

Chair's Report for AGM 2025

Duncan Locke ARPS

Committee:

I must start my Report by thanking all of the Group Committee for their hard work over the last year to maintain and improve the services provided to our Members. Historically, the Committee has been elected to serve for two years and the present Committee finishes its term of office at this 2025 AGM. However, following the adoption of new Terms of Reference for the Group in March 2024, the Committee elected at the 2025 AGM will serve for three years. Our Group Secretary, Greg Lovett, will report on any Committee changes and the results of this year's election in his Secretary's Report.

Nature Group Membership:

I am very pleased to report that the membership of the Group as of the 1st March 2025 was 981 as compared to 948 Members on the 1st March 2024, giving a 3.5% increase in membership during the year. The Nature Group remains the third largest of the RPS Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

As of the 1st March 2025, the Group had 916 Members in the UK, Eire, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands plus 65 overseas Members. The biggest single overseas Group is in the USA, with 14 Members.

The Group continues to have a high turnover of Members to keep our Membership Secretary, Christine Holt, very busy.

RPS Developments:

As I reported at the 2024 AGM, the RPS is implementing a Transformation Plan to assure its long term financial viability. I sit on the Members Committee (MemCom) along with the Chairs of the other SIGs and Regional Organisers.

The RPS has now imposed a charge on each SIG for the Financial, Membership and Website/IT services that it provides to that Group. For the Nature Group, this is just over £3 out of your £18 Annual Subscription. MemCom Members are working hard to put in place Service Level Agreements to ensure that the RPS delivers the services that we are being asked to pay for.

Your Finance Officer, Peter Ward, and Committee have carefully considered whether we can make cost savings, but has reluctantly come to the conclusion that to balance our budget we have to propose an increase in the Nature Group's Annual Subscription from £18 to £20 from the 1st January 2026; this will partially offset the charge imposed by the RPS.

More generally, I understand that discussions are taking place with a potential buyer for RPS House and Dan Jones, the CEO is leaving shortly and a replacement is being recruited. I expect the services the RPS provides to the Group to continue with these changes, but improvements may be delayed.

Group Website:

You must now all be aware that the Group now has its own website separate from the RPS. We have about 335 Members registered on the site. I must thank Ian Wilson for all of his hard work in providing and maintaining this website.

The website provides us with an excellent place to advertise Group events, report on past events and share Group news with our Members. In addition it has enabled us to provide new services for our Members and improve on existing ones. In particular:

- Lightbox: Greg Lovett has developed this as a place where Members, particularly those working towards ARPS, can get constructive criticism on their images
- Galleries: this provides an easy to use place for Members to share images from successful Distinction Panels, Field Meetings, etc.
- Exhibition: this provides a place for Members to view the accepted images in our Annual Exhibition
- Competitions: this has enabled us to provide our Monthly Competition

Monthly Competition:

We launched the Monthly Competition in October 2023 on the basis that the competition year would run from April to March; this to fit in with our AGM in April. There would be a winner each month and, based on the accumulated scores, there would also be an overall winner for the year with a prize presented at the AGM. I am very pleased to report that the overall winner for 2024 – 2025 is our Group Secretary, Greg Lovett ARPS.

The Competition continues to prove very popular. In the competition year 2024 – 2025, 112 Members entered at least one image. On average 41 Members have entered each month and 36 have scored the images.

Group Activities:

I must thank Ann Miles for continuing to coordinate a very large programme of Field Meetings, Zoom talks and Distinction Advisory Days. Last year's are listed in her Programme Coordinators Report. In 2024 the Group organised well over one event a week, all thanks to Ann's and others hard work.

Last May and July we ran two very successful Macro Workshops at Toft and Welney respectively. I would like to give particular thanks to Nick Bowman, who organised the Welney Workshop. Ann Miles also ran a Fungi Photography Workshop at Brandon Country Park in October. I am very keen to build up a programme of workshops to help Members develop their nature photography skills. Please let me have any ideas for topics and venues.

I really must thank James Foad for organising an excellent Residential Weekend on the Yorkshire Coast in June last year, including an intensive day photographing diving Gannets off Flamborough Head. James has decided to step down from organising Residential Weekends and so I would very much like to thank him for all of his hard work over the last eleven years.

Preston Montford Field Studies Centre near Shrewsbury is already booked for the 2025 Residential Weekend. Could you take on James' role and organise Residential Weekends for the Group? Please contact me if you are interested. Help is available to get you started.

Last, but not least, I would also like to thank Ralph Snook for continuing to organise the Group's Annual Exhibition.

Challenges Facing the Group:

Last December I sent an e-mail to Group Members outlining the challenges facing the Group in 2025 and asking Members to reply with their thoughts and if possible offers of help.

The Iris sets us two challenges in 2025: firstly Dawn Osborn intends to step down as Editor at the 2025 AGM in April and secondly the ever increasing cost of producing and more particularly posting a paper journal.

One person that I must really thank for her years of service to the Group, is Dawn, who took over as Editor for Issue 87 of The Iris, Winter 2003, and we have now reached Issue 151. There have been short breaks when other Editors have taken over, but I estimate that Dawn must have now edited over 50 issues. As a result of my e-mail last December I am hopeful that we will be able to find a replacement for Dawn.

Of the 17 Members who gave me their thoughts on the future format / frequency, of The Iris, the majority preferred to stick with the status quo: three paper issues each year and were prepared to pay more to cover the increasing costs. We plan to try and maintain three paper copies a year, but are also conscious of the very high cost of sending paper magazines overseas.

Finally, I don't think that I will offend anyone as it is a statement of fact that the Nature Group Committee are not getting any younger! We would be delighted to hear from any Members who would like to get involved in running the Group. The main qualification required: Enthusiasm!

Going Forward:

As I said at last year's AGM, I believe that the aim of the Group is to inspire and educate its Members into taking better images of the natural world and so we must organise events for Members to get together and develop their nature photography. We now have an excellent and ever growing programme of Field Meetings and Workshops and it would be very helpful if you could let Ann Miles or any other Committee Member know what events you would like the Group to organise.

Duncan Locke ARPS
31st March 2025