



Fieldfare.

© Dawn Osborn FRPS

As I type this, less than two weeks since I took the shot above, the weather has changed dramatically from -12°C to +15°C. The days are now visibly longer, Celandine and Daffodils are blooming in my garden; Song Thrush, Wren, Chaffinch & Greenfinch are singing and a pair of Blue Tits are making regular viewings of nest boxes in my garden - all signs that Spring is on its way. Nevertheless, I did enjoy the recent spell of very cold weather, snow and sunshine, and spent many hours outside with my camera. It felt good to use it again. No doubt like me, you are all looking forward to having the freedom to venture further from home.

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Committee Members.

Welcome to Issue 13 of Nature Group eNews.

First, I would like begin this issue by thanking all those members who have supported eNews with articles, images, reviews & news. Your contributions have been gratefully received. However, I would still like to see more of our Members sharing their experiences and images with their fellow members. eNews cannot continue to grow without the support of Nature Group members.

Whatever your contribution it will be welcome. Don't be concerned that someone may already have written about something similar. Yours will be different, the images will not be the same and neither will your experiences.

In this issue of eNews Richard Revels FRPS shares his knowledge and experience in the benefits of using fill in flash. Richard is a past Chairman of the Nature Group and was a member of the RPS Nature Distinctions Panel for many years.

Mick Durham FRPS, current Chair of the Nature Distinctions Panel shares his experiences of photographing the wildlife that has been visiting his own back garden during lockdown.

Also in this issue, another Committee Profile. This time it's the turn of Gerald Griffin ARPS, Editor of The Iris. There are also details of new on-line talks to book.

As always, I look forward to your offers of content for eNews. Whether you are a newcomer or an old timer, your accounts of past trips, lockdown projects, observations and pictures of wildlife visiting your garden or nature photographs you have taken near to home, all will be welcome.

Until next time, I hope you will all stay safe, exercise caution but still be able to find some spring photo opportunities near to home.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Dawn'.

Dawn Osborn FRPS, eNews Editor

Using Flash for close-up Nature Photography

by Richard Revels FRPS

I am often surprised how reluctant some nature photographers are to use flash when taking close-up images of plants, insects and other small creatures in the wild. For me flash is a 'tool of the trade', to be used as and when I think it will improve the picture I am about to take. Although I have seen some pictures where too powerful flash has been used producing harsh lighting with burned out highlights and dark backgrounds that spoil the pictures, when used at reduced power, and in a balanced combination with the ambient light, the images taken using flash can enhance a picture and produce pleasing and very natural looking results.

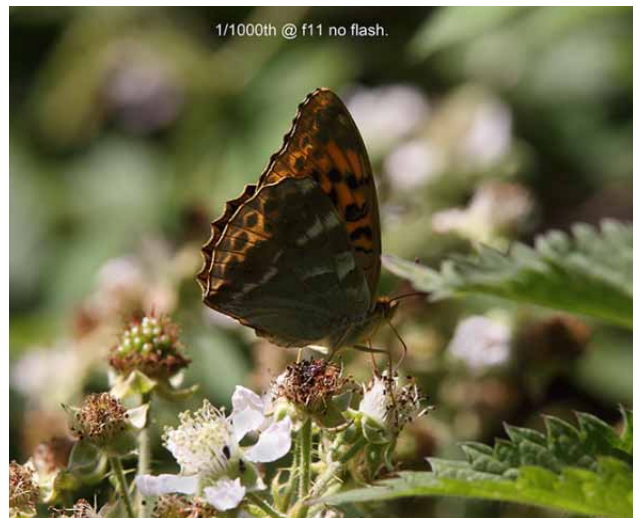
At close range fitting a diffuser over the flash head will soften and spread flash lighting, usually giving a natural looking light to a picture. It will brighten up the shadow areas, and is my preferred technique for adding extra light to a close-up picture. For me it works well for both plants and insects etc. It's a matter of trial and error to find what suits certain subjects best.

When you first start using flash, have unfamiliar or new camera equipment, or are trying out new/different techniques, it is always advisable to take some test shots first to check that it is all working as expected. This will give you a good indication of what the results will be like before you tackle an important picture. I say that because occasionally using flash can startle insects or other creatures - they may flee after just one shot, never to be seen again!

Sunlight in woodlands can produce rather high contrast lighting and I usually walk around woods with a small flash unit mounted on the camera hot-shoe ready for use as and when I want to use it. My usual settings will be at a reduced camera exposure of about 2/3rds to 1 stop and I normally also reduced the flash output by about 1/3rd of a stop. This is a good starting point for those new to using flash in the countryside. I find these settings bring out details in shaded areas of the insects wings, and are necessary if the subject has strong back or side lighting. However these settings can easily be changed if the picture is not to your liking.

Better modelling will be achieved if the flash unit is mounted on a flash bracket that holds the flash unit to one side, however using flash off camera will require a cable or a flash trigger fitted to the camera hot-shoe to activate the flash unit.

For plants, flash can be used as above for good record pictures, but for more creative lighting flash can be used to give back or side lighting. However, please take care not to trample other non-flowering plants when walking around your target flower. Photographers are often accused by botanists and the wardens of nature reserves, of trampling on and destroying other plants when trying to improve their picture by 'gardening' around a plant to remove distracting highlights in the background.

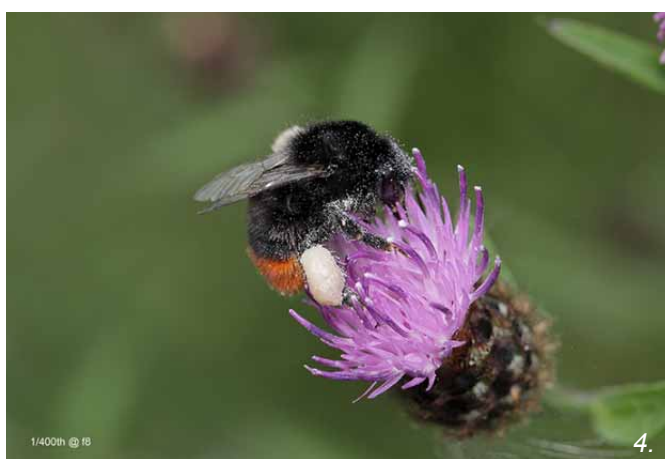


These two pictures illustrate the technique of adding flash when taking pictures that are back lit. This Silver-washed Fritillary butterfly feeding on a bramble flower in a local wood had back lighting. The picture above was taken with just natural lighting. I took the second picture, below, using my small flash unit. This shows what a big difference using a small amount of flash can make, bringing up details in the shaded areas of the butterfly's wings.



For dramatic back lighting flash can work well with some plants, I usually prefer to use natural back lighting, as you can see the lighting effects before taking the picture. A reflector can be used instead of flash to reduce contrast with plants, but is likely to frighten away insects if you move in close with a reflector, a small amount of flash can do the same job.

When used with care, a small amount of flash will often brighten up a picture and can also correct colour casts, so for me a small flash unit is an essential part of the kit I carry, ready to be used as and when I want.



As with many things in life, the more you use your equipment the better you will become at anticipating the results and rewards of enhancing your picture.

In pre-digital days when photographers were using film, the results would not be seen until after the film was processed. This could take hours, or days if it was sent in the post to a Lab for processing. However, with digital cameras the results can now be checked within seconds and, if necessary, adjustments can be made.

Setting the high-speed flash sync (HSS) on the flash unit or in the camera menu will be very useful, as you can continue taking flash pictures at higher shutter speeds than the normal flash sync setting of cameras (often 200th or 250th sec). This high-speed flash is achieved by producing a series of strobe (2 or more) flashes during the exposure when using higher shutter speeds. The limits of how many strobe flashes can be produced when taking a picture is limited by the energy stored in the flash unit, with larger and more recent flash guns out-perform the smaller, lighter and older units. The choice is yours, and that may be partly influenced by your age and fitness, as my choice now is different from when I was younger and fitter.

The selection of pictures on this page and the next illustrate my main use of flash 'in the field' in different circumstances and with different subjects. The pictures were all taken in the wild, at various settings. There are no correct or incorrect settings or indeed techniques, it's up to individuals to 'give it a go', to choose/try out what they think is best as each situation presents its-self and decide if they like the results. Enjoy.

1. Handholding this combination of the Canon 5D Mk3 with 100 mm Macro lens and the Canon Speedlite 270 EX 11 on the hot-shoe has been my main equipment for several years. The small white plastic reflector on top of the flash unit is held in place by 'velcro', and this directs light down on a close up subject.
2. Chalk Hill Blue butterflies nectaring on Carline Thistle flowers, and is one of my best selling butterfly pictures. Although perhaps not really necessary, I decided to used flash on this picture, and underexposed ambient light by about 1 stop to allow me to use a faster shutter speed to freeze any movement. Using a little flash has brought the butterflies up to normal brightness. This is a technique I often use.
3. The same technique as above is used to capture this Honey Bee hanging on a Buddleia flower.
4. A Bumble Bee visiting a Knapweed flower would be a good and fairly easy subject to start with to practice your technique on. Camera settings 1/400th @ f8, and under exposing the ambient light by 1 stop.



5. Male Brimstone butterfly in flight. Although I prefer to use two flash guns to freeze butterflies in flight, on this occasion I only had one flash unit with me. I chose an area with a fairly plain background and waited until one of several nearby Brimstones flew close to the flowers. I set the flash to HSS and used a shutter speed of 1/4600th with the lens aperture at f/8. The flash also added an extra light to the subject.

6. This Ant was visiting a Common Twayblade Orchid flower and had pollinia stuck to its head. I used a diffuser to avoid harsh flash lighting.



7. The Death Cap fungus *Amanita phalloides* is one of the most deadly fungi in the world and should not be handled. Like many fungi they usually grow under trees where there is little light, so extra light from a hand held flash gun will add brightness and modelling.

8. Growing under tree cover as these orchids often do, a day with almost no breeze was needed to get an extreme close up shot of this Greater Butterfly Orchid flower. My camera was on a tripod and fitted with a Macro lens, at 1/20th sec, f/13. The small flash unit with diffuser was fired from slightly to one side.



Committee Profile:

Gerald Griffin ARPS - Editor of The Iris

I have been interested in photography for almost as long as I can remember. I shared my first camera at the age of 12 with a cousin and I specialised in landscapes.

I joined the camera clubs at university and developed my interest and skills in portraits and black and white photography.

I have always been interested in wildlife and when my neighbour, a professional photographer, introduced me to the first digital cameras, I quickly recognised the huge difference digital would make to nature photography. I did not really pursue this genre until our children were 'independent' and I started to travel to Africa in 2003. Since then I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world with my

camera taking Natural History pictures. I am also interested in travel photography and a holiday where this can be combined with nature is ideal. At one time I would have recommended Ethiopia but I'm not sure I would now.

I became a member of Smethwick Photographic Society a long time ago and found that the help of other members and the sharp criticism of judges quickly developed my photography skills.

I also joined the RPS some years ago too. Over the past few years I have been volunteering by editing *The Iris*, a task I enjoy. It is good to receive articles from all sorts of people; those who are just beginning nature photography through to those who are well-skilled and qualified.



Lockdown Garden Photography

by Mick Durham FRPS

I consider myself very fortunate to live in rural Dumfriesshire. This has been even more of a bonus this last year. I can walk from my doorstep for miles without ever going on to a road or meeting up with anyone and with woodlands, fields, ponds and streams I have plenty of photographic opportunities close at hand. However I don't even have to go out of my garden – the wildlife comes to me.

Late one afternoon last winter I saw a badger feeding underneath my bird feeders and so I set up a trail cam to see what was happening. To my delight I discovered that the badgers were foraging through my garden on a regular basis so I decided it was time to try and photograph them. I started by putting food out for them (peanuts and maize) in the area where I wanted to photograph them and my trail cam footage revealed that they were more than happy with the arrangement.

It was time to create a set up. Now this takes a little more thought than just throwing a few logs on the ground. The idea is to build something that looks as natural as possible in the photographs and often this means experimenting and being prepared to adjust! The advantage of doing this in my garden is that I have complete control over what I create and of course I could change it around in order to get a variety of shots. One thing was sure - the badgers didn't care what I did as long as there was food involved!



I soon had up to four badgers visiting on a regular basis. They were appearing around about 9pm (this was in March) so it was time to start some photography. I was using a hide and had four flash guns to light the scene. These were all off camera Nikon speedlights attached to a Pocket Wizard trigger system. I also needed to be able to see what I was doing and have some light for focusing. Working in the garden meant that I had access to mains electricity. I painted the outside of an inspection lamp red and had this mounted on a stake in front of the hide so that it gave a low level red glow over the whole scene. A quick night time test showed that this wasn't enough light to make focusing easy so I also set up an LED builders lamp which gave me plenty of light. Both lamps could be switched on and off from inside my hide.

It was time to try it out. I was in the hide by 8pm and well wrapped up against the cold. I switched on the red light and waited. Within half an hour the first badger arrived. I let it settle down to feed and then, with fingers crossed, switched on the brighter light. It immediately looked up, sniffed and went straight back to feeding. I gave it another minute and then took a shot. Once again as the flash went off it paused, checked to see if there was danger and went back to feeding. That first night I limited myself to just a few images and stopped when the badger moved off. It took a few minutes to return the lights to the garden shed and check that the trail cam was working, I then scattered more food about and went indoors to look at my shots.



Next morning I checked the trail cam footage and was delighted to see that the badger activity continued through the night. They were obviously not bothered by my activities at all.

Above left: One of the first set-ups seen from the front.

Opposite: Behind the scenes – the set-up from behind; not so photogenic!

Above right: One of the first badger shots I took.

Over the next few weeks and months when the weather allowed, I spent many hours watching and photographing the badgers. Sometimes they visited singly but I usually got at least two together, occasionally up to four, and on one evening I witnessed a pair mating (though of course this was off to the side well out of the reach of my flash guns!!). As time went by I was having to stay up later and later and was often not in bed until 1am. When I reached the point that I wasn't really getting anything different I brought the project to a close.

So what of the ethics of all this. Should I have been feeding the badgers and is it right to use flash with nocturnal creatures? Having spent many, many hours with the badgers and also from my experiences photographing pine martens in the Highlands I honestly believe that using flash is not a problem. By day three (or should that be 'night three') of the project the badgers took absolutely no notice of any of the lights I used or the flash guns. Noise however was a different matter. The camera shutter was completely ignored but if I moved and my chair creaked, or my clothes rustled, that was a whole different matter. They would rush off, usually only a few yards away, sitting and cautiously working out what had made the noise. Normally they would creep back within a few minutes and settle back to feeding. If I was particularly careless I could disturb them for half an hour or so, but then so would a car driving up the track past our house. Being disturbed was nothing new to them.

Some people feel that feeding them disturbs their natural behaviour. Well these badgers were coming through the garden looking for food before I began to

feed them. When I was feeding them they would always go off looking for other food as well (their snuffle holes appeared regularly around our garden) so I don't think I was really altering their behaviour at all - it was really supplementary feeding just like we do for the birds.



Images this page: More shots from my badger project.





I didn't spend every night in my hide and there were plenty of opportunities during the day too. I was experimenting with focus stacking and whilst not strictly nature I spent quite some time photographing the varieties of aquilegia growing in our garden. Wind is always a factor when photographing flowers so I decided to use an outdoor studio - the greenhouse. My technique wasn't all that sophisticated - I would select a good looking flower head, snip it off and take it inside the greenhouse where I had a clamp set up. With care, I would arrange the flower and make sure it was held securely so that it wouldn't move whilst I was taking my images. I use a Nikon D850 with its in built focus stacking facility and spent quite a few happy hours taking a whole range of images. Robert Thompson has already written extensively (and far more authoritatively than I could) on focus stacking so I am going to leave the technical details alone except to say that after experimenting with Photoshop to stack the images, I tried out Helicon Focus and was converted.

Early one morning I found an Orange Tip butterfly resting on an Aquilegia flower. It was sufficiently dormant for me to pick the flower, carry it into the green-house and take a number of images. Afterwards I stuck the stalk in the ground near to where I found it and as the air temperature warmed up the butterfly moved off.

During the late Spring and Summer I moved out of my garden in search of butterflies and dragonflies, never

Above left: The outdoor greenhouse studio.

Above right: Aquilegia flower.

Below: Orange Tip.



having to go more than about 20 minutes walk to find something to photograph. And then it was Autumn and time to concentrate my efforts on squirrels. I have squirrel feeders around the garden the whole year and I simply moved one of these to an open area and then looked around for suitable set-up material. As with the badgers I made changes as I took more and more images. On one walk I found a wonderfully sculptured tree stump and staggered half a mile home with it. My arms were dropping off by the time I got back but it was well worth it!

Of course there were no lighting issues to contend with here but other 'problems' that needed solving. As the image below shows, my lovely stump needed to be lifted high off the milk crates so that the squirrels tail came down across something photogenic – an extra tree stump did the trick. Bits of the set-up became worn and needed replacing and there was one thing I really wanted to conquer. I am not a fond of squirrel images where they are eating a shop bought, highly polished hazelnut - they just don't look natural. But of course squirrels do love hazelnuts and they do eat wild ones. I spent quite some time looking for and collecting wild hazelnuts to use as bait - most of the time the squirrels rejected them in favour of the shop bought ones! I did manage to get some images of them eating natural looking food, but it wasn't as successful as I had hoped.



Below: Red squirrel eating a wild hazelnut.



The other problem was that if I gave them shop bought hazelnuts or peanuts they would appear, grab one and then run off to bury it elsewhere in the garden and not really stay long enough to get their picture taken. I discovered the answer almost by mistake. I started putting out sunflower hearts for the birds as well and to my delight the squirrels thought this was wonderful. They adore them. Also they are too small to carry off to bury and most of the time they are too small to show up in a photograph. Win – Win!

Occasionally a second squirrel would try and join in but this was never tolerated and always ended up in a chase around the garden. I finally got a very brief opportunity but I wasn't all that happy with the result. I'm still working on this!



I'm writing this in early February and we have had some snow - not a great deal but enough to give me some opportunities to work with the squirrels in a winter environment.

We are still in lockdown and who knows when it will end but I hope, like me, you are able to find something to keep your interest and your camera busy.



Events News

by Ann Miles FRPS

New Zoom Meetings ready for booking

Full details of how to book for these events can be found on the RPS website at: [Nature Group Events](#)

1. 13th March 2021

Living The African Dream by Alison Mees

Join Alison on her journey through Africa with photographs and stories of living and working in Africa. The talk covers Alison's travels in Selous, Serengeti and Mara, with the camps, wildlife and community projects she has worked on and also cheetah conservation with CCF UK.

[Living the African Dream](#)

2. 27th March 2021

Why Focus Stack by Qasim Syed

The first essential is to understand why Focus Stacking is such a powerful tool and when and how to use it. The talk will cover a wide range of topics from equipment and settings to tips, techniques and software.

[Why Focus Stack?](#)

3. 10th April 2021

Dynamic Wildlife Photography by Gordon & Cathy Illg

Taking your wildlife photos beyond mere documentation. This talk will not focus on the necessary gear, but rather on what to do with that gear and about the choices you make in the field that provide the best chance of capturing something extraordinary.

[Dynamic Wildlife Photography](#)

Field Meetings.

We are hoping to resume local field meetings at the end of March when the restrictions should allow up to 6 people to meet outdoors. As always we are looking for people to share their local outings with Members. Advertising for the meeting would be done by myself to ensure the information gets to Members in your area.

Please contact me with offers or suggestions.

Email: annmiles70@gmail.com

Previously Held Zoom Meetings

Many of our talks have been recorded and the videos can be found on the Nature Group Event Recordings page. If you missed any of the talks or wish to review the techniques you can catch up by following the link:

[Nature Group Recorded Lectures](#)

Preparing Files and Printing (2nd January 2021)
by Dr Ian Wilson

Photographing the Unseen World (Dec.2020)

Adrian Davies shows how he photographs the unseen world using high speed and time lapse, polarised light, and ultraviolet and infrared radiation

Chairman's Day - 31st October 2020: (3 events)

1 Polar Bears of Svalbard

by Thomas Hanahoe FRPS (Nature Group Chairman)

2 Rewilding in Britain by Mike Daniels.

Mike is Head of Land Management at the John Muir Trust and a Founding Trustee of Rewilding Britain.

3 State of Nature 2019 by Daniel Hayhow.

Daniel is an Environmental Scientist at Earthwatch Europe.

Monochrome for Nature Photographers (Oct 2020)

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

Techniques and tricks to create good mono images, and perfect the tonality, sharpness and impact of an image. Raw conversion in Lightroom and Photoshop as well as the specialist package Silver Efex (Nik) are demonstrated.

Layers and Masks (Aug 2020)

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

Ian shows how to use of Layers & Masks in Photoshop to improve post processing of your Nature Images

Gaining a Distinction in Natural History (July 2020)

Presented by Mick Durham FRPS .

Mick is the acting Chair of the RPS Nature Distinctions Panel. He explains the criteria needed for each distinction level and shows a series of examples of individual images and panels to illustrate the quality and presentation standards needed to gain that distinction.

Raw Conversion of Nature Images

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

Two versions of this talk are available each one using different images. The talk covers best practice when converting RAW files in Lightroom and Photoshop as well as hints and tips to get the best out of your image without compromising quality.

Dates for your diary

Entries Invited*

National Exhibitions with Nature sections:

Rushden Open Photography Exhibition

Closes 10th April 2021

Digital Projection - 5 Classes

www.rushdenopen.co.uk

Neath & District PS Exhibition

Closes 18th April 2021.

Digital Projection - 4 Classes

www.neathphotographicsociety.org

Robin Hood Open Digital Exhibition

Closes 24th April 2021

Digital Projection - 6 Classes

www.robinhoodexhibition.co.uk

Winchester National Exhibition

Digital Projection - 5 Classes

www.winphotosoc.uk

Beyond Group

Closes July 2021 - Digital Projection - 4 Classes

<http://beyondgroup.org.uk>

*International Photographic Salons
with FIAP patronage and Nature Sections:*

Lisboa 2021

Closes 15.03.2021

Trierenberg Super Circuit

Closing 29.03.2021

Cheltenham International Salon

Closes 05.04.2021.

More information about FIAP (The International Federation of Photographic Art) can be found at:

<https://www.fiap.net/en>

Information for entering individual Salons with FIAP Patronage can be found at:

<https://www.myfiap.net/patronages>

**Members are advised to check Salon websites for rules, closing dates & entry requirements before preparing their entry as image sizes & rules may differ. Covid 19 restrictions may require exhibitions to be selected using software like Zoom.*

Saturday 24th April 2021

The Nature Group Spring Meeting

Steve Race from 'Yorkshire Coast Nature' will be the principal speaker at this year's Spring Meeting. Steve's talk will be:

'A Year in the Life of a Yorkshire Wildlife Photographer'



Steve says "The county of Yorkshire is an incredible place to see a wide variety of our UK wildlife species across an array of different habitats. From deep forests and woodlands to the beautiful landscapes of our National Parks, the rugged wild coastline and the sweeping hills of the Yorkshire Wolds you will be amazed at what you can find. This talk tells the story behind my photographic journey through Yorkshire over the years and the incredible wildlife images that I have captured in 'God's Own County'".

combined with the

Annual General Meeting

and the

Annual Exhibition.

The exhibition was for digital images only this year. A presentation of the accepted images will be shown.

Please note: in line with current Government guidance this meeting will be held on Zoom. Further details of the Spring Meeting, including the full programme for the day and information on how to book your place, will be on the RPS Nature Group website shortly.

Publication information

Nature Group eNews is published by the RPS
Nature Group three times a year.
Copy and publication dates roughly as follows:

Late Winter	Copy deadline mid January Published early March..
Late Spring	Copy deadline mid May Published early June.
Late Summer	Copy deadline end August Published late September.

All contributions should be submitted to the Editor at: naturegroup_eneews_editor@btinternet.com. Any item of interest to nature photographers is welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books. Copy should be submitted as .txt or .doc files by email. Please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images should be supplied as flattened 8bit sRGB tif or jpg files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch. Please do not email larger images.

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

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

Distribution:

eNews is available to members as a download from the Nature Group Members section of the RPS website. An RPS Bulletin advising members of its availability will be emailed to Members using addresses supplied by them to the RPS Membership Department in Bristol. Please update them if you change your email address.

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by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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President of the Society;
Chief Executive Officer of the Society;
Hon. Treasurer of the Society;
Chair of the Natural History Distinctions Panel;
Immediate Past Chair of the Nature Group

* Members please note:

The Nature Group needs a new Honorary Treasurer. David O'Neill has been acting Nature Group Hon. Treasurer since our previous Treasurer was forced to retire due to ill health, but David can no longer continue in this role. Therefore, from the AGM in April 2021 the Nature Group will not have a Treasurer.

If you have any experience in this type of role, please consider volunteering for this important role. Please contact David O'Neill for further information.
Email: david.oneill_nh@outlook.com

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,
E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

