever growing programme of Field Meetings, Residential Weekends and Workshops. It would be very helpful if you could let Ann Miles or any other Committee Member know what events you would like the Group to organise.

The Secretary's Report was accepted by the Members.

**Programme Coordinator's Report – Ann Miles FRPS:**

The Nature Group has organised many events since the last AGM with a series of Zoom Lectures, Distinction Events and a wide variety of Field Trips. All events are listed on the Nature Group home page when ready for booking and News Items and Galleries are created after the events (see appended, some of the images from our Galleries).

The talks by Bruce Kendrick, Ann Miles, Ian Wilson, Kevin Pigney, Kevin Elsby, Danny Green and Mick Durham were excellent and many thanks to those who have helped provide this service to Members. If you missed any of these, recordings can be found on the Nature Group home page under Event Recordings.

We ran a 'live' Advisory Day at Smethwick in the autumn so that those long-neglected prints could be shared and an online Advisory Day in January. The event at Smethwick was expensive to run so we will need to be sure that it will be well subscribed (Advice places as well as Observers) before undertaking another.

We have run a great number of Field Trips since the last AGM and have many more planned (lists for 2022-2023 appended). Thanks to Duncan Locke, Peter Ward, Nick Bowman, Bruce Kendrick, Ken Rasmussen, Chris Holt, Margaret Beardsmore and David O'Neill who are helping to run events. Hopefully those attending have had fun, got the occasional satisfying image and made new friends.

We are still looking for Volunteers to help organise events so that we can spread the locations out over more of the country. I have e-mails from South Western, Northern and Scottish Members wishing the events were not so far away, so it would be great if more Members were willing to share their favourite locations. You do not have to be an expert in any field, just have an enthusiasm for a locality and its wildlife.



We would also love to hear your suggestions for events – do you want more Zoom Events and on what topics; or more Practical Workshops and topics; ideas for Field Trips.

The Programme Coordinator's Report was accepted by the Members.

#### **Committee for 2023 – 2025:**

The Committee is elected to serve for a two year term and were now due to retire having been elected at the 45th RPS Nature Group AGM in 2021.

All of the Committee, save the retiring Chair, David O'Neill, had indicated their willingness to re-stand and were re-elected accordingly, with Duncan Locke ARPS becoming the new Chair.

Greg Lovett was nominated as Honorary Secretary, the nomination being proposed by David O'Neil and seconded by Dawn Osborn. The Members present voted unanimously in favour of his election.

Accordingly the new Committee was:

<b>Chair:</b>	Duncan Locke ARPS
<b>Honorary Secretary:</b>	Greg Lovett ARPS
<b>Honorary Treasurer:</b>	Peter Ward
<b>Vice Chair:</b>	Vacant
<b>Editor of The Iris:</b>	Dawn Osborn FRPS
<b>Exhibition Secretary &amp; Webmaster:</b>	Ralph Snook ARPS
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Christine Holt LRPS
<b>Programme Coordinator:</b>	Ann Miles FRPS
<b>Residential Weekend Advisor:</b>	James Foad LRPS
<b>Facebook/Competition Admin:</b>	Julia Wainwright FRPS
<b>Immediate Past Chair:</b>	David O'Neill LRPS

Duncan Locke thanked his fellow Committee Members, for all their hard work during the year just gone and in the year to come.

Duncan then thanked David O'Neil for all his efforts on behalf of the Nature Group Members over the ten years during which he had served on the Committee in a variety of roles, of which the last two have been in his role as Chair. Duncan then presented David with the RPS Silver Medal in recognition of that very significant contribution.

#### **Any Other Business:**

- A number of Members raised the issue of the continuing problems being experienced with the RPS website portal.
- The RPS Journal was raised and after discussion it was clear that in the view of those present, the RPS Journal was largely irrelevant to their own photographic interests.
- The delays in the RPS paying the monies due to the Group reported by Peter Ward should not be allowed to continue.

After discussion the following resolution was proposed by Brian Ferry and seconded by Bruce Kendrick

"The Nature Group expresses strong dissatisfaction with the performance of the RPS in the following areas:

1. It is considered that the Journal lacks balance and should better reflect all Members' interests;
2. Problems with the new website continue to have a real detrimental impact on Members in the areas of (i) booking events and (ii) the process of membership renewal;
3. Inadequate financial control by the RPS is leading to delays in the receipt of funds by the Nature Group.

All of which cause a risk of loss of faith amongst the membership of the RPS.

The Chair is accordingly requested to seek a meeting with the CEO of the RPS to discuss these problems and to seek his assurance of improvements within a specific measurable timeframe."

The resolution was passed by 40 votes in favour and none against, with no abstentions.

#### **Date and Venue of the**

#### **48th RPS Nature Group AGM 2024:**

The 48th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group will be held on Saturday 20th April 2024 (date to be confirmed) at: Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, B69 2AS.

The AGM closed at 1440hrs.

Greg Lovett ARPS  
Honorary Secretary RPS Nature Group

# Treasurer's Report for AGM 2023

## Report for the Year Ended 31st December 2022

### Cash Book Summary:

Current Account Balance:	31st Dec 2021	£28,369.81
Income for 12 Months to 31st Dec:		£14,306.03
Expenditure for 12 Months to 31st Dec:		(£20,768.86)
Closing Balance:	31st Dec 2022	£ 21,906.98

**Bank Account Balance: 31st Dec 2022 £ 21906.98**

### Income and Expenditure Summary:

	Income:	Expenditure:
Members Subscriptions:	£8,283.18	
Field trips	£50.00	£50.00
Publications	£36.00	
Admin:		£409.55
Exhibition:		£570.65
Events in Year		£50.00
Printing & Distribution (Iris):		£13297.56
Distinction Days:	£195.00	£518.18
Residential Kingcombe	£4900.00	£4881.75
Residential Margam	£548.85	
Talks and donations		£160.00
Other Income	£293.00	£100.00
Committee		£731.17
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£ 14306.03</b>	<b>£20768.86</b>

### Summary

1. Income down by 32% because of RPS updating in membership software and membership subs have not been credited into our account. The last payment was made in June so we are missing 6 months of membership subs. Payments have now been received for July, August and Sept 2022 this month (Feb23) so will be included in 2023 accounts. So, this will balance out in the 2023 accounts as we should have an extra 6 months of membership subs.
2. The next biggest income was from the residential trip to Kingcombe, but this was balanced by an expenditure for the same trip.
3. Expenditure up by 8% mainly driven by the extra cost of the A4 print of The Iris. Printing costs of The Iris increased by £3818.10 over the year but the feedback from the membership is very positive.

### Summary:

2022 was a very difficult year to allocate the costs because of the membership software update. I received bank statements with just payment codes and no description of source. Taking into account the missing subs our income and expenditure are stable and inline with previous years.

Peter Ward, 20th March 2023





### Highly Commended Projected Images

- 1 *Ophrys kotschyi*  
by John Simpson ARPS
- 2 Young Fox in a meadow  
by Janice Clark ARPS
- 3 Brown Bear Cubs playing  
by Robin Claydon ARPS
- 4 Heath Spotted Orchid in habitat  
by Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS
- 5 *Ophrys lapethica*  
by John Simpson ARPS







1



RPS Nature Group  
Annual Exhibition 2023



2



3



4

**Highly Commended  
Projected Images**

- 1 **Tripe Fungus**  
by Bob Breach
- 2 **Honey Fungus in New Forest  
undergrowth**  
by Karin Wilson ARPS
- 3 **Coral Fungus**  
by Mike Rowe FRPS
- 4 **Saffrondrop Bonnet**  
by Mike Rowe FRPS