

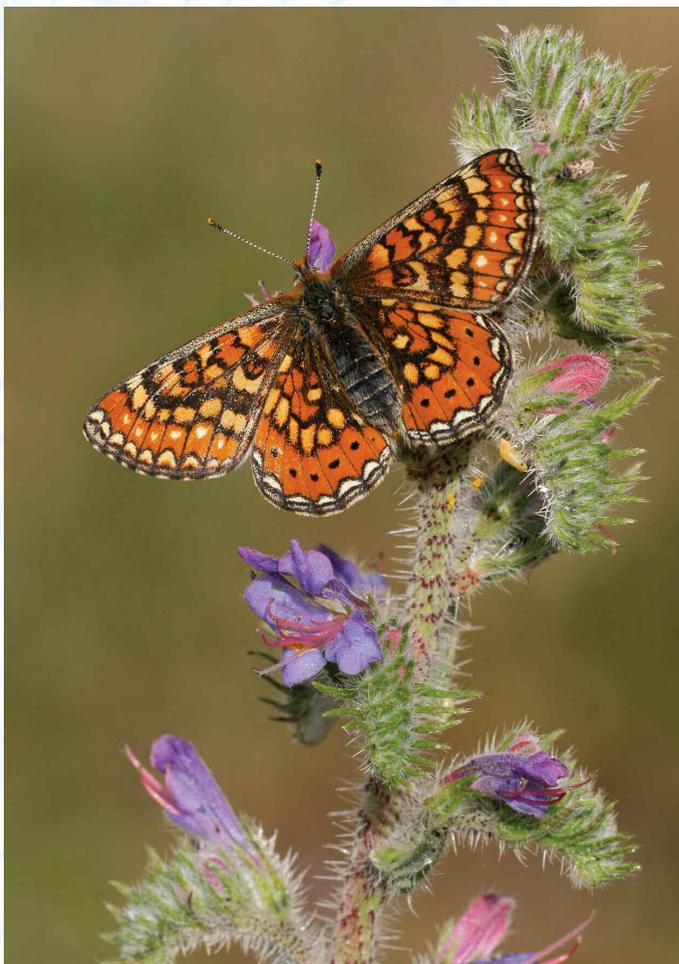
THE IRIS



Magazine of the Nature Group of the RPS

Issue No. 108
Winter 2010-2011

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Marsh Fritillary by Martin Withers FRPS

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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 - 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.

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Distribution:

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* Both forms plus the Entry Form for the 2011 Nature Group Exhibition are also available at:
www.rpsnaturegroup.com

A Date for your Diaries

Chairman's Day

Provisional Date: Sunday 6th November 2011

Smethwick P.S. Clubrooms

10.00am for 10.30am start

Programme 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. 2000 to 2007 are only available in slide format. Since 2008 a CD of the Exhibition has been produced and is available for purchase.

For more information please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above or go to our website: www.rpsnaturegroup.com

Editorial

Welcome to the Winter 2010/2011 edition of The Iris. Firstly, let me take this opportunity to thank all those members who responded to my plea for articles - some of which are included in this issue and others which you will have the pleasure of seeing in the Spring and Summer editions. Again, thank you all.

Kicking off this edition is a report of a trip to Gran Sasso D`Italia and Abruzzo National Park by Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS illustrated with images taken by Gianpiero and Martin Withers FRPS. Following this is an account of a visit to the Ngorongoro Crater by John Bullpitt FRPS and a visit to Cuba by Kevin Elsy ARPS.

The next item in this issue is your entry form for the 2011 Nature Group Annual Exhibition. Please enter your images. There are sections for both prints and Projected Images (slides or digital) so no one should feel left out in the cold. The Entry Form can be removed without detriment to your copy of The Iris, so please use it.

The second half of this issue contains articles by Colin Smith FRPS and David Cantrille FRPS. Colin retells his story of a visit to Iceland while David's account is of his visit to Etosha. Then we hear from a member about a Hedgehog in his care and finally from a devout slide user who has finally made the transition into the world of digital image capture.

You will also find two forms - one is for the nomination for election to the committee. Committee members are elected for a two year period every other year. A postal voting slip will be included in the next issue (if necessary) for any member not able to attend the AGM. Votes received will be added to those of members who do attend the AGM. The other form is a plea to members to volunteer to lead a Field Meeting. We bang on about this every year - every year we are asked for more field meetings and yet fewer and fewer members volunteer to host such an event. No specialised knowledge is required, you will not be required to teach anything or be an expert. You only need to know your way around your chosen venue and to have a good idea of what is likely to be found at the time of year you choose. So, what is stopping you? Contact Colin Smith asap.

That just leaves me enough space to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and photographically productive New Year.



From the chair

First I must thank John Bebbington FRPS, my Vice Chairman, for standing in for me and writing the Chairman's report for the last issue of *The Iris*. Since then things have been fairly quiet as most of us have been enjoying our holidays, whether at home or abroad, and hopefully taking lots of new wildlife images.

Between now and Christmas there are a few field meetings coming up - I shall certainly do my best to attend as many of them as I can and I trust that you will too. Field Meetings are organised for members by members, so please attend if you can, especially as those members acting as leaders will have gone to a fair bit of trouble organising them.

Last Christmas I suffered a heart attack. Since then I have had both good and bad times but have had lots of leisure time to relax and enjoy our new garden. Three years ago we moved from our bungalow in Mountsorrel, Leicestershire to a barn conversion in Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire - part of an old farm complex. Looking south, out to the front, our view is of our local church - just a stone's throw from our front door step. At the rear of our back garden we have ranch style fence which separates us from a field which drops some 100 feet before rising 300 feet - at one time this was a slag heap going back to the mining days of Bilsthorpe Colliery, now it is fully regenerated with trees and looks just like part of the Sherwood Forest.

Throughout the past eight months I have spent many hours watching my local wildlife. In the Spring the Rooks were busy renewing their old rookeries and later in the year, when they had finished breeding, there were hundreds and hundreds of them flying over our barn at sunset to roost in the trees on the hill opposite along with Crows and Jackdaws.

What we all look forward to is sighting our first Swallow bringing the first hope of summer, followed by House Martins and, always last, the Swifts, then we know summer has arrived.

Most of us have some kind of bird feeders in our gardens. Ours attracts mainly finches - we have

had flocks of Yellow Hammers. We also had a pair of Pheasants which bred in the adjacent field - the female brought her chicks into the garden. It was not long before the birds of prey found our feeding stations and made use of the easy pickings. We only have three: Kestrel, Sparrow Hawk and a pair of resident Buzzard. Recently one Buzzard was quartering our drive and the church grave yard eventually landing on the church tower only to be chased off by a crow.

The end of July and early August was a good time to watch the Swifts gathering together just before they set off south followed soon after by the Swallows and House Martins. On August 11th we had hundreds of Martins flying low over the garden and our little valley searching for food, resting on our pergola and house roof, then suddenly they were disturbed - a Kestrel had taken one from our ridge. August is also the time we have large numbers of Goldfinches and their young coming to the feeders along with many Greenfinch and of course Wood Pigeon.

We have also planted many butterfly loving plants in our garden and have been rewarded with a varied selection of butterflies. Our pond attracts Dragonflies and has given us lots of opportunities to photograph them. We also have a resident young Rabbit which seems to do no harm to the garden and an even more welcome visitor - a Hedgehog.

Well that's summer gone for this year. I hope that you all have enjoyed yours as much as I have.



Gran Sasso D`Italia and Abruzzo National Park

by Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS

During late May 2009, three friends, Martin Withers FRPS, John Wakely and myself, Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS, spent a week in the Abruzzo region of central Italy. Our first 4 days in the area of Mount Gran Sasso d`Italia (Great Stone of Italy) and the remainder in the Abruzzo National Park.

Gran Sasso d'Italia is a mountain located in Abruzzo and forms the centerpiece of the Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park, established in 1993, and holding the highest mountains in continental Italy south of the Alps. It is part of the Apennines, the mountain range that runs the entire length of the Italian peninsula. This area is well known for the outstanding beauty of the landscape and for its flowers. Teramo and L'Aquila are the nearest cities to the Gran Sasso, while Rome is 132 km by road.

Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise (National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, often abbreviated to Abruzzo National Park) was the first Italian national park, being founded in 1923. The majority of the park is located in the Abruzzo region though it is not constrained by regional boundaries and also includes territory in Lazio and Molise. The park headquarters are in Pescasseroli in the Province of L'Aquila. The park currently covers an area 506.82 km² (195.68 sq mi).

Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo plays an important role in the preservation of species in danger of extinction, such as the Italian Wolf, the Abruzzo Chamois, the European Lynx and Marsican Brown Bear. The park is around two thirds Beech forest though many other trees grow in the area including the Silver Birch and Black and Mountain pines. Other characteristic fauna of the park are Roe and Red Deer, Wild Boar, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Alpine Chough, Snowfinch, White-backed Woodpecker, two species of Salamander and lots of insects and beetles, including the rare *Rosalia longicom*.

The aim of our trip was to have a short holiday in search of wild flowers, mainly orchids, and insects. The accommodations were both good and affordable and the areas we visited surpassed our expectations being incredibly rich in orchids and other flowers,

nothing rare or unusual, but an absolute spectacle. The weather was incredibly hot, but higher up in the mountains the air was much cooler.

We flew from East Midlands airport to Rome in the early morning, arriving in Rome about 10 am. We hired a car and took the Rome Pescara motorway, exiting at a place called Popoli and travelled the road N.17 spending all afternoon driving slowly and stopping frequently to visit meadows and small woodlands. Along a very interesting road leading to San Benedetto in Perillis and the small road leading to Collepietro we found *Orchis bertolonii* (Bertoloni Orchid), *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple Orchid), *Ophrys bombilifera* (Bumblebee Orchid), *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramid Orchid), *Orchis morio* (Green-winged Orchid), *Cephalanthera longifolia* (Sword-leaved Helleborine), *Ophrys sphegodes* (Early Spider Orchid), *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly Orchid), *Platanthera bifolia* (Lesser Butterfly Orchid) and *Orchis italica* (Naked Man Orchid).

Some special butterflies were found, like Italian Marbled White, Southern White Admiral, Marsh, Glanville and Marbled Fritillaries, Transparent Burnet and Beautiful Damsel self to name just a few.

Around the city of L`Aquila there was a good display of Poppy fields, obviously the fields had not been sprayed, and a close look proved to be very rewarding, not just for the display of poppies, but for good old arable field flowers still growing amongst them such as Ground-pine (*Ajuga chamaepitys*) Corn Cocker (*Agrostemma githago*) Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) Venus` Looking Glass (*Legousia hybrida*) Forking Larkspur (*Consolida regalis*) and Summer Pheasant`s-eye (*Adonis aestivalis*)

We stayed in Navelli at a B&B named 'Secret Abruzzo', owned by Francesca and Jimmy - a very friendly place where we made our base for 4 days.

We spent the next 3 days visiting the area from Navelli to Campo Imperatore passing through incredibly rich orchid areas, especially around the villages of Capestrano, Ofena, Villa Santa Lucia degli Abruzzi, Castel del Monte, Castelvecchio Calvisio, Calascio and Santo Stefano di Sessano. We encountered *Ophrys promontorii*, *Orchis militaris*

(Military orchid), *Orchis purpurea* (Lady orchid), *Orchis tridentata* (Toothed orchid), *Orchis pauciflora* (Sparsely-flowered orchid), *Acera anthropophorum* (Man orchid), *Orchis picta*, *Orchis bertolonii*, *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple orchid), *Ophrys bombylifera* (Bumblebee orchid), *Anacamptis pyramidalis* (Pyramidal orchid), *Orchis morio* (Green-winged orchid), *Cephalanthera longifolia* (Sword leaved Helleborine), *Ophrys sphegodes* (Early Spider orchid), *Platanthera chlorantha* (Greater Butterfly orchid), *Platanthera bifolia* (Lesser Butterfly orchid), *Orchis italica* (Naked man orchid), *Orchis provincialis* (Provence orchid), *Dactylorhiza sambucina* (Elder-flowered orchid) both red and yellow forms plus some beautiful hybrids such as *Orchis hybrida*, a very robust plant, a cross between the Lady and Military orchids *O.bilineata*=(*Ophrys bertoloni* x Early Spider orchid), *O.couloniana*=(*O.bertoloni* x *O.promontori*), *O.neowalteri*=(Early Spider x *O.promontori*).

In these unspoiled meadows the insect life was very interesting too, lots of day flying moths, beetles and butterflies such as Large, Small and Red Underwing Skipper, Eastern Dappled White, Wood and Small Southern White, Painted Lady, Common and Scarce Swallowtail, Green Hairstreak and Wall Brown, lots of fritillaries like Queen of Spain, Pearl-bordered, Spotted, Marsh, Glanville, and Knapweed, also great numbers of Blues including Common, Little, Silver-studded, Mazarine, Adonis, Chalk-hill and Brown Argos, just to name a few. The Copper group was present in the form of Small and Purple-shot, but the highlights were several beautiful Morocco Orange-tips in tip-top condition.

Campo Imperatore was very interesting too. Lining the roadside to the summit were an incredible amount of Lady Orchids (*O. purpurea*), Military Orchids (*O. militaris*) and Elder Flower Orchids (*D. sambucina*), at the summit one area was covered with yellow Ranunculus while another area of the mountain was carpeted with Pansies in various colour forms of Blue, Red, Yellow, Pink, and White, while yet another area with melting snow was carpeted with millions of Spring Crocuses and Spring Squill (*Shilla verna*) plus a great number of Gentians both Spring and Trumpet. In the Gran Sasso area we did not find any rarities, but the beauty of it was in the richness and the vast amount of orchids that we did see, one of the most productive areas we have ever visited.

We spent the last 3 days in the Abruzzo National Park, entering the park through the north entrance along the road from Cocullo, Scanno and Passo Govi. After Scanno the road starts climbing and the



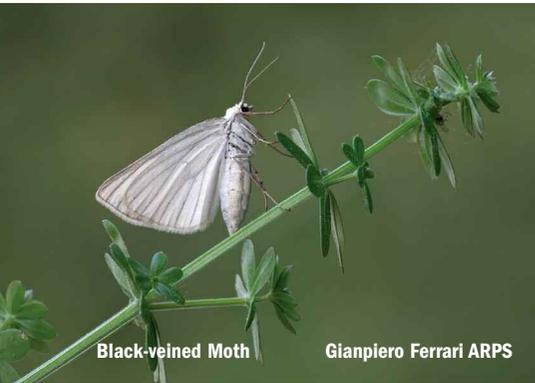
Toothed Orchid
Martin Withers FRPS



Orchis hybrida
Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS



Red-underwing Skipper Martin Withers FRPS



Black-veined Moth Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS



Moroccan Orange Tip Martin Withers FRPS



Glanville Fritillary Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS

Orchids reappear, lots of *Dactylorhiza sambucina* (Elder-flowered orchid), *Orchis provincialis* (Provence orchid), *Orchis mascula* (Early Purple orchid), *Orchis pauciflora* (Sparsely-flowered orchid) and *Orchis ustulata* (Burnt orchid). In one beautiful area we found 3 plants entirely white of Sparsely-flowered orchid and 9 plants of a beautiful, elegant, Pink coloured orchid named *Orchis coulemani* (a hybrid of Sparsely-flowered x Early Purple orchid).

At Passo Govi we found meadows full of Early purple and Elder-flowered orchid, hundreds of *Orchis pallens* (Pale-flowered orchid) a plant with beautiful light yellow coloured flowers. We had seen this orchid before in other parts of Europe, but never in such quantity, the hybrid between Pale-flowered and Early purple orchid was present too, three plants with pink coloured flowers in full bloom.

In the Park we stayed at a B&B at the village of Villetta Barrea. The first day we decided to go looking for the Scarpetta di Venere (Venus shoe) the Italian name for Lady's Slipper Orchid in a place called Camosciara, a very rare plant in the Park. The only place where it can be found south of the Alps in central Europe. In the Abruzzo National Park this plant is extremely rare, altogether there are only 12 flowering plants known to exist. We attempted to obtain some information from the Park Information Service but without luck - due to the rarity of the plants they will not give any information away. So we took a decision to go and look for it anyway. The area we went looking was a place called Camosciara, a mountain slope covered in woodland mainly Oak, Beech and Pine, it was rather like looking for a needle in a haystack. As we searched a few more orchids were added to our list, *Dactylorhiza maculata*, (Common Spotted orchid) a rare plants in this part of the world, *Listera ovata*, (Common Twayblade) and *Neottia nidus avis* (Birds nest orchid). After about 3 hours our search brought us to a little brook, in front of us appeared the most beautiful orchids we had ever seen, a group of four plants of *Cypripedium calceolus*, in full flower, our first Lady's Slippers and in a most unusual place. Photographing these orchids was not very easy, the light was very poor under the woodland canopy and this group of plants were growing only a few inches away from the brook, so the only way to do it was to take our shoes off, roll up our trousers and step into the ice cool water of the mountain brook. The excitement of finding the plants was so great that we hardly felt the cold. We spent over an hour photographing this beauty of nature, but had to take some breaks because of freezing feet!



Italian Marbled White

Martin Withers FRPS

In the evening as we returned to our accommodation, we were told that a Marsican Bear with two cubs had been seen for the past three evenings in a particular part of the Park, so we returned quickly to the car and took a long drive to try to see this very rare and elusive creature. Unfortunately, in spite of our best efforts, the bear and cubs failed to show themselves.

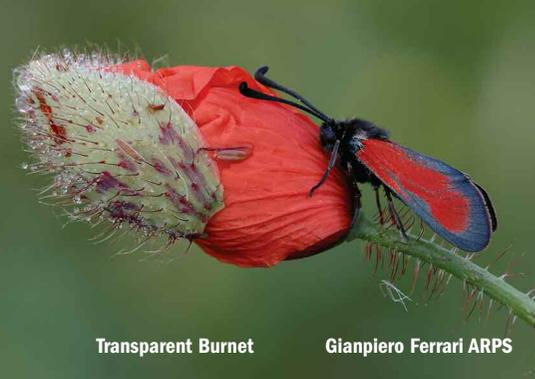
The second day we decided to go in search of the Abruzzo Chamois. This involved a two and a half hour climb to the Valle di Rose and up to the snowline of Monte Camosciara, to an altitude of 2500m. It was a hard climb but very successful as we saw about a dozen of these lovely creatures and obtained some good photographs. Other interesting finds on this mountain top included a good display of Spring Crocus, some Pale Pasque flowers, a few Primula Auricula (Bears ears) and *Saxifraga porophylla*.

Our final day of photography was spent in an amazing meadow in the southern part of the park along the road to Barrea- Alfadena, about 3 kms after the sign post marking the exit of the park. Here are a few meadows where the orchids are in great numbers, especially the Man and the Adriatic Lizard Orchid which were at their very best. This unspoiled meadow rewarded us with a great display of flower and insect life, with an amazing number of *Ascalaphid libelluloides* (strange insects resembling

Abruzzo Chamois

Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS





Transparent Burnet

Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS



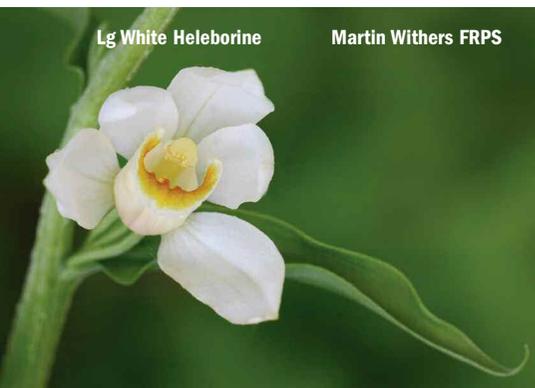
Ascalaphid or Owlfly

Martin Withers FRPS



Spring Crocus

Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS



Lg White Heleborine

Martin Withers FRPS



Lady's Slipper

Gianpiero Ferrari ARPS

a Dragonfly) and Black-veined Moth (*Siona lineata*) a day flying moth almost extinct in the British Isles.

On the last day we returned to Rome along the road to Pescasseroli, Gioia dei Marsi, and Pescina, we made a few stops between Gioia Vecchio and Gioia dei Marsi, and added a few more species to our list. There were thousands of *Cephalanthera damasonium* (White Helleborine) in full bloom, several *O. fusca* and Lesser Butterfly Orchids, but the most interesting find for us was a population of strange Late Spider Orchid (*O. fuciflora*), strange because there was a great variety and difference among the plants, there were big plants with small flowers, little plants with tiny flowers, and so many variations in colour and markings on the labellum, something we never noticed before in the *Fuciflora* group. On our return we contacted a local expert from this area, to see if he knew about this population of *O. Fuciflora*, the answer was yes and they are currently monitoring and studying this population, but as yet, they have not come to any conclusion.

Altogether our trip was very successful and very enjoyable, we had been able to see and photograph a great number of Orchids and other flowers and some truly amazing insects, in some dramatic landscapes.

Cuba – in search of the world's smallest bird

by Kevin Elsby ARPS

Although a full time GP, I am fortunate to be able to travel widely in my spare time, as a lecturer on wildlife on cruise ships and also as a wildlife tour guide for Naturetrek, one of the UK's leading wildlife holiday companies.

Over the years I have visited most of the countries of South America and the Caribbean, but had never visited Cuba. My wife had wanted to visit the island for a long time, and, after she suggested that we ought to visit soon, before it changed for ever, we flew to Havana for a 17 night trip in March 2010.

I consider myself a general naturalist, but for me this trip was all about seeing the smallest bird in the world, the Cuban Bee Hummingbird. At just 5.5 cm long and weighing less than 2g, this species is endemic to Cuba and is declining fast for a variety of reasons including habitat loss. I was therefore very keen to visit the few remaining places on the island where it could be found.

However, this trip was to be about more than one bird species. There would be many other birds to see and hopefully photograph, about 30 of which can only be found on Cuba. Add to that a wide variety of other flora and fauna, the wonderful scenery and a very interesting history and culture, and we were both looking forward to the trip immensely.

We booked with Geodysey and were met at Havana airport by our two guides, a naturalist (the Curator of Reptiles at Havana museum) and a culture guide. Both of these, together with a driver, would accompany us throughout our trip.

We visited many different parts of this large island in order to maximise the chance of the greatest variety of wildlife and culture. Travel was very easy on mostly deserted roads. The people were, without exception, delightful, and we remarked that Cuba is among the safest places that we have ever been to. There was no hassle when walking anywhere





while carrying a camera, not even through the streets of Havana, where many of the buildings were in a poor state of repair.

As for photographic equipment, I took two Canon 7D bodies together with a 100-400mm zoom, a 17-40 wide angle zoom and a 500mm f4 lens with a 1.4x converter. I always shoot in RAW, and had two portable storage devices for my images. I make two backup copies of every image. There was a near disaster on day 2 when a tripod leg gave way whilst I was looking in another direction taking a landscape shot. Imagine my feeling as I turned to see my tripod fall over with a 7D and 500mm f4 plus converter and 580 EXII flash gun attached to it! Why is it that at such times everything seems to take place in slow motion? Examination of the wreckage revealed a smashed flash gun and converter, but the body and lens (thankfully) appeared to still function. The flash gun took the brunt of the damage.

After a trip to the west of Havana for a couple of days, we moved east. One of the best places to find our main target bird is the famous Zapata swamp. Here, after much searching, we eventually came across a female Cuban Bee Hummingbird sitting on a nest about 40 feet up. Our guide pointed it out, but it is such a small species it took me 20 minutes to see it! It was against the sky and the light was very strong, so getting a good photograph proved difficult. However, later in the day, we found a male, hovering whilst taking nectar from some flowers at just above head height. It was the size of a large bee or moth (but seemingly smaller than a Privet Hawk Moth, for example), and the buzzing from its rapid wing beats was clearly audible. I managed to get off a few shots with the 100-400mm lens before it disappeared. I hoped the shutter speed that I used (1/800 sec) would be quick enough to freeze the action.

Then, amazingly, it reappeared much closer, and settled on a low twig at knee height about 10 feet away, in good light, where it began preening. However, by now I had my 500mm f4 lens on the 7D and was too close to focus! Panic on again. I therefore had to quickly move backwards in order to get the bird in focus. (I decided it would be tempting fate to change to a lens with a shorter focal length as I might miss the photo opportunity altogether.) Luckily, the bird remained preening for two or three minutes, and I got my images.

I have often been asked what is the best bird I have seen on my travels. Up until this trip, I would respond by saying that I didn't really have a favourite. I have been lucky enough to see Resplendent Quetzals in Costa Rica, Wandering Albatross in South

Georgia and Lilac-breasted Rollers in Kenya. Indeed, I have seen over 2,500 species of birds in the wild over the last 40 odd years. However, for me, the sight of the male Cuban Bee Hummingbird was the best moment's birdwatching in all that time. It truly is a spectacularly beautiful bird and I don't believe I could have asked for more.

We ended up seeing over 150 species of birds including most of the endemic ones, and I managed to photograph many of them. I also learned a great deal about the history and culture of the island. For example, as a doctor it was interesting to learn that the infant mortality rate in the island is superior to that of Washington, in spite of the American dominated embargo which prevents trade between Cuba and most other countries.

There were also several species of lizards (mostly endemic) on the island, and we saw a good number of these, including the gaudy Blue and Green Lizard. Our guides were excellent and well chosen for their roles.

Cuba is very much recommended as an excellent holiday destination for the naturalist and partner with a camera and we would happily travel with Geodyssey again.

Finally, more images from Cuba, as well as other wildlife, can be seen on my website:- <http://www.wildlifeontheweb.co.uk>



Images:

- Page 9: Cuban Bee Hummingbird feeding
- Page 10: Cuban Bee Hummingbird feeding
Cuban Bee Hummingbird perched
Cuban Emerald Hummingbird
Cuban Gnatcatcher
- Page 11: Yellow Warbler
Cuban Tody
Fernandinas Flicker
Blue & Green Lizard

The Ngorongoro Crater

by John Bulpitt FRPS



The Ngorongoro Conservation area (NCA) is located in Northern Tanzania. It lies at the western edge of the Great Rift Valley, with Mount Kilimanjaro to the east and the Serengeti to the north-west. The NCA covers 3200 sq miles and the Ngorongoro crater lies towards the southern end.

About 2.5 million years ago, Ngorongoro was a volcano that may have rivalled Kilimanjaro in size. The nearby Olduvai Gorge has yielded a remarkable record of human evolution with its fossil footprints of animals and ancestral humans. After the last eruption about 2 million years ago, the top of the Ngorongoro collapsed inwards forming a huge caldera, covering about 100 square miles.

The Ngorongoro is a World Heritage Site and is the world's largest unflooded caldera. This means that the entire rim of the old volcano is intact. It offers 7 distinct habitats: acacia forest, swamp, short grass, long grass, riverine, soda lake and woodland. The picture of the Hippo opposite shows a number of these habitats. Each habitat attracts a wide variety of birds and animals. The rim of the crater sits at 7,800 feet above sea level, and the floor descends to about 5,000 feet.



The crater is home to about 30,000 large mammals in an area naturally enclosed by the slopes of the volcano. It is the best location in Africa for Black Rhino and huge bull Elephants. There is insufficient vegetation to support breeding herds of elephant, but old males come to the crater to feed on swamp grass when their teeth can no longer cope with their traditional diet. The only large mammal that you will not see is the Giraffe, as they are unable to descend the steep slopes without lowering their heads, which raises their blood pressure to dangerous levels. There is also a huge variety of birds, some of which are variants or even distinct sub-species of those you find elsewhere in the region.

Ngorongoro has a number of advantages for photographers. Because of the altitude the air tends to be fairly clear. The backdrops are stunning and the wildlife is habituated to people and vehicles. The drawbacks are that one cannot drive off-road and there is a slight sense, perhaps, of being in a safari park. However, I have spent 12 days in the Ngorongoro during 5 separate trips to East Africa, and a disproportionate number of my most successful African images have been taken within the crater. The best time for a visit is probably mid-January to mid-March because a trip to the NCA combines well with the Serengeti to observe the Wildebeest migration - the largest single movement of wildlife on earth. I find it is best to go with a photographic group such as Mike Wilkes FRPS has organised for February 2011. At the time of writing Mike still has some vacancies. Mike can be contacted at: wilkes.m1@sky.com



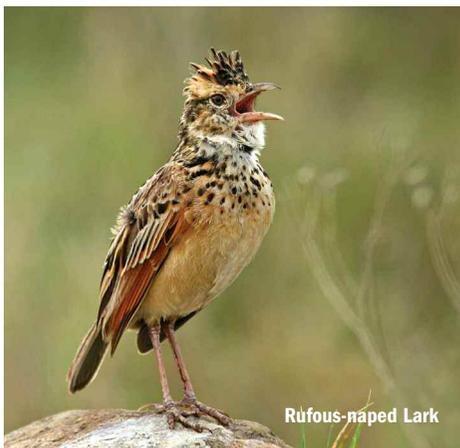
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Old Bull Elephant



Black-bellied Bustard calling



Rufous-naped Lark

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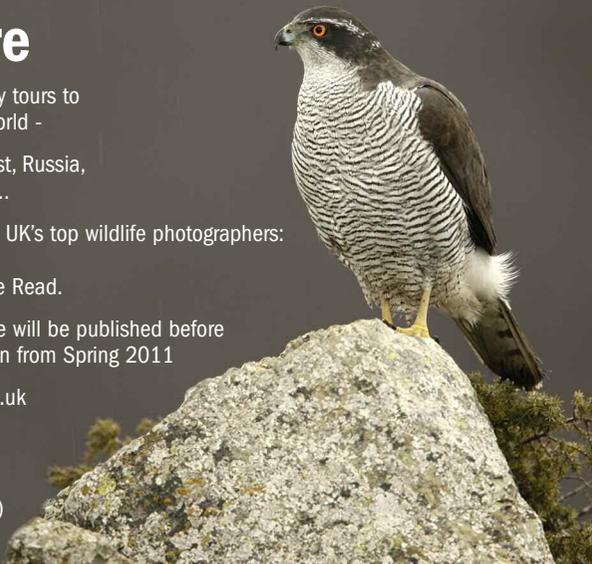
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Iceland - Land of Ice and Fire

by Colin Smith FRPS

It was with some trepidation that we followed the news of the volcanic ash cloud which played havoc with flights all around Europe this summer. We were due to visit the very heart of where the problem began! It was also with some relief and slight disappointment that the volcano stopped spewing ash and fire about two weeks before we were due to leave. The disappointment was that I would have liked to have seen a volcanic eruption as it would have been a new experience for me, but at least the travel restrictions were lifted and so the trip was on!

The trip was run by Ribble Bird Tours, a small organisation based in Blackpool which normally only caters for bird watching groups. On this occasion I persuaded Stuart, the leader, to run this trip for photographers. The party consisted of 12 people, mostly experienced photographers and many also members of the RPS with four of us belonging to the Nature Group. We left Manchester on June 25th to fly to Keflavik which is the airport for Reykjavik. On arrival we were met by our Icelandic guide and mini

bus driver, a charming lady called Holmfridur, who took us to our first hotel about an hours drive from the airport and where we stayed for three nights. This was my first experience of nights without darkness. The sun set for about half an hour before reappearing to start the new day. Quite weird and not conducive to easy sleeping in spite of the windows being fitted with blinds. This was also to be our introduction to the high prices we were promised in Iceland. A glass of beer at the bar was about £4.00 and we were told a bottle of 'ordinary' wine would have set us back some £30.00. Needless to say we all went to bed sober!

The next morning we spent along the south coast around the Gulfoss and Geyser areas. We visited Gulfoss waterfall, a popular tourist site, but well worth a visit. Nearby we came across a pair of nesting Whimbrel affording us a chance to photograph them both on the ground and in the air. En-route we visited cliff sites for Razorbills, Puffins, Common Guillemots and more interestingly, Brunnich's Guillemots, a new bird for me.





The landscape was quite awesome. Everywhere there was evidence of seismic activity stretching back thousands of years and, as we know, up to the present day. The lunar like landscape covered large areas with its tortured dominant lava shapes giving rise to spectacular scenery as well as the thermal areas with impressive geysers, steaming pools of boiling water and bubbling mud coupled with deposits of stinking yellow sulphur, all of which came through vents from far below the earth's surface. The Icelanders have harnessed this massive power by drilling bore holes, some as deep as 3000 metres, from which they tap into the super heated steam to drive generators which provide cheap electricity for the population and industry.

Generally we were very unlucky with the quality of light as we experienced a lot of cloud during our stay. Consequently we struggled to take the images we all wanted; landscapes were 'flat' and bird photography was difficult due to low level lighting conditions with many pictures being spoiled by subject movement and/or camera shake. Nevertheless we did the best we could.

We discovered some interesting plants growing on the lava fields, especially orchids, one of which we hadn't seen before. It's common name is Northern Butterfly Orchid but it is a plant found particularly in North America. It was abundant in places and grew alongside Heath Spotted orchids and Frog Orchids, both of which were sub-species peculiar to Iceland.

Butterflies were not seen and we were told that only a few migrant insects, like the Painted Lady, were found when conditions were favourable.

One of the first things that struck me was the sheer size of the country. Iceland is in fact bigger than Ireland and yet has a population of only 30,000 people, most of whom live in and around Reykjavik or near the coast where fishing is the main occupation. Where the land is suitable, there are scattered farms, sheep farming and the rearing of magnificent horses seem to be the main activities.

On day four we travelled to the Snaefellsnes peninsula, along dirt roads for much of the way. We stopped to see a fault line in the earth's crust where an earthquake had pushed up a line of rock a hundred feet high consisting of columns of basalt rivalling both the Giants Causeway and Fingal's cave for sheer impact. We encountered large numbers of orchids growing amongst the lava which provided an unusual background for these beautiful plants. We also saw large swathes of wild lupin turning the hillsides a purplish blue with the density and

intensity of the plants. These were Alaskan lupin originating in the USA, as the name suggests, and we saw them everywhere we went.

Great Northern Divers with their young were seen quite a way out on a lake and we saw lots of wading birds like Redshank and Snipe - if we approached too closely their aggressive behaviour suggested that they were defending their offspring.

Days five and six were spent on the Snaefellnes peninsula visiting various sites including the small island of Flatey. In spite of the dull but dry weather once again, we found Flatey to be an excellent place for birds and were able to get close to Black Guillemots on the coastal rocks and very close to the wonderful and common Red-necked Phalaropes which completely ignored our presence and carried on with their normal activities as though we weren't there. Both Snipe and Redshank were very approachable and gave us lots of opportunities to photograph them - but oh for a bit of better light!

We had a boat trip the next day, supposedly to photograph the White-tailed Eagle at a nesting site on a small rocky island. As it turned out the boat stopped about 100metres from the bird perched on a rock making meaningful photography impossible.

The next day we travelled north and made a few stops where we had fairly close views of Red-throated Divers, Great Northern Divers, Slavonian Grebes and both Harlequin and Barrows Golden-eye ducks, but once again we suffered the frustration of having poor light to contend with.

We stayed at Guesthouse Ongulsstadir for the next three nights and on day eight visited Lake Myvatn which is an outstanding lake for wildfowl including a wide variety of exciting birds like Slavonian Grebes and Divers. Lake Myvatn is also renowned for the immense number of black flies which are to be found there. Fortunately they don't bite but their sheer numbers can drive a person to despair. However on our visit there were hardly any flies to be seen, probably they didn't like the weather either! So our frustration continued with the lack of light. Sometimes it would be quite bright and even occasionally sunny while we were travelling but as soon as the bus stopped the sun disappeared and Sod's law prevailed once again.

We also had a boat trip to see whales. A few people on board had a very brief sighting of a Minke Whale but otherwise we saw nothing - the sea trip was good though. On the way back to our guesthouse we took a long diversion to another waterfall to see the elusive Gyr Falcon which regularly nested on the steep rocky cliffs alongside





the waterfall. At this point the heavens opened and the quarter mile walk to the waterfall was less than enjoyable as our waterproof clothing was put to the test. However eagle-eyed Stuart, our leader, found the Gyr Falcon perched on a rock across the other side of the fall. It was all we could do to see it at all but it was a magnificent bird and was in the end well worth the soaking we got. I took a surprisingly good record shot of the bird (but not good enough to include here).

Day ten found us travelling about 150 miles across the interior mostly along dirt roads. For mile after mile there was nothing except for the twisted volcanic landscape as far as the eye could see in every direction. For those who think the American moon landings were a hoax then surely this was the place to film the whole event. I swear I caught sight of the moon buggy just disappearing behind a large 'moonrock'! We suddenly came across another thermal spot with the usual impressive features where we spent an hour or so photographing emerging steam and slurping mud whilst some intrepid visitors took a plunge into a steaming pool. It really was fascinating. It was also on this leg of the journey that we came closest to the icecap and the associated glaciers as we were by now quite high up. In common with most glacial areas, the ice is retreating at quite an alarming rate, Holmfridur could remember the glacier extending much further down the valley not so very long ago.

We spent our final night in Iceland back at the hotel we first stayed in on our arrival ten days previously and travelled to the airport the next morning for our flight back to Manchester. Everyone had enjoyed the experience and I for one would like to go back again sometime in the future.

Pictures:

- Page 19: Whimbrel
- Page 20: Alaskan lupin
Extinct volcanic crater
Basalt columns, Gerduberg
- Page 21: Frog Orchid
Northern Butterfly Orchid
- Page 22: Golden Plover
Redshank
Red-throated Diver
Red-necked Phalarope (female)
- Back cover: Geyser at Geyser
Waterfall
Hot Springs, Hveravellir

Etosha National Park

by David Cantrille FRPS

My first safari was to Etosha in Namibia during September 2008. The National Park skirts the Etosha Pan, a vast dry lake bed which forms part of the Namib desert. The park terrain is a mixture of thorn scrub, mopane woodland and grassy plains.

A three and a half hour drive north from Windhoek airport on an excellent tarmac road took us to the Africat Foundation at Okonjima. Here, the reserve is dedicated to the conservation of Namibia's large carnivores, particularly leopards and cheetahs. We were able to see and photograph orphaned or injured cats in their protected enclosures. Game drives also took us to the surrounding vast reserve.

Another three hours driving got us to Okaukuejo Rest Camp in Etosha, the first of the three lodges that we stayed at inside the park. Facilities were excellent and we had a round chalet close to the waterhole. Every morning at dawn the lodge gates would open and we would be off for

the first expedition of the day. In Etosha wildlife photography in the dry season is mainly confined to the waterholes. Early morning and late afternoon are the best times to find animals drinking, though we always had to keep an eye on the clock in the afternoon as the lodge gates locked at 7 pm sharp.

Maps of the waterholes, and leaflets on the animals we were likely to see, were readily available at all the lodge shops, so drives were easy to plan each day. At first our party of 6 in three vehicles stayed together but gradually we began to go our separate ways.

Our arrival at a waterhole might mean immediate action with the camera, as a herd of Zebra, springbok or elephants or a mixture of animals gave us plenty to photograph. On other occasions, there might be absolutely nothing there. Then, the dilemma: do we drive to the next waterhole 10 miles away or do we sit and wait?





On one occasion, waiting really paid off as a Hyena walked straight past us to drink at the waterhole and then returned the same way, giving us ample opportunity to shoot portraits that included its yellow teeth! On another occasion, waiting was rewarded with a herd of thirsty Elephants who appeared out of the scrub and broke into a run as they saw the water. There followed much splashing and frolicking until the whole waterhole was churned into mud. At another waterhole we were lucky enough to see some Eland, the largest and most retiring of the antelopes in Namibia. Eland are now farmed for their meat, as are Oryx and Kudu.



Perhaps our greatest excitement was turning a corner of the road and finding a Leopard sitting on the verge. After a few minutes posing for our cameras, he sauntered across the road and off into the bush. We were also notified by a passing driver of a Cheetah with Springbok kill, though by the time we arrived there, a crowd of other vehicles and thorn bushes prevented us from seeing much.



Whilst the idea of waterhole watching might seem monotonous, in fact we found a great variety of wildlife at each one. On one day, a pride of Lions had taken up residence and herds of drooping Zebra waited at a distance for many hours hoping the lions would go away. On another, Giraffe tried for ages to approach the water but were always spooked by Oryx fighting or Warthog running nearby. Our last afternoon in Etosha, near the rest camp of Namutoni, looked as if it was going to be an anticlimax as we drove away from an empty waterhole. On the road, we suddenly saw three Lion cubs and then two males appeared out of the bush. Where were they going? We guessed it would be the next waterhole a mile away, so drove there as fast as we could and waited. Sure enough, lions began to appear in ones and twos, until a pride of about a dozen, including the three young cubs, had gathered beside the water. We sat, watched and photographed them until the sun went down and we were forced to leave.



Camera equipment was a Canon EOS 1D Mark II with a 500mm F4L IS lens plus a 300mm F4L IS lens on a smaller body for wider angle shots. It is advisable not to change lenses in the field because of the dusty conditions. My wife's main lens was a 400mm DO F4L IS. As our vehicle was our hide, beanbags were essential, as was hiring a vehicle that gave us both access to both side windows. Tripods were used only within the rest camps or in hides at Okonjima.; it was absolutely forbidden to get out of the vehicle once in the park.

Etosha in September was hot and dusty, but the end of the dry season is a good time to photograph animals; they have to use the waterholes and are therefore easier to find. The accommodation was excellent, particularly at the newly renovated Namutoni Rest Camp, and so was the food. The dirt roads inside the park were generally good. The people were very friendly and helpful. It is, however, a long six-hour drive from the Park to the airport, so a stop at Okonjima is a welcome break. Bitten by the safari bug, our next trip was to the Kruger.



Images:

Page 17: Leopard

Page 18: Hyena

Young Elephants playing after bathing

Lions watching stilts flying overhead

Burchells' Zebra drinking

Page 19 Black-faced Impala

Springbok with Cape Dove flying past

Eland



A Hedgehog named Bunter

by Gunars Ulmanis

It must be tragic if a pet cat or dog goes blind, but with a great deal of love and patience from a caring owner, I am sure the animal's life can still be fulfilling. Yet imagine what it must be like for a wild animal to go blind? Surely, it can be nothing short of a death sentence. This is why, when I found a hedgehog bumbling around in my garden one sunny afternoon in April, I couldn't imagine it was blind. Nevertheless, there was definitely something wrong with the animal; usually if a hedgehog is about in the daylight it is more than likely ill. I went to fetch a box and when I returned, noticed a neighbour's cat slowly stalking through the grass, followed by a sudden rush, all claws and teeth, at the hedgehog. The poor animal hardly reacted; it seemed confused and uncertain as to what the threat was, but in time-honoured fashion, rolled up into a spiny ball. I shooed the cat away, gingerly picked up the hedgehog, gently put it in the box and off we went to my local veterinary surgery. According to the vet 'it' was a 'he' whose eyesight was so weak he would be unable to fend for himself in the wild; consequently I acquired a large, blind male hedgehog, who at the suggestion of a friend I called 'Bunter'.

Seemingly it is not uncommon for hedgehogs to lose their eyesight; nonetheless it must be very traumatic for them. Although they can eat up to 20% of their body weight in a single night, Bunter could easily surpass this. His stomach seemed to be a bottomless pit, matched only by his huge appetite, but as his eating became less frantic, he became more and more fussy over his food. Indeed, Bunter eventually would only eat one brand of dog food which just so happened to be one of the most expensive available.

Over the next few days his nightly whimpering bouts stopped, as did the panic attacks whenever he heard any loud noises and as he seemed to have settled, I took him outside to get some exercise in a small boarded-off area I constructed on my patio. He took to it like a robin to mealworms and each day I increased the size of the run, so that little by little he became familiar with his new world.

In due course, Bunter would wake up each afternoon around two o'clock and expectantly wait to be carried into the garden, where he went for a wander. Once released Bunter behaved like a small, yet very determined rugby player as he pushed and shoved





aside the opposition, which in his case was not burly, square-jawed, broken-nosed players, but my poor plants. When he came across one blocking his path, Bunter would simply try and force his way through, finding a gap between the stems or clambering over any low growth, reducing thick ground cover to a maze of hedgehog-sized tracks. Of course being awake during the day made it a lot easier for me to keep an eye on him and you might have thought photographing, however there was a hitch: for no matter how many times I tried to make my garden 'blind-hedgehog-friendly', checking he could not get stuck in netting, impaled on spiny plants or fall into the pond, Bunter had a knack of finding all the weaknesses in my design. He invariably climbed over every obstacle in his path, squeezed through the tightest gaps and dug through loose gravel like a determined tunneller attempting to escape from Colditz. This meant that to ensure his walks around the garden did not end in disaster, where he went I inevitably followed, albeit trying not to cause terminal damage to my plants and the occasional startled frog with my size 10 shoes.

The years went by and Bunter started showing his age. Unfortunately, despite the vet's best efforts, some of his spines fell out leaving bald patches, one foot was stiff with arthritis and according to the vet: 'he had the worst tartar-covered teeth she had ever seen'. Nevertheless when the weather was fine, Bunter still enjoyed being outside but would spend much of the time curled up beneath a favoured plant in a sunny spot dozing. Yet whenever his route led him to the ramsons' patch, he would still enthusiastically self-anoint, contorting himself into bizarre shapes so he could cover his spines in sticky gloop.

Following him became less difficult as he aged, as did photographing his antics. Bunter would no longer jump every time he heard the click of my camera's shutter, though I rarely could use a flash as he reacted to the 'pop' of the gun going off by curling up and erecting his spines till he resembled a large, brown and annoyed sea urchin.

Following Bunter on his daily rambles I learned a lot about the trouble hedgehogs could get into in an average garden, but to be honest, I learned very little about how to photograph Bunter's wild relatives. Bunter was simply too trusting. On the other hand, you can't say the same about my current charge, 'Lucky'. She has three-legs and one paw-less stump, and even three years after Lucky was given into my care by a vet, isn't as docile as Bunter was, almost from the first day he blundered into my life. There are two further important differences: she is almost entirely nocturnal and reacts to any camera/flash) sound much more than Bunter ever did. To take any pictures I have had to rely on using a quiet digital camera set on its available light setting, or if she is awake in daylight, grab a shot from a distance with a long lens as I was a paparazzi photographer.

Lucky isn't allowed outside for fear of damaging her delicately-fleshed stump, so instead exercises in my hall and kitchen. This means my pictures of her are best viewed simply as records of her life. Even so, her activities at times have given me wonderful glimpses into hedgehog behaviour. On warm mornings around midsummer I like to sit on my front doorstep, watch the bats make their last circles in the brightening sky and listen to the dawn chorus rising in volume. Lucky often joins me, teetering on the edge of the step, looking this way and that, her snuffling sounding like a steam train chugging its way slowly up a steep incline. If a wild hedgehog is nearby, snatching a last meal from one of the food bowls near the door, her snuffling intensifies. Occasionally, the wild hedgehog on hearing Lucky will come and stand at the bottom of the step, looking up at her. Both animals then sniff at one another, their noses as animated as a shrew's, until the wild hog loses interest and wanders off. Any attempt to photograph the scene usually comes to nothing as Lucky, with an amazing turn of speed for a disabled animal, will try and bite one of my toes before she too goes off to her nest. There must be a moral in that somewhere...



Midwinter Madness!

A Field Meeting Announcement from Tony Bond FRPS

Those of you seeking an antidote to Christmas (and West Brom supporters) are invited to join me on a midwinter fungal foray. Before you question my state of mind, allow me to explain that the target species, the very attractive Velvet Shank, is only found at this time of year. There may be a few other species, such as the Earth Star, *Geastrum triplex*, but as I write this (July 2010), from the arid wastes of Greater Manchester with a hosepipe ban, the prospects for autumn look grim.

- Date:** Sunday 23rd January, 10am.
Place: Pennington Flash Country Park, Leigh, Lancs.
O.S. 109 , SJ 644986
Directions: Follow Brown signs from A580, A572 or A579
Parking: Park in the free car park approx 40m on the left after entering the park.
Other: Wear sensible winter clothing and footwear.
Paths are good but can be slippery in winter.
Little walking involved.
It is envisaged that the foray will be over by lunchtime.
You will be able to explore other parts of the park in the afternoon if you wish.
The park is best known for birds.
There is a pub and restaurant just across the main road.
- Contact:** If you are interested in attending, ring me on 01942 674773 a few days beforehand.

Congratulations

The following members have achieved their Associateship in the Nature category:

Shaun Boycott-Taylor	Bristol, Avon
Heather Elizabeth Cutting	Ipswich, Suffolk
Geoffrey Spencer Einon	Milton Keynes, Beds
Philip Geoffrey Gill	Newton Abbot, Devon
Graham Goddard	Hornchurch, Essex
Ian Gould	Atherstone, Warks
Gordon Mills	Lymm, Cheshire

NG Residential Weekend 2011

The NG weekend will be held at the **Kingcombe Centre**
Friday 27th to Monday 30th May 2011.
Cost £225 per head, members use own cars.

For full details please contact:
James Foad
Email: james_foad@hotmail.com
Tel: 07850 368797

Apology

Sincere apologies to member William E. Middleton whose accepted images from the Projected Image section of this years Nature Group Exhibition were incorrectly accredited to another member with the same surname.

A corrected acceptance list, in pdf format, will be available for download from the nature group website: www.rpsnaturegroup.com

William's accepted images were:
Song Thrush with beakfull of worms and
Male Yellowhammer on gorse bush

2010 A Digital Odyssey

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Prologue

As 2009 turned over into 2010 there remained four of us, friends, active photographers; two of us had already thought seriously that the New Year would bring a change in our working medium; a third had already bought a digital camera but it remained unpacked in its box; the fourth, perhaps the purest of us, remained adamant, he would be constant and true to film.

Journey

The seeds of photography were sown in my breast during 1946, when, as a new boy at Derby School an Uncle decided that such an event should be marked by the gift of a camera, a folding Kodak 620 dating from just before the outbreak of the Second World War. My Uncle also initiated me into the mysteries of developing and printing, see-sawing the film through the developer, washing in water and then through the fixer, finally washing it for a goodly time in running water. Contact printing of course produced the 'positive' and the seemingly magical appearance of the image on the paper in the developer hooked me as surely as it has others before and since. Of course the young shoots of photography had to compete with other interests, a newly acquired bicycle, which took me into the lanes of South Derbyshire, fishing, which became a wonderful window into the natural world and of course new subjects at school such as Chemistry and Biology. I was also a Chorister and so music was important, then the School Combined Cadet Force in which I eventually learned to fly. How prep ever got fitted in remains a mystery to me, but it did! When you are a young teenager your brain is like a sponge soaking up everything before it. I enjoyed Art and was mortified when I had to drop it in order to take Chemistry, but colour remained important to me and I chose my course at Leeds University, Colour Chemistry, for the simple and very good reason that it sounded exciting! It was at University that I scrimped and saved to buy my first 35mm camera, an Iloca, with which I won my first competition with a flight shot of a Common Gull overhead on the ferry to Dunoon, more by good luck than good management I think. It was whilst I was at University that I found I needed to wear spectacles, so any career in flying with the RAF was a non starter; I had also met Barbara and felt that my

future must involve her. Taking these and other factors into consideration I decided I would become a Schoolmaster.

The next twelve years or so were taken up with making my way professionally, getting married, setting up home, starting a family; in fact the normal busy life of people in their twenties and thirties. Photographically I had moved on to an Exacta, it carried a Tessar lens and was quite a decent performer. More importantly I had moved on to transparency film, usually Kodachrome with some Agfachrome. Later on of course I became a convert to Fuji Velvia.

I was still based in Nottingham and by 1972 I had moved into the upper echelons of my profession; that fact coupled with a back dated pay award prompted Barbara, bless her, to suggest that I should buy myself a good camera. At that time Pentax were running an advert which ran "Just pick up a Pentax" and it worked for me. I found the Spotmatic F to be a splendid camera and it became a good and reliable performer over many years to come. I slowly added a few lenses including a Vivitar 50mm macro, which did well for me; however a long telephoto was not really within my remit. At that time such a lens was about the same price as a small car and not really something I could contemplate. As a young family we joined the Trent Valley Birdwatchers (later to become Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers) and I also became a founder member of Wollaton Natural History Society. My photographic work was expanding; I was collecting a good array of wild flower pictures, as well as fungi, and some aquatic life, courtesy of a newly constructed garden pond. I also purchased a projector and was soon invited to give a few talks, which as a teacher I found relatively easy to do. My reputation spread and I soon found I was getting more invitations than I could easily cope with. This meant a fairly long waiting list, but better to be in demand than otherwise.

Two members of the Natural History Society were also members of a local Camera Club and they invited me to go along to a meeting. I subsequently joined the club which brought me into contact with RPS members and I joined the Society. It wasn't long before I decided to go for my Distinctions. As a Natural History Photographer most club judges didn't really seem to have much experience in that area, so

in order to measure myself I thought that the 'L', 'A' and 'F' would give me more idea of where I stood. The L proved to be straightforward and I succeeded straightaway. However the 'A' and 'F' provided more of a challenge, and quite rightly. All my submissions were panels of transparencies, it was my medium. I enjoyed the building of the short slide shows, the flow and interplay of the colours, the sizes of the images, the way they related to one another, I was totally at home with it. Eventually I was of course successful, but I did take good advice on the way.

Whilst all this was going on our family had grown up and become independent. Barbara, artistic and a wonderful embroiderer now decided to join the photographic journey and very welcome she was. I had also made changes to my equipment; Pentax had ceased manufacturing screw fit cameras some time previously so I had moved to Minolta. Their 100mm macro lens was possibly the sharpest lens I have ever used, it was wonderful.

Technology never stands still however and one day our younger son came to visit us bearing a Canon autofocus camera; it was lovely, the handling felt just right. Oh dear, another decision to make!

At about this time I was offered early retirement by Nottinghamshire Education Authority with an offer to enhance my pension. In modern parlance it was a 'no brainer' and I accepted the offer immediately. I sold the Minolta equipment privately to a friend and Barbara and I re-equipped with Canon.

I was doing well with my speaking and judging invitations, as many as I could comfortably cope with. Barbara and I were also doing well with our Photographic Natural History Holidays; we never had to advertise, we had a clientele which had built up from recommendations. Barbara also succeeded with an 'A' submission. Later I was invited onto the RPS Nature Distinctions Panel and so we were kept comfortably busy. Digital cameras arrived on the scene and the first prints began to appear in Club Competitions. Some were awful with colour casts, banding and noise, but some were beautiful. The rest is history; some of the prints which I am now privileged to see are truly beautiful; the standard is rising all the time. However digital projection has lagged behind this print progress and it seems only recently that I have noticed a significant improvement. It was beginning to look as though Barbara and I should finally give up our beloved Velvia, perhaps in late 2010? Neither of us had ever criticised digital photography in any way, indeed we could see the great advantages it offered, but with our style of natural history photography film continued to give us everything we wanted.

In the autumn of 2009 we had planned a trip to Lesvos, for the second two weeks of May 2010, with a few of our friends including Martin and Sally Withers and John and Shelagh Tinning. Both Martin and my wife Barbara were due to have replacement knee surgery in 2010, Martin at the beginning of January and Barbara at the end. One day towards the end of February when visiting Barbara, Martin turned up with a Canon 20D. "Here, you had better use this in Lesvos", he said. "It's doing nothing at my home, just sitting on a shelf". Shortly after that John Tinning presented us with another 20D. "You'd better both have one", he announced. The die was cast. As the eldest chap on the holiday I was excused driving duties, it was all about insurance really, so I could relax, sit back and enjoy the trip. Because of her knee it was more convenient for Barbara to sit on the left hand side of the car, behind the driver, this meant that she got the best of the photographic opportunities and I was pleased for her, I knew she was apprehensive about the new equipment. We had fitted a 20D with a Canon 300mm f4 IS lens plus a 1.4 converter, which coupled with the 1.6x increase in focal length, gave us an impressive 672mm. She got along famously and became in her own words, "quite an expert in deleting". In fact though, we did get a few quite passable pictures and Barbara gained considerable confidence with the camera. It is worth mentioning that we continued to use Velvia on plants and insects.

In July we were invited by Dawn Osborn to visit her in Norfolk for a few days and we enjoyed a quite delightful time visiting a number of good sites as well as running her moth trap. Lesser Butterfly Orchid was one of the flowers we photographed, now a rarity in England but still doing well in Scotland. The moths included a few which we had not trapped so far in our Nottinghamshire garden, Ghost Moth (female), Privet Hawk and Golden Y. We were still using up our stock of Velvia, but whilst in Norfolk we took the opportunity to visit Warehouse Express and purchased ourselves a couple of digital Canon camera bodies.

Epilogue

We sit at our computer looking at an image of a White Satin Moth on the monitor. It is sharp and the wings show no hint of over-exposure, the background is muted and accurate. We are confident we shall learn to love it as we did film, with rich colours glowing on the light box. Will our friend's camera remain unpacked in its box? Will the fourth be constant to film? Who knows; but on his request I've forwarded a contact for film storage sheets!

Elections 2011

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 with 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.

This form is also available at: www.rpsnaturegroup.com go to the 'Who We Are' page.

Nomination Form for Elections 2011

Please complete and return before
30th November 2010-2011

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)

Secunder'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 2011

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 31st January 2011

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

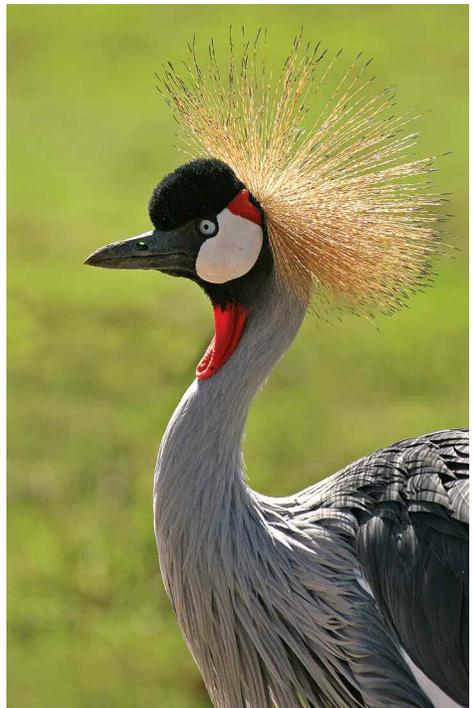
Tel: 01257 271981

E-mail: csmith3@blueyonder.co.uk



Pictures by John Bulpitt FRPS

Above: Heron on Hippo
Below: Kori Bustard displaying
Below right: Crowned Crane





Pictures by Colin Smith FRPS

Left: Geyser at Geysir

Above: Waterfall

Below: Hot springs at Hveravellir

