

THE IRIS



Magazine of the Nature Group of the RPS

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All contributions should be submitted to the Editor. Items covering any aspect of nature photography and/or natural history are welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books.

Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD, or printed using double line spacing on one side of the paper only - please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images should be supplied on CD (no DVDs please) as RGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 ppi (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Original transparencies may be submitted, however, the Editor cannot specify how long they may be away from the author.

No payment will be made for material used and whilst every care will be taken, neither the Editor, the Nature Group or the Printers can accept liability for any damage that may occur to photographic material submitted.

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

Distribution:

'The Iris' is forwarded to members using address labels produced by the RPS Membership Dept in Bath. Any member not receiving their copy should contact that department so that their name appears on a label in the future. However the Secretary will be pleased to post single copies to members who have failed to receive them.

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Contents

- 2 **Editorial**
- 3 **From the Chair**
- 4 **'An Interactive Guide to Obtaining your Nature Associateship'**
by John Myring ARPS
- 6 **The Evolution of an 'F' Panel**
by Bob Pearson FRPS
- 10 **Orchid Hunting with a camera**
by Richard Revels FRPS
- 14 **Nature Group Residential Weekend and Field Meeting at Ryewater Nursery**
by John Bebbington FRPS
- 17 **No Penguins Here**
by John Nathan LRPS
- 21 **Chamois, Wolves and Bears of the Nizke Tatry Mountains, Slovakia**
by Chuck Eccleston ARPS
- 24 **Review of the new KOOD Professional Carbon Fibre Tripod**
by Charles Brown ARPS
- 26 **Image Stacking using Helicon Focus**
by John Bebbington FRPS
- 28 Book Review

Front Cover:

Galapagos Penguins Courtship
by Bob Pearson FRPS

A Date for your Diaries

Chairman's Day

8th November 2009
Smethwick P.S. Clubrooms
10.00am for 10.30am start
Speakers to be announced in the Spring issue.

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Nature Group Exhibitions

Copies of Nature Group Exhibitions dating back to 2000, are available to book for camera clubs/photographic societies. If you would like to book one of these or the current or next years' Travelling Exhibition, please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above.

Editorial

Well, we have passed the Autumn Equinox, the days are getting shorter and cooler, the nights longer and colder. The big question is: will we have a good fungi season after the very wet weather we have had? Good luck if fungi is your thing.

Thank you to everyone who sent me articles for publication. If yours is not in this issue, it will be in the next one, but I can always use more, so keep them coming.

In this issue we have a successful Fellowship Panel from Bob Pearson FRPS, and articles about British Orchids from Richard Revels FRPS, the Norwegian Arctic by John Nathan LRPS, the Nizke Tatry Mountains in Slovakia by Chuck Eccleston ARPS and Image Stacking by John Bebbington FRPS. In addition there are Field Meeting reports, a book review and a report on a new carbon fibre tripod by Charles Brown ARPS.

Also in this issue is the Entry Form for the 2009 Annual Exhibition. This is your Exhibition, so please do enter. Over the years the Exhibition has evolved and developed - in the past it was just prints and slides, now there are sections for prints, slides and projected digital images and two categories (a. all creatures and b. plant life, geology, etc.) Full details are on page 2 of the entry form. There are some changes to the Conditions of Entry, so please read them before you complete your entry form. There is an extensive and intensive amount of work being done by those of us who volunteer our time to organise the exhibition and it really does help the smooth running of things if the forms are filled in correctly, etc. So please, help us out, read the conditions and then prepare your entry, complete your form and send it to the right person. We are looking forward to a bumper entry next year.

Also in this issue is the Programme Secretary's plea for volunteers to host Field Meetings next year. Please don't let him down. Familiarity of your site is the only knowledge required to do this. It's an opportunity for you to meet fellow members and make new friends.

Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and hope that 2009 proves to be an excellent year of photography for us all.



From the chair

Well it is the end of August and along with everyone else I am waiting for summer to start! The flat grey days of August have not inspired one to venture out in search of stunning images, having said that I did manage to find one or two breaks in the cloud at the end of July which enabled me to take the pictures I needed to complete the book on 'Wild Lincolnshire'. August was mostly spent indoors in front of the computer finalising the design for the book so that the printer could supply the final proofs. These have now been checked and returned so the book will hopefully be ready for early October.

Having a large garden with a wood of about an acre which was planted twenty two years ago means that as well as supplying a roost for the local Wood Pigeons other things do turn up from time to time. For three weeks in August a female Sparrowhawk took up residence with her newly fledged brood of youngsters which appeared to be made up of three females. The food cries of the young echoed round the garden and as the wooded area was approached, Sparrowhawks seemed to explode from every direction only to disappear just as rapidly as they dived for cover further into the wood. The evidence of their presence has been left in untidy piles of feathers of the numerous Wood Pigeons, which seem to have been the major part of their diet, scattered in various parts of the garden. Did I get any pictures, no! August is a busy time in the garden cutting the two meadows and the half mile of hedges, which did seem a good idea when my wife and I planted them all those years ago.

In my last 'From the Chair' I mentioned that my wife and I were visiting Mull during May in search of Otters. The weather was very kind to us. Apart from Otters the island has much to offer with Common Sandpiper, Snipe, Curlew and Golden Plover being just some of the bird species that presented themselves in front of the camera. Golden Eagle and Sea Eagles were also seen but not close enough to get pictures. I was told that a Sea Eagle had deserted its nest due to disturbance by a photographer. I was informed that the photographer in question had been arrested and their equipment confiscated. I have not seen anything in the press to confirm this but if it is true, it is just the sort of behaviour that can reflect badly on other wildlife photographers and is something we can well do without.

The bird which really did impress me was a confiding Slavonian Grebe in full breeding plumage on one of the many sea lochs. According to one of the local guides this was a very unusual appearance. Back to the main purpose of the visit, Otters. We saw these delightful animals on every day of our week long stay on the island and managed to get some reasonably successful pictures. For those who may wish to see and photograph Otters on Mull the best place is just after you get off the ferry at Craignure. On leaving the ferry turn left and after about two or three hundred yards turn left just opposite the pub, park near the jetty, walk towards the sea with a camp site to your right, pass the end of the small railway, continue past all the gorse bushes and find a vantage point on the headland then just sit and wait, all the time scanning the sea weed covered rocks and water for any sign of movement. If you don't see otters at some stage I will be amazed! Being fairly single minded in the search for one species it is inevitable you are going to miss something of interest and so it was only after it had disappeared that we heard about a Bearded Seal that had been sitting on rocks on the other side of the island allowing a fairly close approach for anyone with a camera. This species is normally found in coastal waters and shallow seas from Alaska to Labrador and is considered to be non-migratory.

Thanks to Tony Wharton FRPS, the group has received £500 sponsorship from Pentax. This will be put to good use by helping cover the costs of producing the next two issues of *The Iris* in return for which Pentax will be given advertising space in the magazine. I am sure every member of the group will join me in thanking Pentax for their generosity.

As another year draws to a close I hope you have all managed to add to your collections of stunning images this year and will, during the winter months, sort through them ready to enter the Group's Annual Exhibition. Enough of my ramblings - just enough space left to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



'An Interactive Guide to obtaining your Nature Associateship'

a history by John Myring.

The idea for this guide was formed in October 2001, whilst reading a magazine review of 'Illuminatus' software [now called Opus Pro], which was described as 'multi-media' and produced by Digital Workshop.

By 2001 I had been a member of the Nature Group for some twenty five years, of which the latter twelve were as a committee member. In those days many of our committee meetings were held in the early evening at The Octagon, Bath, coinciding with the six monthly Nature Distinction Assessments.

At this stage I should dispel any confusion which may exist with some readers; the Nature Group [NG], as a body, is not connected with, nor has any jurisdiction over, the Nature Distinctions Assessment Panel [NDAP]. The latter is controlled by the RPS. Those who sit on it are appointed by the RPS and the criteria they operate under are set by the RPS. It is true that many of the NDAP are also members of the NG but that is as far as it goes.

Anyway, to return to the narrative; when attending our meetings I took the opportunity to sit in, as a spectator, on some twenty assessments over a ten year period. During this time I saw both excellent applications and dreadful ones. I witnessed the Assessment Panel striving to be fair despite the difficulties that some applicants created, which also impacted on the Distinctions staff. Equally as important, sitting amongst the audience I heard their comments, including those whose applications were being assessed. The latter's comments were undoubtedly sometimes biased, according to whether they had been successful or not! However others were there simply to observe, hoping to learn what was needed for a successful application. On occasions it seemed that they were disappointed, did not hear the panel's comments on the applications, or failed to appreciate the points which were being made. This was not the panel's fault; the day was purely for them to assess the applications, not to provide tuition for future applicants; the latter the RPS offered by way of workshops.

All of the above, including gaining my own Associateship in 1982 [second attempt] gave me a broad overview of the whole process; of the apparent need by many applicants for guidance concentrated in one source. It is understood that Distinction Workshops, both general and specific, are held and that members of the Assessment Panel do give freely of their time with individual advice; however, due to time and/or geographical constraints, not all applicants are able to avail themselves of such help, hence the concept of a guide.

It seemed that a CD-ROM would be an ideal way of distributing such guidance, and that Illuminatus would enable this to be done on an interactive basis.

Colin Smith FRPS, NDAP Chairman at the time, and Tony Wharton FRPS, a long standing member of the NDAP, [and current Chairman] provided invaluable collaboration in the project. Chris Mattison FRPS, another NDAP member at that time, provided input as did Carol Agar, RPS Distinctions Manager.

So the guide was prepared with me trying to put myself in the place of the applicants and provide what they required. Tony, Colin and Chris detailing what the NDAP were looking for and how applicants could avoid some of the common faults. Carol covered the problems encountered by Distinctions staff when applicants didn't read the instructions!

By November 2002, having received approval of the various RPS committees, the first version of the guide was ready for sale. Since then there have been revisions and successful panels added; in December 2007 I rebuilt the whole guide with a new interface, adding a new section on digital applications. Tony Wharton again kindly assisted.

I am pleased to say that the guide appears to be fulfilling its purpose; at the time of writing some 300 copies have been sold. Whilst feedback has been limited, that which I have received is all complimentary.

In the guide we attempted to take the prospective applicant through the whole process of applying for an Associateship in Nature Photography. Contents include:

- What happens on an Assessment day
- Application criteria set by the RPS and the Nature Photographers Code of Practice.
- Sections covering choosing the panel of images, whether as prints or projected images [digital or transparencies, yes, there is still the odd one]. Suggestions are made as to how panels should be shown.

Twenty seven tutorial images are provided from which the user can select their own mock panel of fifteen and arrange them for order of presentation. Tony and Colin comment individually on the twenty seven images detailing common faults; which fifteen they would suggest be chosen and the order they should be shown in. There is a section containing successful print, slide and digital applications.

As it seemed that some digital applicants needed greater guidance the section for this includes more general advice as well.

Until the autumn of 2008 I maintained/updated the master copy of the guide and burned CDs as required, usually five/ten at a time, printing the inserts and labels at home. No stocks were held thus keeping outlay to a minimum and preventing wastage should an update needed to be made. In the last few years Trevor Hyman kindly handled sales for the NG, thus relieving me of some of the workload.

Much as I enjoyed the project, helping the Nature Group and also, hopefully, aspiring applicants, I decided in mid 2008 that the time had come to hand over the project and have asked the NG committee to find someone willing to take on the job of producing further editions. I hope that the Editor will be able to add a post script giving details of the new arrangements.

Once again my grateful thanks to all those mentioned above and also, most importantly, all those successful applicants who kindly allowed their panels to be included on in the Guide.

Editor's Note: Arrangements for purchasing the CD have not changed. See notice below.

Now Available - Version 3.0 - revised and rebuilt CD ROM

'An Interactive Guide to Obtaining your Nature Associateship'



Over three hundred copies of this interactive CD have been sold since its conception. Now thoroughly revised. The whole interface has been rebuilt to incorporate:

- Covers every aspect that needs to be considered, before preparing your application!
- A new section with advice on problems seen in many digital applications, print and projected images.
- The core features of earlier versions including successful applications and interactivity.
- Information panels are now static, taking less time to load.
- The screen resolution size is increased to 1280 x 1024, with automatic monitor adjustment.
- The 'Guide' is best run by copying the file from the CD to your hard drive.

The CD-ROM (PC only) costs £10 incl p&p. Cheques payable to 'RPS Nature Group' should be sent to: Trevor Hyman LRPS, 3 Northcourt Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire. OX14 1QA

The evolution of an 'F' Panel

by Bob Pearson FRPS

These notes outline my path to a successful 'F' nature panel 'Wildlife of the Galapagos Archipelago' which was photographed and printed digitally.

The selection of who to use as your mentor and 'guru' is clearly a critical one, as is the decision to use one or many. The reviewers at a workshop that I attended suggested John Chamberlin FRPS. I knew John and it proved to be a happy and successful choice. I must thank John for sharing his expertise, his time and for the helpful advice that he gave me. I was brought down to earth with a bump at our first meeting to discuss my prints, many being rejected.

My interest in the Galapagos goes back to my Junior School days where I read a shortened version of the 'Voyage of the Beagle' and became fascinated with the concept of Evolution. This isolated island archipelago became a dream destination and I have now been fortunate to make several visits. With the increasing numbers of visitors, the National Park

authority has quite rightly imposed more and more access restrictions. Unfortunately, the decrease in access significantly reduces the opportunity for good wildlife photography. For example, individual visits to a landing site are now restricted to once a fortnight, there is no opportunity to return to make use of knowledge gained.

All the images were captured in RAW format on a Nikon D2x DSLR with lenses ranging from 12 to 400mm (18 to 600mm 35mm equivalent). The images were then developed in Lightroom. I used a "WhiBal" card as a colour temperature reference when taking a series of images but found necessary adjustment in colour temperature to be small.

The layout of the panel is clearly critical and needs to appear well balanced with lighter images at the top, darker at the bottom, side prints looking inward and some degree of symmetry around the centre images. In a general panel such as this, images



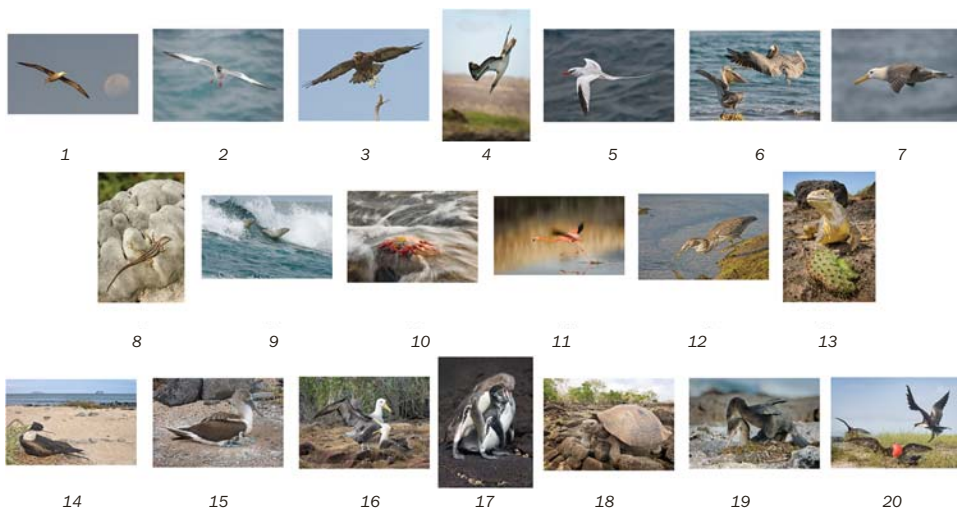


need to demonstrate a wide variety in choice of lens and viewpoint and subjects in non-static poses. The majority of my images were the result of pre-planning, setting up for the shot and then just waiting within the constraint of the time allowed.

The iconic image of the Galapagos of course is that of the Giant Tortoise, my image was taken in a drying lake that forms in the base of a caldera and is covered with clumps of Tuff rock. On my last visit the numbers of Tortoise in the immediate vicinity of the lake bed approached 100. The area is situated about 5 miles in land from the coast of the island of San Cristobal, an arduous walk. I looked for the best location to show the habitat and using a 12-24mm lens, set up my camera on a ground pod and waited for a tortoise to walk by.

I had been focused on the Galapagos Hawk sitting on its perch for some 45 minutes, it was 5.30pm with sunset at 6pm, the time we had to be off the beach. At last it left its perch. The image of the frigate birds was also the result of seeing the possibility and composing the anticipated picture. The male frigate bird tries to attract a mate to its nest by this display, inflating its courting pouch and shaking its wings. A female was eventually attracted to the nest.





I am very pleased with the shot of the Galapagos Penguins (front cover). It was made with the 400mm lens, hand held from a panga, a small inflatable with an outboard, rising and falling some 3 feet in the surf by the rocks. The black and white penguins were on the black lava typical of the Galapagos, they had just mated when the male embraced the female. Incidentally, the sea lions were also photographed from a panga, not from the shore.

I was asked by the RPS if the panel could form the start of a library of 'F' panels they hope to build for use as a reference and for display at workshops, I readily consented.

- 1 Waved Albatross 70-200mm f2.8, 1.4x conv.
- 2 Swallow Tailed Gull 200-400mm f4
- 3 Galapagos Hawk 200-400mm f4
- 4 Blue Footed Booby diving 70-200mm f2.8
- 5 Red-billed Tropicbird 200-400mm f4
- 6 Brown Pelicans 200-400mm f4
- 7 Waved Albatross 200-400mm f4
- 8 Lava Lizard on uplifted coral head 70-200mm f2.8
- 9 Galapagos Sea Lions Surfing 200-400mm f4
- 10 Sally Light Foot Crab in surf 24-120mm f3.5-f5.6
- 11 Greater Flamingo 70-200mm f2.8 1.4x conv.
- 12 Striated Heron with catch 70-200mm f2.8 2x conv.
- 13 Land Iguana feeding 24-120mm f3.5-f5.6
- 14 Magnificent Frigatebird (female) on nest 24-120mm f3.5-f5.6
- 15 Blue Footed Booby with chick 70-200mm f2.8
- 16 Waved Albatross pair display 200-400mm f4
- 17 Galapagos Penguins courtship 200-400mm f4
- 18 Galapagos Giant Tortoise on tuff 12-24mm f4
- 19 Flightless or Galapagos Cormorants mating 200-400mm f4 1.7x conv.
- 20 Male Great Frigatebird attracting female to nest 24-120mm f3.5-f5.6





This Fellowship panel and other images can be seen on Bob's website: www.bobpearsonphotography.com



Orchid Hunting with a Camera

by Richard Revels FRPS

Although it was well over 50 years ago, I can still remember the thrill of finding my first wild orchid. It was a Bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* growing along what is now the southbound dual carriageway of the A1, about two miles south of Biggleswade in Bedfordshire, where I lived. Work on upgrading the A1 to dual carriageway had been started just prior to the Second World War and a cutting dug, but the war halted all work until the mid 1950's. During the early 1950s this cutting was just brimming with wild life. As a schoolboy I would sometimes cycle there to play or catch butterflies. Upon finding that first orchid I promptly picked it and cycled back home all excited to show my parents that exotic looking flower. I am pleased to say that I long ago stopped picking wild flowers, but my interest in orchids, triggered by that event, has continued to this day.



It was not until the mid 1960's that I started photographing wildlife, concentrating mostly on butterflies and moths. I became much more interested in orchids in the early 1980's when I met Joe Zorzi, a fellow member of Bedfordshire Natural History Society, whose main wildlife interest was in British orchids. During the next couple of decades we made many trips out together to various locations in Britain and Ireland to photograph orchids. Among those we found were some of the rarest species occurring in the British Isles.

One notable trip in early June 1984 was to the Yorkshire Dales to photograph the Lady's-slipper orchid *Cypripedium calceolus* in its only known British site. Because of its remote location this plant had escaped the attention of the Victorian and Edwardian orchid collectors, who had managed to dig up all the other wild Lady's-slipper orchids in Britain. This plant has been known at that site since the 1920's, and I believe still survives there to this day. One of Joe's orchid enthusiast friends had told him of the secret location of this plant. Joe was told that a close approach was not allowed, to avoid damaging the fragile habitat around the plant, so a 400mm lens would be needed to get a decent sized shot of the plant. We knew that it would be guarded by a warden, and hoped that he would let us photograph it. Fully equipped with long lenses we headed north, and eventually found the well-hidden location. Fortunately we were able to persuade the warden to let us take some pictures, but only on condition that we would not tell anyone else of the site, and that we would never return there again. The Lady's-slipper was in full flower, making it a spectacular site, and although the photos I took that day were no more than competent record shots, they remain among my most treasured wildlife pictures. Today plants have been propagated from that last original British Lady's-slipper orchid, and these clones have been used to re-establish this orchid back into some of its previously known localities in Yorkshire and Cumbria. At least one has been planted where there is public access, so that once again the public see and photograph this spectacular orchid.

Three years later (in 1987) Joe was told that another great rarity the Ghost Orchid *Epipogium aphyllum*, was flowering in a wood near Marlow, Bucks. So off we went to see if we could find it. Although he was told of the area in the wood where it was, we had great difficulty in finding it. This orchid is small and pallid - growing in the leaf litter in gloomy Beech woodlands it is extremely difficult to see. Eventually we found the plant, but unfortunately it was just getting past its best. Being able to get any photograph of this species in Britain is somewhat of an achievement, as there is sometimes a gap of 20 or 30 years between plants being found.

The Ghost and the Lady's-slipper orchids are generally regarded as Britain's two rarest wild flowers, but I am not obsessed in hunting down extreme wildlife rarities, be it bird, butterfly or orchid. When an opportunity to photograph a rare or special species presents its-self, I will of course readily take it. Usually I am content to travel to a location for the day and photograph whatever I can find there.

One gem of a wildlife habitat recently created and local to me, is a shallow drainage lake to collect storm water from a new industrial estate. The area around the lake has been made into a small local





nature reserve. Common species of Butterflies, Dragon and Damselflies abound there, and in the last couple of years a colony of some 1000 - 2000 Bee orchids have flowered at this site. This orchid is well known for suddenly appearing in large numbers in recently created man made places, like road verges and disused pits. Bee orchid seed is very small and light and is spread around the countryside by drifting in the wind, so it is a good coloniser of new suitable habitats. It is not however good at maintaining its hold there for many years, as it is unable to compete with the coarser vegetation that usually takes over. From the time a seed germinates (with the help of a suitable fungus) in a new site, to when the plant is large enough to produce a flower spike takes about 5 years. So any 5 to 10 year road cutting or other such place that has had soil disturbance, and is not covered by coarse vegetation, is worth looking at for this and several other orchid species.

I still get a thrill finding a Bee orchid as it is such a lovely flower, and to have such a good colony within a mile or so of my home is just great. One of the major attractions for me is in the variability of Bee orchid markings and colouring. My local colony has produced a few interesting forms with one 'Wasp' form *Var trollii* flowering there this year (2008). This form is mostly confined to the West Country, from Gloucester to Dorset, flowering regularly in some locations as a small percentage of the Bee orchid population. It is extremely rare in eastern England, and this is only the 2nd recorded in Bedfordshire. A single *Var belgarum* also flowered there in both 2007 and 2008, and I also found a 'freak' with a double flower. Two other variants were found flowering within 2 feet of each other, one with a very dark lip lacking normal markings, and a very pretty marked one. However over 99% show little variation from the typical markings. I am looking forward to searching this colony again next June to see if any other major variants appear.

British Orchids occur in a wide variety of different habitats from sphagnum bogs to industrial waste tips, with woodlands and chalk downlands being home to the majority of species. Some orchids have very precise habitat requirements, so a visit to a certain type of habitat will be needed to find them, while others like the Bee and Common Spotted orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* are less fussy. However all need a fungus to invade the seed before it can germinate and grow, and some species require that fungus partner throughout their life.

Finding large numbers of orchids in flower is always impressive. At Cressbrook Dale in the Peak District during mid May the sight of thousands of Early Purple orchids *Orchis mascula* is magnificent and will get my season off to a good start. At the same time of the year the Green-winged orchid *Anacamptis morio* can be found flowering in damp unimproved meadows, and the Burnt orchids *Neotinea ustulata* will be blooming on a local chalk hillside NNR. By mid June the Common Spotted orchids will be flowering in their thousands on the nearby Chiltern Hills, and the Marsh orchids *Dactylorhiza* species will be flowering in the damper habitats. The majority of Helleborines are mid summer flowering orchids to be found in a variety of habitats from deep shaded woods to sand dunes and limestone pavements. The season ends in September with the Autumn Ladies Tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* a delicate little orchid that is confined to areas of short turf, and is sometimes found on lawns.

The techniques for photographing orchids are the same as for any plant. Look out for a good clean specimen standing out from the surrounding background vegetation, as that will give a nice clean well out of focus background to a picture. I may use a wide-angle lens to show a clump of orchids growing in their habitat, or my 180mm Macro lens to isolate a single flower head, or individual flower. If there is strong sunlight I will use a reflector to brighten up the shaded parts. Flash can be used instead, but take care not to overpower the ambient light, as you only want the flash to lighten the shadow areas. I prefer to use a reflector as you can see the fill-in effect. For close-ups I use a cable release and the mirror lock, this cuts out the risk of mirror vibration spoiling sharpness, and an angle finder is essential for a very low viewpoint. Good composition and adequate sharpness where it matters, are of course other factors in getting a quality picture, whether it's an orchid, butterfly or bird.

Selecting a good specimen is important, but take care not to damage or destroy nearby plants (incl. non-flowering plants) while you are taking your pictures.

So if you are looking for a new project for next year, there are 56 species of British orchids out there just waiting for your attention.



Pictures:

Page 10: This is one of my most prized wildlife pictures, the Lady's-slipper orchid flowering in its Yorkshire habitat in 1984. This orchid was the only one left in Britain after the collectors had dug up all they could find. It has survived here since the 1920's.

Page 11 top right: A Bedfordshire rarity, the 'Wasp' variant of the Bee orchid. This is only the 2nd recorded in the county, the last one was in 1977.

Page 11 bottom left: This belgarum variant flowered in the Biggleswade reserve in both 2007 and 2008. A spider has taken up residence in the flower head adding interest to the picture.

Page 11 bottom right: A group of Bee orchids flowering in 'my' local nature reserve in June 2007.

Page 12 top: Getting a good close up of a single orchid flower can be difficult. The slightest movement caused by wind will ruin the picture. This Lizard orchid close-up was taken on a day with little wind, I took over a dozen shots so that I could choose the sharpest.

Page 12 centre: A pollinating wasp visiting a Broad-leaved Helleborine has many pollinia stuck to its face. Events like this are always worth photographing.

Page 12 bottom: The Early Purple orchids in Cressbrook Dale in the Peak District are a joy to behold each May. A wide angle lens was used to show the habitat.

Page 13: A small colony of Burnt orchids grows on Knocking Hoe National Nature Reserve in Bedfordshire, and occasionally two or three may flower close together.

More pictures on the back cover.

NG Residential Weekend and NG Field Meeting at Ryewater Nursery

by John Bebbington FRPS



Above: Alder Kitten *Furcula bicuspis*

Below: Larva of Lilac Beauty Moth *Apeira syringaria*



Once again Kath Bull organised our visit to The Kingcombe Centre from 16th to 19th May. Set deep in the Dorset countryside, this small and peaceful venue is surrounded by traditionally farmed meadows and overgrown hedgerows, with access to local reserves such as Powerstock Common and (by kind permission of Clive Farrell) the butterfly sanctuary at Ryewater Nursery.

Sixteen of us gathered at Kingcombe on the Friday afternoon and immediately started to find subjects in the garden and adjacent meadows. After a pre-dinner drink and an excellent evening meal, followed by a short health & safety briefing, we gathered in the lounge at Beech Cottage where John gave a digital show introducing the proposed venues and showing some of the species we might expect to see. Later two moth traps were set up in the hope of attracting some photogenic species.

On the Saturday morning several group members were up and about by 6am, although the weather was cool and grey; the moth traps were reasonable and provided a few photogenic species such as Peppered Moth *Biston betularia*, Lime and Elephant Hawkmoths *Mimas tiliae* and *Deilephila elpenor* and both Sallow Kitten *Furcula furcula* and the more rarely found Alder Kitten *furcula bicuspis*.

After breakfast we set off in a rather fine new Transit minibus (the Centre's machine having spectacularly failed its MOT!) for Ryewater Nursery. Despite the forecast for heavy rain we had an almost dry day – one or two group members who had decided to stay behind at Kingcombe experienced heavy rain for most of the time!

As always the venue produced a good range of plants and invertebrates, although the cool conditions kept most of the butterflies down; however there were a few Small Blue *Cupido minimus*, Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus* and Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* moving around and providing a challenge! There were good stands of

Bird's-foot and Marsh Bird's-foot Trefoils *Lotus corniculatus* and *L. pedunculatus*, Kidney and Horseshoe Vetches *Anthyllis vulneraria* and *Hippocrepis comosa*.

In the evening, (and again on the Sunday evening) after another excellent meal, we looked at group members' images – prints, slides and projected digital.

The Sunday was spent exploring the Kingcombe Meadows reserve. We spent most of the day in a single field (Adders Mead) as it was sheltered from the wind and had large numbers of wild flowers and insects. There were numerous spikes of Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, abundant Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea* and many other plants typical of unimproved meadows. In the sheltered sunny areas there were large numbers of micro moths including a quite beautiful metallic *Coleophorida* – sadly not identifiable to species, as determination is based on dissection of the male genitalia! Later in the day one of our group found a very late-flowering stand of Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* deep in a patch of damp woodland.

The moth-traps produced very little in the way of subjects – the night had been cool and clear. After breakfast we set out for Powerstock Common, an area of acidic scrub/heath adjacent to a chalk railway cutting. We had heard rumours of Bird's Nest Orchids *Neottia nidus-avis* and after a long search eventually found a reasonable stand under some Beech trees at the top of the railway bank. The dragonfly ponds proved rather disappointing, with few species and almost no cooperative individuals, but butterflies were slightly better and some members found Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*, Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae* and Dingy Skipper. A male Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines* perched next to the minibus at lunchtime and obligingly posed with wings open and closed, but although several Wood White *Leptidea sinapis* were seen not one of them settled. Illustrations – Bird's nest Orchid, Grizzled Skipper.

Finally back to Kingcombe for afternoon tea and farewells – some of the group had long drives ahead! Thanks again to Kath Bull for organising the weekend and to the staff at Kingcombe for making us so welcome and comfortable.



Above: Underside of male Small Blue

Below: Southern Marsh Orchid

Bottom: Coleophorida moth



Field Meeting Report continued



Above: Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*

Below: Bird's Nest Orchids *Neottia nidus-avis*



Ryewater Nursery, Saturday 5th July

(by kind permission of Clive Farrell)

Leader: John Bebbington FRPS

Despite a fairly discouraging weather forecast nine of us met at the venue near Sherborne and it was good to meet old acquaintances and make new ones.

Ryewater Nursery is an interesting site which the owner has turned into a butterfly sanctuary, with wildflower areas, marshy meadows, limestone scrapes and bunds (and the longest Buddleia hedge in the world) with positive consequences for other invertebrates and for plants. The site is enormously rich and varied can usually be guaranteed to produce plenty of interest.

Plant photography was not particularly easy although there was much to admire including a good range of vetches such as a fine stand of Crown vetch *Coronilla varia* and many plants of the uncommon Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* - a challenge to photograph even in ideal conditions!

The breezy and overcast conditions meant that we had to work quite hard to find insect subjects and even then it was difficult to cope with the wind! However the first Gatekeepers *Pyronia tithonus* of the year had just emerged; there were some very fresh Marbled Whites *Melanargia galathea* and larvae, cocoons and adults of the 6-spot Burnet moths *Zygaena filipendulae*; there were also a few final instar larvae of the Pebble Prominent *Eligmodonta ziczac* on a rather fine willow boat. We also found a fully-grown larva of the Green Silverlines moth *Pseudoips prasinana* but unfortunately for it (but not for us as it made a fascinating study) a dozen or so small parasitic wasp larvae had just emerged from it.

Towards the end of the afternoon the gloom began to gather but we found one sheltered corner with cooperative Black-tailed Skimmer dragonflies - we had seen some earlier in the day but they were too active! Finally, as it began to pour with rain, we gathered under shelter and were delighted when Clive Farrell produced a freshly-emerged female Lappet Moth *Gastropacha quercifolia*.

Despite the difficult conditions everyone seemed to have enjoyed the day and obtained some decent images.

No Penguins here

by John Nathan LRPS

Well, despite looking hard, I never saw one penguin. Do I need new glasses? - well, no, because we were not in the Antarctic. We were in the Norwegian Arctic, and we DID see Polar bears.

I am a keen amateur wildlife photographer. In recent years it has become very popular to go to the Antarctic. For some reason, the Arctic has been less popular. Of those who do go to the Arctic, the majority go to Greenland, the Canadian Arctic, or Alaska. But we do have just a smidgen of the Arctic here in Europe - Spitzbergen - less expensive to get to than other places, and I recommend it. I visited from July 17th to 29th this year.

Svalbard, or Spitzbergen, although technically that is just the main island, is administered by Norway. Since a treaty in 1925 other countries have been allowed to trade there. Travelling from the UK it took us about seven hours to get there; leaving Heathrow at 1.30 pm, with a stopover in Oslo, followed by a four hour flight. You fly North up the

length of Norway, over Tromsø on the North Cape, and then for nearly two hours over the Barents Sea. We arrived at 11.30 pm but not in the dark - in broad daylight. The sun never sets for two months in the summer. Is this above the Arctic circle? - yes, nearly 1000 miles north of it. The capital, Longyearbyen lies at 79 degrees North, as far North as the North of Greenland, and much further north than you can sail south. It is less cold than the Antarctic, and in July it varied from about +5deg C to -5deg C.

My wife did not want to come on this trip, so I went with a pal; the holiday was a ten day cruise, and the ship carried 95 passengers. All of us could go ashore at once, and for several hours - not the case, I believe, with large cruise ships. The aim was to circumnavigate Spitzbergen, (Sharp Mountain), an island, about the size of Ireland. The archipelago of Svalbard is at the latitude in which the northern half is usually locked in the pack ice during the winter, and becomes ice free around





early July. This varies. This year there was a lot of ice, and we were the first cruise ship this season to sail right around. The capital, Longyearbyen, is usually ice free. This was essential in the past, because of its raison d'être. Coal was exploited from about 1900, by an American called Longyear, and was exported for many years. But it is so remote, that it was difficult to make it pay, and, apart from a local mine, mining stopped in 1970. Now it is a spring destination for Norwegians, and a summer one for other tourists.



The photography challenges were quite different from my last big trip to Kenya and Tanzania. In the Arctic there were three problems, weight, cold and sea water, of which the last was by far the worst. The other problem was what is currently known as HDR, but is just a wide range of stops between the lightest and darkest areas. I coped with this by taking a range of exposures, and use the RAW converter in Photoshop CS3.



Protecting your equipment from sea water can be a difficult problem. I took advice from a friend who had done this trip, so knew that we would be going out in Zodiacs (inflatable craft with an aluminium floor and, not infrequently, an inch of sea water in the bottom) and that sea water can splash over them. It is essential to keep corrosive salt water off your equipment, so I bought a diver's dry bag. I had to manoeuvre this down the steps on the side of the ship each time we went out in a Zodiac, which created some amusement for the other passengers. To avoid my cameras and lenses banging against each other, they needed to be in a camera bag inside the dry bag. My dry bag had a large shoulder strap, which was very useful as you need both hands free when getting on and off the Zodiac. The dry bag protects equipment totally against sea water, but it is a fiddle to get a camera out of it quickly. I often had one camera inside the dry bag but outside the camera bag. I made a protective cover for one camera by cutting two holes in the bottom of a strong plastic bag, disconnecting and reconnecting the camera strap through the bag, with the lens projecting from the mouth of the bag so that the lens was protected from splashes. You are advised to wear inner and outer gloves when sitting in Zodiacs, removing the outer ones when photographing but it is very easy to lose them overboard unless they are fixed to your wrist. I did not bother with inner gloves and used ski gloves with a wrist loop instead - easy to take off but not to lose.



I took two camera bodies - Canon EOS30D, Canon EOS10D, Canon 500mm F4 IS and 300mm F4 IS lenses plus 1.4 and 2.0 x converters, Canon 28-200mm, Sigma 17-35mm, Tamron 90mm macro, Canon flash gun, nine batteries, Epson 40Gb portable hard disc, a heavy duty Manfrotto monopod with quick release head and two polarising filters. I used everything except the macro lens and flash gun, and the only reason I did not use the macro lens was lack of time. I carried the 30D plus 500mm lens and portable hard disc in a photographers rucksack, as my hand luggage. I checked in a Pelicase with most of my other equipment. The chargers, monopod and dry bag were packed in my suitcase with the minimum of clothes. I was about 5kg over the permitted weight. However, I would recommend all the above if you are trying to get the very best pictures from a place to which you may never return. I found two cameras very useful. The 300mm lens was attached to the 30D most of the time; this camera will take 5 frames per second - useful for wildlife photography of birds etc. I tried to change lenses as infrequently as possible - sea spray does them no good at all!

Although this was a 'good' ice year and we sailed into drift ice, it was never very cold. We sailed above 80 deg North, only 600 miles from the North Pole. We were in an ice strengthened vessel, but not an icebreaker. So we sailed through drift ice, football pitch sized pieces of ice, adjacent to each other but not attached. Once or twice, below decks, I heard the ice scrape along the outside of the hull which was slightly unnerving. You find yourself looking to see if sea water is coming in behind you; fortunately none did.

I did not have my cameras 'winterised' - I doubt it was cold enough to need that. My only problems were that the shutter of the EOS10D did not always function well in damp conditions. When it was clear and dry, there was no problem. Modern electronic cameras do not like damp conditions. The other problem was rechargeable battery life. Spare batteries need to be kept warm inside your clothes but they must be quickly accessible. When we went out in Zodiacs we had to wear a water-proof suit with a life jacket over the top of our warm clothes. It was remarkably difficult to get at a spare battery wearing all that clothing. The battery also lasted considerably less than they do in dry conditions. So each day, to service two cameras, I carried at least four spare batteries. My cabin was well served with 240 volt sockets, so each evening I down-loaded data onto my portable hard disc and recharged batteries.





We took our pictures from the ship, the zodiacs and on land. The ship, fitted with stabilisers and moving slowly, provided a good viewpoint - up to 50 ft above the sea. Polar bears are what everyone wants to photograph, but they are so dangerous that you are not allowed on shore if they are around. So you have to photograph them from the ship or the Zodiac. I used my 500mm + 1.4 converter to take shots of one on a kill nearly half a mile away from the ship; you see the result on page 18. Not perfect, but I was the only person to get a picture of a Polar bear on a kill. Their diet is almost exclusively seal pups. Global warming is causing a shrinkage of the sea ice; no sea ice, no seal pups, no polar bears. I soon decided that the 500mm was too bulky to take off the ship, but it was still very useful. I also used it to photograph three walrus going past on an ice floe. During my visit the weather was calm and the ship was well stabilised, so I could use any lens, even so, image stabilisation was useful. I often used an ISO of 400, which enabled the use of speeds up to 1/2000 sec.

Zodiacs are highly mobile even with up to a dozen passengers, mostly keen photographers and all trying to take pictures. The guides are aware of this and pass by subjects of interest in both directions to give everyone a chance. We could be out in the Zodiac for up to three hours but we would be told in advance if we were going to land. I carried both cameras, the EOS10d with a 28-200 lens and the EOS30d with a

300mm. I found the monopod very useful for taking pictures from the Zodiac - every little helps when you are photographing moving subjects from a moving Zodiac, so I used the monopod, image stabilisation, and a very fast shutter speed.

On land there are obviously no problems with motion but you had to carry all your equipment and there is a limit to how much you can comfortably carry. We would land near a beach in about one foot of water. Once or twice we were allowed to walk for a mile or two though only with armed guards to protect against unexpected Polar bears. These beautiful animals are heavily protected in Svalbard, and there are strict rules governing when they can be shot - only if life is at risk. Our tour operator took this extremely seriously; before every landing our guides scanned the shore very carefully with binoculars and staff went ashore first. I carried the 300mm, 17-35, 28-200 and 90mm macro on shore. There are very interesting subjects here, such as trappers huts, old mines, and whaling stations. My wide angle lens was useful to give an idea of the huge size of whale bones. On one occasion there were flowers, pretty but very small, and on another there was a chance to photograph lichens and a receding glacier. During another landing we were able to get close enough to a group of walrus to photograph them on land.

Photographically I had to be adaptable and be prepared for anything. Was it worth it? Yes, I think it was. Although the range of flora and fauna is much narrower than in the tropics, there are more than twenty species of birds and perhaps an equal number of plants. We saw about eight Polar Bear, Seals, Arctic Fox and a few Reindeer. There are also historic remains; everything dating from before 1947 is a historic site, protected by law, and tourists are not allowed within ten metres. For me this was a fantastic trip which I would definitely recommend.



Chamois, Wolves and Bears of the Nizke Tatry Mountains, Slovakia

by **Chuck Eccleston ARPS**

My wife and I have spent a lot of time travelling around various countries, so we decided it was time to try and put something back into the environment! We found an eco tourism company called Biosphere, who specialise in using lay people to participate in various research projects around the world, assisting local scientists by carrying out less specialised tasks.

We chose to visit Slovakia (as we had never visited an 'eastern bloc' country before) to help with a study of the endangered Tatra Chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra tatra* (mountain goat) looking into their relationships with large predators such as wolves, bears and lynx. We were to observe the chamois in the mountains and also record the scats and tracks of the predators. The outcome was hopefully to demonstrate that wolf, bear and lynx predation was not responsible for the chamois decline and therefore help prevent large scale hunting of the predators in the area of the Nizke Tatry mountains in north east Slovakia.

We were due to meet up with the expedition in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, in August. To give ourselves a chance to become accustomed to life in Slovakia we booked into a hotel for two nights prior to joining the expedition. Despite our initial reservations about Bratislava (we thought it would be all drab concrete blocks and generally unsafe after dark), it turned out to be a truly beautiful city, particularly the 'old part' which is completely pedestrianised. There are many beautiful churches, cathedrals, and old buildings plus lots of pavement bars and cafes and the weather was 32 deg c. so we were warm in the evening in shorts and tee shirts, very welcome after the summer we have just had!!

On the Sunday we joined up with the rest of the group plus our expedition leader Melanie (from Germany) and embarked into the two land rovers that were to take us to the Nizke Tatry mountains. The journey took over four hours passing through small towns and semi industrialised areas before we





Photo by Dieter Stokar



Photo by Dieter Stokar

reached the predominantly agricultural foothills. Once we had been assigned our rooms in a small timber built mountain chalet that is a ski lodge in the winter, we got straight down to induction and training.

Melanie introduced our group of eight volunteers to the scientist, Slavo, who was running the project. He gave us a talk on chamois, wolves, bears and their relationships and dependencies on each other, then we started to learn all about scat and track collecting!!! Basically we had to learn to use the

local 1/ 25000 maps plus Garmin hand held GPS locators. Each track and scat had to be logged onto forms showing its precise location, altitude, condition (i.e. fresh, worn, eroded for tracks or fresh, dry, weathered etc for scats), what animal made it and if a track, what direction it was going in. If it was a scat we had to put it in a plastic bag and attach a label showing location etc. so it could be analysed later at Slavo's laboratory.

Research over the next days fell into a routine of rise at 6.30, collect survey equipment: GPS, radio, spare batteries, clip board, compass, flares, spare flares – no not wide bottomed trousers!!, scat bags, labels and various data collection forms. We then walked down the road 300m to a hotel for a 7.30am breakfast, whilst there we made up our packed lunches to take with us into the mountains. Back to base and into Landrovers by 8.30, we were then driven (often through rough forest tracks, rivers and steep mountain tracks) to remote areas where we were split into pairs. Slavo would then tell us where we were on the map (roughly) and mark a route for us to follow and a collection point with rendezvous time, usually around 'fourish'. He would then drive off and drop the next pair somewhere else in the wilderness.

We were doing what we like best, walking in the woods, mountains and meadows, all the while on the lookout for tracks and scats and of course bears! and generally soaking up a new environment. The weather was kind the first week or so, bright, hot and sunny but the second week heralded in heavy rain that lasted four days and put a complete stop to our research as all tracks and scats were washed away. The navigation was quite tricky as the forest tracks frequently seemed to peter out or be non-existent so we had to keep a close eye on the map, compass and GPS (which worked well provided you were not under tree cover). We were not lucky enough to see bears, but two of our group surprised two bears not more than 20m away. Fortunately the bears were not aggressive and left the scene almost as fast as our team members. Needless to say the radio traffic was hot for half an hour after this encounter.

During our walks we encountered chamois (only once, and that was on our first training day), red and roe deer, stoats, red and also black squirrels, a pair of golden eagles and a juvenile bird, water pipits, black redstarts, jays, nutcrackers, hazel grouse, harrier, buzzards, dippers, crested tit, coal tits, ravens and wheatears. We were enjoying ourselves so much we and three others of the group even did a 14km walk, climbing some 500m, on our day off! Ending up on a mountain ridge called Baba, it was very hot and sunny, but three days later this ridge was covered in snow!!!

One day Slavo decided it was time to get up to the top of the mountains to try and observe and count the chamois, four of the group, my wife, myself, a Swiss member of the group and a French natural history photographer (who was making a book on European wildlife) volunteered to walk up to the ridge and then survey the north sides of the Nizke Tatras. The other four group members were to drive up to a mountain refuge at a place called Durkova at 1700m and survey other ridges, we all met in the evening at the refuge where we were to stay overnight. There was a large dormitory in the roof of the refuge but as it was a Slovakian national holiday the place was heaving, so my wife and I decided to sleep in a tent outside the building. We had a fantastic view but did not sleep very well as four rather merry Slovaks pitched their tent right next door to us and kept us awake for most of the night shouting and laughing. The whole group got up at 3.30 with a view to going to see the sunrise but as it was blowing a gale and very cloudy my wife and I went back to bed.



Photo by Dieter Stokar



Review of the new KOOD Professional Carbon Fibre Tripod

by Charles Brown ARPS

For some time I have been increasingly aware of the somewhat excessive weight of my sturdy aluminium alloy tripod when mounted with the Canon L500mm f4.5 lens and camera body. I finally decided that to effect a worthwhile reduction in weight of the set-up, the time had arrived for the heavy tripod to be replaced by one of the new much lighter state of the art carbon fibre models now available, particularly as I was shortly about to take a trip to Spitsbergen where both the weight and bulk of one's gear has to be kept to a minimum. Since the cost of the 'top of the range carbon fibre models' offered by established suppliers was to say the least somewhat daunting, I decided to have a look at alternatives now becoming available from the Far East via other importers and ultimately acquired one of the new 'KOOD' C2840 Professional models which having a load capacity of 8kg seemed to meet all my requirements for wildlife photography. This tripod first came to my notice as a full page advert on p.131 of the April edition of the RPS Journal.

The construction is not dissimilar to other professional models available, having a lightweight but robust cast alloy head which supports the three 4 section legs manufactured from the new carbon fibre tube material of 8 cross layer construction, which it is claimed maximises rigidity and vibration absorption. The legs also have an in-built anti rotation feature which gives both increased rigidity and quicker locking by means of the chunky easy to operate rotational leg locks. The angular spread of the individual legs is achieved by means of robust quick release sliders which engage with three seating positions on the alloy head. Any intermediate angular position being possible. At the foot of each leg is an easily retractable steel tip which can be used as an alternative to the normal hard rubber base. An adjustable centre column fitted with a spigot to prevent rotation and robust locking ring is included together with a top plate fitted with reversible 1/4" and 3/8" head screws. The bottom of the column is provided with



a spring loaded hook on which a camera bag or similar weight can be suspended. An additional short interchangeable centre column is also provided to facilitate extra low level use. This feature being particularly useful for botanical photography. Other useful features are a spirit level incorporated in the head and a small tool pouch which contains a small double headed ring spanner and a hexagon key - the only tools necessary in the unlikely event of having to make minor adjustments in the field. A waterproof, woven nylon, zip fastening bag and carrying strap is also included in the kit.

The 4 section tubular legs and associated reduced folded length is such that the tripod can be accommodated in a relatively small suitcase or holdall which together with it's reduction in weight of around one kilo when compared with a typical similar alloy tripod is certainly a bonus when travelling by air, with the current tighter weight restrictions.

Having now had the opportunity of subjecting the tripod to the arduous working conditions on my trip to Spitsbergen I am pleased to say that it performed extremely well giving no problems whatsoever on both the rough terrain of the arctic

tundra or when working from the zodiacs in the pack-ice. The tubular legs slide in and out very smoothly and are easily locked firmly into position by means of the 'chunky' rotary locking rings even when one is wearing gloves - far easier to operate than the smaller ones on my older alloy tripod!

I was particularly pleased to find that these locking rings did not tend to contract and over tighten when moving from a warm environment into freezing cold conditions and could always be loosened without any problem. I found the tripod very stable when used with lenses up to the Canon 500 f4.5 in size although I was inclined to use it with just the three leg sections extended when using this, my largest lens. All three upper tripod legs are fitted with external foam sleeves which allow the tripod with legs extended and complete with large lens/camera body to seat nicely and comfortably on one's shoulder when walking over rough ground.

In conclusion, I can fully recommend the Kood tripod as a very stable, well engineered and far less costly alternative to others currently available.

Full details: www.koodinternational.com

Email: info@koodinternational.com

Images of Wildlife in an Arctic Spring by Charles Brown ARPS

My visit to Spitsbergen in late June was very rewarding - with spectacular scenery. The number of species of birds that visit the area to breed on the tundra in the short arctic spring and other animals that can be found on the pack ice during this same period is small but provide lots of photographic opportunities.

Images (from top to bottom):

- 1 Bearded Seal *Erignanathus barbatus*
At rest on an ice floe.
- 2 Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* Male in
summer plumage on breeding ground.
- 3 Walrus *Odobenus rosmarus*
Group at rest on pack ice.
- 4 King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*
Drake on pool recently free of ice.





Above: Orange-tip hindwing underside 'green patch' scales showing top and bottom of the focusing range

Above – burdock barbs at the top and bottom of the focusing range, no spotting or manipulation

Below: final image of Orange-tip hindwing blended from 15 files and sharpened.

Below: the final image, blended from 6 files, manipulated, cropped and sharpened



Image stacking using Helicon Focus

by John Bebbington

It has always been possible to combine photographic images but the advent of digital imaging has made the process far easier – although it has also created many pitfalls!

My particular interest in image stacking comes from the desire to produce photomicrographs of butterfly and moth wing-scales, pollen grains and other minute plant structures with far more depth of field than I could obtain with film. When I used to show Kodachrome 25 slides of scales the audiences were usually wowed – but the effect is far greater when the image is sharp overall!

Butterfly and moth wings are not flat – they undulate and there can be millimetres of difference between the highest and lowest areas of a wing under the microscope and this is far too much for an edge-to-edge sharp image at x100. Using a cover-slip to flatten the wing is useful for transmitted light images but it isn't really an option when photographing by reflected light.

I have never had access to electron microscopy or had the technique, time and patience which some darkroom workers have used to combine multiple film photomicrographs. Thus, when I heard that software could be used to combine images, it seemed to be worth investigating.

As I am a Mac user I began by downloading a free trial version of the only reasonably-priced compatible software I could find - Helicon Focus – which seemed simple and straightforward. The first task was to scan some old film photomicrographs and try to combine them, but this failed because they didn't register exactly.

I then tried using our Canon Ixus 500 held over the microscope eyepiece (we didn't have a microscope adaptor for this camera) but although the individual images were very good indeed, once again registration was a problem.

At about this time Pentax brought out the K10D which is compatible with all my old Pentax gear including the microscope adaptor. At last I was able

to take images which were accurately registered and suitable for blending with Helicon Focus. An added bonus was a gift of an old Nikon photographic microscope which was 'broken' (actually it only needed a new power plug!!). Obviously this has superb optics. It has a numbered scale on the fine focus knob and a fixed mark on the coarse focus wheel which makes selection of the focus range and of the interval between individual images very simple.

Now to details of reflected light images using an example of a butterfly wing (I get my specimens from road casualties, spiders' webs and by scrounging dead specimens from butterfly houses so no live creatures are harmed in the process!). I chose the underside of an Orange-tip hindwing as it has what appear to be green patches; they are however a mixture of yellow and black scales when seen magnified.

Firstly I cut out piece of the wing and attach it as flat as I can to a microscope slide using Scotch magic tape. This is then placed on the microscope stage and a suitable area selected by looking through the microscope. The camera is now mounted and the lighting set up – I use a cold swan-neck light with a silver foil reflector to soften shadows. A bright light is useful for fine focus through the camera, although 'live view' (which the K10D doesn't have) makes this easier

I found highest focusing point of the image and noted the reading on the focusing scale – it was 20. I then repeated with the lowest point - the reading was 35. A series of 15 images were then taken with the same manual exposure and ensuring precise registration focussing down through the range, one focusing scale mark for each image.

It is simplest to take JPEG images as this shortens processing time but I use RAW on the principle that I might one day want to produce large prints. However when the downloaded files are processed it's essential to treat them all identically.

Now the files are selected and processed; the larger and more numerous the files, the more cups of

Book Review

Guide to Orchids

by Richard and Mavis Gulliver

Illustrations by Carol Roberts

Published by:- Field Studies Council
ISBN 978 1 85153 233 9. OP121

This is another in the excellent AIDGAP series of books and charts produced by the Field Studies Council. It is a six-fold chart of this fascinating group of plants with full colour illustrations on one side and splendid notes and keys on the reverse.

I first came to orchids in the late sixties and have had forty years or so gently discovering them. I would have loved to have had this chart to help me along my way. Although I do know orchids quite well by now, I nevertheless found it to be delightful.

The illustrations are very good indeed, as is to be expected from Carol Roberts, whose botanical work is excellent. The colours are reproduced accurately, at least to my eye, remembering that orchids can and do vary enormously. There are close-up studies of individual flowers where necessary.

The Key works very simply, match up the flower type with the line drawing across the top of the notes chart, then look down to the group suggested e.g. if R matches the flower type, look down to R and you will find Marsh orchid and Spotted-orchid Genus, further reading and comparing will bring you to your particular specimen.

Scientific names of orchids are changing rapidly as more and more molecular analysis is carried out. The names in this chart are taken from the 'New Flora of the British Isles' by C A Stace and are based on morphological characters. This makes it easier for those of us who are 'amateur naturalists/botanists' and who have grown up with the system. However notes are given on the newer names based on DNA analysis in the new Bateman list. These new names are now being used in the world of conservation. It will take some time to settle down I'm afraid but don't let this put you off these wonderful flowers. The commoner ones, which you will come across most of the time, do have more settled names. If you live in the world of Bee Orchid and Early-purple Orchid, rather than *Orchis apifera* and *Orchis mascula* you will hardly be troubled at all. The cost should be no more than £5.00

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Image stacking using Helicon Focus

by John Bebbington

continued from page 27

coffee you can make in the meantime! Eventually the software produces a blended image which gives great depth of field and can be sharpened and resized in Photoshop as necessary for projection or printing.

Transmitted light images are produced in the same way, using the built-in microscope light and setting the white balance to tungsten (no need for those blue filters). It is very difficult (at least I find it so!) to get absolute cleanliness within the microscope optics and on the microscope slide – a disadvantage of an old dusty house! However Photoshop can be used to 'spot out' the images.

I particularly wanted to produce an image of Burdock fruit barbs – the 'itching powder' which makes dogs scratch when they get Burdock heads in their fur – for a 'Fruits and Seed Dispersal' lecture. These barbs – around 5mm long in real life – are beautifully sculptured, as can be seen from the blended image on page 22.

The blending technique can also be used to produce close-up and macro images with exceptional depth of field – look at John McCarthy's article 'Supermacro Photography' on the 'Better Photographs' website by going to: www.better-photographs.com/macro-photography

Chamois, Wolves and Bears of the Nizke Tatry Mountains, Slovakia by Chuck Eccleston ARPS

continued from page 23

Next day we checked the ridge to the west but due to very low cloud did not see a thing. Around 3 pm. we met back at the refuge and Melanie treated us to a one hour plus descent in the land rover along a very precipitous mountain track, brilliant driving on her part!! After this the rain started in earnest and we had to abandon all research for the last three days, a great pity.

On our last day we decided to take the ski lift as far as possible and then walk to Chopok, another mountain refuge, with the hope that if the cloud cover lifted we would see some chamois. The ski lift was an adventure in its self - you could hardly see your hand in front of your face, but by the time we got to the top we were above the clouds and could see quite well. Snow had been falling on the high mountains for a few days, so we commenced our climb in quite deep snow which soon became even deeper. By the time we reached the refuge, some two hours later, we were walking through snow up to 100cm thick, with many deep snow drifts, which was quite tiring. At the refuge we were drank wonderful hot chocolate, made with real chocolate, making the climb worth every step. While we were there, a porter arrived - he had walked the same route carrying 50kg of supplies for the refuge on his back, making our efforts seem very feeble!!

All too soon the expedition came to an end and Melanie and the Swiss chap drove us back to Bratislava in the landrovers, they drove for four hours in absolutely torrential rain, spray and mist and after they dropped us off they had to continue to Vienna to return one of the vehicles to a hire company, what heroes. We spent a further three days exploring Bratislava before catching the plane home.

Photographic opportunities on the expedition were quite limited, mainly because we were there to carry out research and only had to use digital cameras to record any tracks we were unsure of. The second restriction was one of weight, fortunately my wife carried all the research equipment, radios, gps, clipboard, batteries etc. plus our lunches, water and a thermos of coffee, leaving me free to carry my Canon 1dMk111, 100mm-400mm lens, 24mm-105mm lens and a 100mm macro lens plus water, fleeces and waterproofs. Most of my photography was limited to the numerous forms of fungi in the forests and some flowers in the upland meadows. I managed some shots of a pair of golden eagles, but they were miles away and the images very small. Had the weather been kinder we could have stayed over-night at Chopok and then ridge walked to observe the chamois. The French natural history photographer assisted by the Swiss chap got up at 2.30am one morning and walked up to Chopok in the dark, a climb of some 500m. They encountered some marmots and a large herd of chamois and were able to secure many photographs of them as the chamois are quite habituated to humans.

Fitness levels required for this kind of expedition vary considerably and Slavo easily catered for the differing degrees of hill walking and map reading experience in the group. We had a great time and would definitely consider undertaking another Biosphere expedition in the future. If you would like further information on Biosphere expeditions go to www.biosphere-expeditions.org and follow the links to expeditions and Slovakia. If you would like to chat about what's involved please do not hesitate to email me via our Editor.



The Brilliance of Photography -

A Contemporary Group Event

The Contemporary Group of the RPS has organised a prestigious event to be held at the Cheltenham Film Studios on Saturday and Sunday 23rd-24th May 2009. Eight top photo-graphers will speak about their personal projects and the role of contemporary art photography today and in the past. There will also be a print appraisal session for attendee's work planned for the Saturday evening. Speaker's published books will also be available for sale.

Speakers

Gerry Badger, will talk on the major post-World War II photographers.

Stephen Gill, who has recently published 'Hackney Flowers' and 'Archaeology in Reverse' featuring East London.

John Blakemore Hon FRPS is one of England's leading landscape photographers whose work is included in many public collections. John will show his recent work 'Domestic Spaces'.

Richard Sadler Hon FRPS.

Richard is the past Contemporary Group Chair and was recently awarded a Fenton Medal by the RPS. His talk is entitled 'From Today Photography is Dead'.

Peter Kennard's work is internationally known with examples at The British Museum and The Arts Council of England. He has published several books and is Senior Tutor in photography at the Royal College of Art. Peter plans to present some of his recent political commentary work.

Bill Jackson has been working as a photographer in the fine arts for over 25 years. He taught lens based and interactive media in British art schools for 25 years before taking early retirement in 2006.

Daniel Meadows teaches Participatory Media and Photography at Cardiff University. His idea of Digital Storytelling has been described as "the most ambitious of all the BBC's user generated content offerings". Daniel's talk is entitled 'Pictures that talk: photo-documentary in the multimedia age'.

Paul Hill MBE Hon. FRPS is Professor of Photography, Course Leader of the MA Photography course, De Montfort University, Leicester, mentors MAIS students and supervises MPhil. PhD candidates.

This unique event should be of major interest to photographers with a wide range of interests, and will be open to all, whether or not they are RPS members. You are invited to express your interest in attending and to reserve a place as numbers are expected to be limited. A booking form is available on request or can be downloaded from the website of the Contemporary Group www.rpscontemporary.org

Local accommodation is available if required, with the Cheltenham Travelodge directly adjacent to the Cheltenham Film Studios, Arle Court, Hatherley Lane, Cheltenham (www.manorbythelake.co.uk)

Cost:

A deposit of £25 per person is required to secure a place at this event. Cheques to be payable to 'RPS Contemporary Group'. Payments in full may also be sent if you prefer. (£90 for both days, members of the Contemporary Group £75. Sat only £55 (Group members £45). Sun only £45 (Group members £40). Portfolio reviews £10.

Payments to Avril Harris,
92 Old Park Ridings, Grange Park London N21 2ES
Email: avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk.
Tel: 020 8360 7996.

Contact details:

Contemporary Group website:
www.rpscontemporary.org

Avril Harris, Contemporary Group Events Organiser,
92 Old Park Ridings, Grange Park, London, N21 2ES
Email avrilrharris@blueyonder.co.uk

Travelodge Cheltenham Hotel, Golden Valley
Roundabout, Hatherley Lane, Cheltenham, GL51 6TA
Tel: 0871 984 6202, Fax: 01242 241 748 or book
on-line at www.travelodge.co.uk

Elections 2009

New Committee Members required to perform a variety of tasks for the Nature Group.

Every two years at our AGM we elect the committee for the following two years. The Nature Group committee welcomes nominations from any member who feels they could assist in the running of the group by performing a role or because they have a special skill to offer.

What is involved

Being a Committee Member requires a willingness to assist in a variety of events and or tasks plus attendance at Committee Meetings - these are held two or three times a year, usually but not exclusively at Smethwick PS Clubrooms, nr Junction 2 of the M5.

If you feel that you would like to be more involved in the running of your group, or if you would like to nominate someone, please complete the nomination form opposite and return to Nature Group Secretary, Margaret Johnson LRPS by the end of November.

Nomination Form for Elections 2009

Please complete and return before
30th November 2008

I wish to propose

for the Office of

or - as a Committee Member
(Please delete as appropriate)

Name of Proposer (Capitals)

Proposer's signature

Name of Seconder (Capitals)

Seconder's signature

I agree to accept this nomination (Signed)

After completion by all three parties please post to:

**Nature Group Secretary
Margaret Johnson LRPS
53 Mapperley Orchard,
Arnold,
Nottingham,
NG5 8AH**



Volunteers needed to host Field Meetings

“Why aren’t there more field meetings in my region?”
A question frequently asked by Nature Group members to the committee.

Committee Members’ time is often fully occupied with other Nature Group work and therefore it is just not possible for all of us to host field meetings, although several do host such events and they are always well attended. It is not practical to expect anyone to host a field meeting at a site which is far from their home and involves a great deal of travelling. Consequently, every year, we ask members to volunteer to host a field meeting in their region of the country.

Hosting a field meeting requires no special knowledge. All that is required is a familiarity of the area and what subjects of interest are likely to be found there. Volunteers are not expected to instruct in photography, be experts at identification or be experienced naturalists. A genuine interest in nature and a desire to meet and share ideas with like minded individuals are the only criteria required for hosting a meeting.

If you are familiar with a wildlife park, nature reserve or woodland near to you, please consider volunteering. The meeting does not have to be held on a weekend - many of our meetings are held during the week and are very popular with retired Nature Group members.

If you are unsure about the suitability of your choice of venue, please contact the Programme Co-ordinator, Colin Smith FRPS - address and phone number opposite - who will be pleased to discuss your idea with you.

So, the answer to the question “Why aren’t there more field meetings in my region?” is down to you. Do something about it and volunteer. You won’t regret it!

RPS Nature Group - Field Meetings 2009

Location _____

Meeting Place _____

Grid Reference _____

Leader(s) _____

Day & date _____

Cost (eg car parking) _____

Main subjects of interest :- _____

Items to bring (tick as applicable and add any other necessary items below).

Stout Shoes ☐ Wellingtons ☐

Waterproofs ☐ Packed Lunch ☐

Additional information:-

Name _____

Address _____

Tel No: _____

E mail: _____

Please return this form as soon as possible/ or to arrive not later than 18th January 2009

**Colin Smith FRPS
3 St Hilda's Close,
Chorley,
Lancs, PR7 3NU**

Tel: 01257 271981

E-mail: colin-smith@foto-wizard.fsnet.co.uk

'Journey South' -

David Osborn's spectacular wildlife photo-tour of

The Falkland Islands

November 2009



For further information or a brochure contact

David Osborn FRPS EFIAP

Tel 01263 511221

Email poppyland3@aol.com or

www.davidosbornphotography.co.uk

Wildlife Photo-tours 2009 & 2010

organised and led by Wildlife Photographer

David Osborn FRPS EFIAP

Small groups - availability limited on all tours.
Bookings now being accepted for:

Canadian Rockies - September 2009

Fungi Workshop, Norfolk - October 2009

Birds of Florida - March 2010

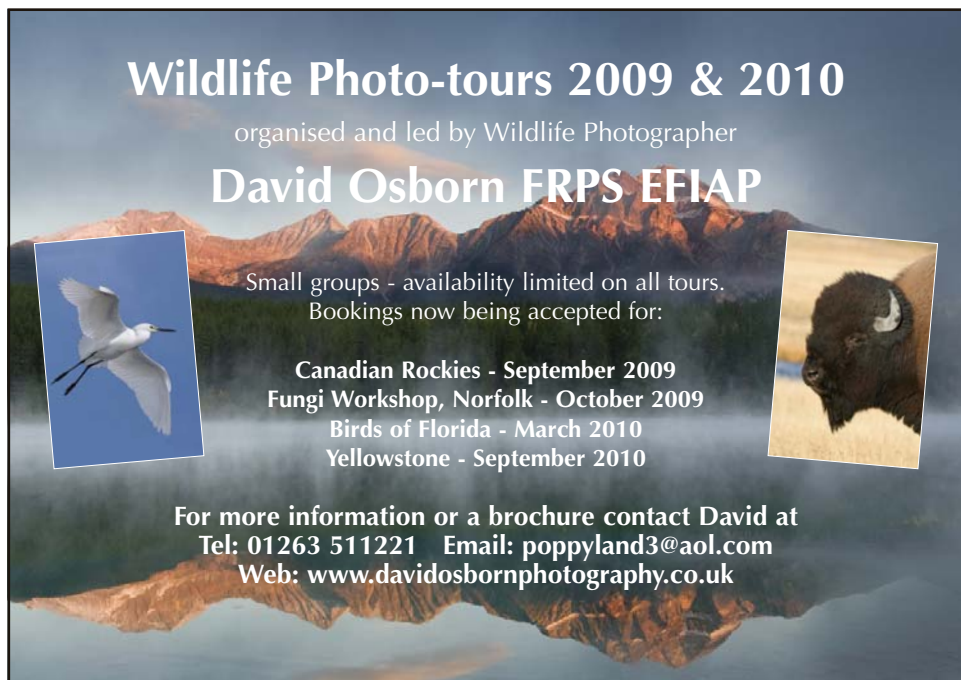
Yellowstone - September 2010



For more information or a brochure contact David at

Tel: 01263 511221 Email: poppyland3@aol.com

Web: www.davidosbornphotography.co.uk





Pictures by Richard Revels FRPS

See article 'Orchid Hunting with a Camera' on page 10

Left: Autumn Ladies Tresses is our latest flowering orchid, coming into bloom in mid August and over by mid September. The twisting flowers around the stem gives it its latin name spiralis. Photographed on the Isle of Wight early September 2006.

Below left: Bumble Bees are a major pollinator of Common Spotted orchids.

Below right: This Military orchid was photographed in Oxfordshire. Besides the problem of wind movement, depth of field needs to be adequate when taking a close up an individual flower. Unfortunately in 2008 orchid collectors dug up some plants from this site.

