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THE **RPS**
ROYAL
PHOTOGRAPHIC
SOCIETY

THE IRIS

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

Issue No. 126 / Winter 2016



RPS Nature Group Residential Weekend

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E-mail: shepherdlen@btinternet.com

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Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD. Please do not send hand written copy.

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Cover shot: *Common Blue Damselfly*
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Nature Group Exhibitions

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme. Please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above.

Editorial

It may be November by the time you read this, but at the time of writing it is early October. I'm not sure how October got here quite so quickly, but here it is. Summer lingered right up to the end of September, with record temperatures which then dropped so quickly I had to turn on the central heating. I am presently readying the garden for winter and preparing for a well earned vacation. I imagine that many of you with an interest in fungus are hoping this year will be a memorable one for fungus.

Some good news and some bad news. First the good news. John Bebbington FRPS, a past-Chairman of the Nature Group, has been awarded a Fenton Medal by the RPS in recognition of his outstanding work on behalf of the Society. John has done sterling work for the Nature Group and has promoted the RPS in all of his many endeavours. Congratulations John.

Now the bad news. I had hoped to introduce our new Editor to you in this issue. Unfortunately he has felt the need to withdraw his offer and we are once again looking for someone with the time, energy and expertise to step up and take over from me. Until then you will have to put up with me, but I cannot continue in the role of Editor indefinitely

Still with my Editor's hat on, I am needful of articles for the Spring issue and beyond. Have you recently achieved your Fellowship or Associateship? Have you recently returned from a successful photo-trip and have some great tales and images to share? Have you recently acquired a new piece of kit or a book that you would recommend or review? I would love to hear from you. Articles for the Spring issue need to be ready to send to me by the end of November. Please contact me by email if you have something you would like to share with fellow members. I may be out of touch for most of November, so don't be concerned if you don't hear from me until the latter part of the month.

This issue includes the final part of Ludi Lochner's series of articles on The Kruger National Park, for which I owe a huge 'thank you'. Also accounts of a successful Fellowship Panel by Mike Rowe and an Associate Panel from Darron Matthews. Interesting articles also from Richard Revels FRPS, Conor Molloy ARPS, David Cantrille FRPS and Michael Gore FRPS. Thank you all so much.

That's all from me for now. I wish you all a very pleasant winter.



From the chair

I hope the 2016 summer has been good for you and your nature photography, so that you will have plenty of good pictures to enter into our annual exhibition. Although we always receive many excellent pictures for the exhibition, the majority are entered in Section A which is for Birds, Mammal, Reptiles, Amphibians and Invertebrates etc. Section B which covers various kinds of plant life including Fungi always has far fewer entries. As an incentive to enter all sections, we have introduced a special Tony Wharton award. This is a small plaque that will be presented to the member who gains the most points from their accepted entries. Points from images not accepted will not be counted. Hopefully this will encourage members to enter all four sections of the exhibition.

Winter months are a good time to photograph Lichens, as many are at their most colourful, and there are also colourful winter fruiting Fungi which photographed in frosty weather conditions can make excellent pictures. If you don't already have anything to enter in Section B there are still good photogenic subjects out there during the winter so there really is no excuse for not entering.

Full details of the exhibition are printed in this issue of *The Iris*, but the Entry Form is not. You can download one from our website if necessary. However, we hope that most members will enter everything on-line this year. However, those members who wish to have a printed entry form and do not have access to the internet can obtain one by sending a SAE to our exhibition secretary Ralph Snook ARPS.

The weather over the past 12 months has been very volatile in Britain, probably as a result of global warming, and as I write this column in mid-September the last few days has seen temperatures in southern Britain reached 34°C, which is close to a record for this time of the year. Last winter we had a record warm and wet end to 2015, before it turned much cooler in early January, the cool conditions extending well into spring. Then we had an 'on-off' early start to summer, with a mixture of warmer and then much cooler and wetter weather. Summer eventually arrived in August with many parts of southern Britain having a mainly dry warm month, which has now extended into mid-September.

This strange mixture of sometimes unseasonal weather has resulted in many of our usually common insect species being down to record low numbers. Holly Blue, Chalk Hill Blue and Ringlets butterflies were the only butterfly species in my area to be seen

in good numbers this year. The Common Blue, Small Copper, Small, Essex and Large Skippers and Gatekeeper butterflies have been extremely scarce.

Most years during July there are flowering Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* along the rides of my local woodlands and usually there are plenty of Hoverflies, Beetles, Bees and Wasps feeding on them. This year however they were almost absent, which is extremely alarming. Catches in moth traps have been mostly extremely low, which makes me wonder what the Bats have been feeding on this summer! Another thing I have noticed is that I have had almost no splatted insects on my car windscreen after a journey. So what have the swifts, Swallows and Martins been feeding on this year?

The change-over of the Nature Group Secretary role from Margaret Johnson to Duncan Locke seems to be going smoothly, however regrettably the change of Editorship of *The Iris* is not happening. So we now need to start the process again. If you have the required know-how to perform this essential role, please consider applying. The Nature Group needs you! Full details of how to apply are elsewhere in this issue of *The Iris*.

It had been planned that after handing over the Editorship of *The Iris* at the AGM next April, Dawn would step into a new and less demanding role of Editor of the Nature Group's new e-Newsletter which was to have been e-mailed to members between issues of *The Iris*. Regrettably the introduction of the e-Newsletter now has to be put on hold until a new Editor for *The Iris* can be found.

At the coming AGM in April several long serving Nature Group committee members will be stepping down. If you would like to help the Nature Group by joining the committee, please see pages 31 and 32 in this magazine. We normally have two committee meetings each year, in January and in September, and these are usually held at Smethwick P.S. clubhouse, a fairly central location which has plenty of free parking. Please note that your application needs to be sent to our Secretary, Margaret Johnson LRPS by the end of November, so please act now.



The Kruger National Park - a photographer's paradise (Pt IV).

by Ludi Lochner

In this, the last of four parts on the Kruger, I want to look at behavioural patterns in wildlife.

The more one knows of one's subject, the better one is equipped to anticipate the next move and to be ready for it. Unfortunately, I am not aware of a publication that deals with the behaviour of African wildlife from the photographer's point of view but here are some general points.

- Most wildlife, particularly those subject to predation, have a comfort zone and a flight zone. Enter the comfort zone, and the subject is on alert and this can show in your photographs. Enter the flight zone and the subject will flee.
- Lion, Hyena, Buffalo, Chacma Baboon and Vervet Monkey are the least affected by an approaching vehicle. You can drive close to Lions and Baboons but remember that the closer you approach, the more you will be looking down on them. On the other hand, small antelope, such as Grysbok and birds such as raptors are notoriously skittish, have a large flight zone and will leave without first showing signs of anxiety. Always keep a safe distance from Elephant.

Note the reaction of a subject as you approach very slowly and quietly, this will give a feel for how close you can approach without the subject showing signs of stress.

Turning off the engine can put the subject on guard, particularly if there is movement and noise from within the vehicle. My preference is to keep the engine ticking over, to shoot and move forward very slowly and then shoot again! Once you are within a suitable range, and the subject shows an acceptance of your presence by returning to feeding, preening etc, switch off the engine to minimize vibration being transmitted to the camera. Then wait until the subject resumes feeding etc before starting to take pictures. While coasting up to the subject with the engine turned off may appear to be a better option, the sound of the tyres on the road, particularly as

they pass over loose stones, becomes more noticeable and, being sudden and unexpected, can give rise to fear. One is also in trouble if it becomes necessary to re-start the engine because the vehicle has coasted to a position short of where one wants to be or the subject moves ahead. The sudden sound of the engine re-starting usually causes a timid subject to flee.

Wildlife in the Park is constantly exposed to the sound of engines and do not relate traffic noise to danger. However, the throbbing noise of an air conditioning unit can cause some subjects to be frightened away so turn off the a/c unit.

Any movement outside the confines of the vehicle is likely to be seen, by the subject, as the presence of a possible danger and may cause the subject to move off. Therefore, when lifting your lens into the shooting position, remember that it may project beyond the confines of the car and will be noticed as it emerges – the long telephoto's big eye will be seen as from some dangerous monster. Always, therefore, lift the camera and lens slowly into position and, if possible, do so when the subject is not looking your way.

Many lenses, such as those from Canon, have a barrel coated in an off-white colour that can be obvious when being moved into position. For that reason, I always cover my lens with a suitable sleeve that has a green camouflage pattern.

- Birds settling on an open perch will often look around to check the area for dangers before relaxing to the job of preening, searching for prey such as insects or just relaxing. Don't move your camera into position until the bird has shown signs of relaxing - that early movement of the camera may catch the subject's attention and cause it to take fright.
- Insectivores such as rollers, flycatchers and bee-eaters patrol a territory. They will leave a particular perch, catch their prey and then move on to another perch. In this way, they will pass through four or five perches, within a territory,

before returning to the original perch. This circuit may take twenty to thirty minutes. That is not to say that birds never change territory. I move on after 20 – 30 minutes if there are no signs of the bird being around.

- Wind plays an important part in the movement of birds. They will generally land into the wind, perch facing the wind and take off into the wind. Bearing in mind the direction of the wind, it is possible to guess the line of approach to a perch. Set your camera on follow focus and on continuous shooting. Fit a remote release. Watch the bird but not through the viewfinder. Change to the viewfinder when you see the bird flying towards the selected perch. Start shooting, using the remote release, as soon as the bird appears in the viewfinder. The alternative is to keep a constant watch through the viewfinder but this can be tiring. This can result in you being taken by surprise and result in a delay in activating the remote release when the bird suddenly appears in the viewfinder.
- Birds often ready themselves before take-off. Typically, they will stretch their wings and may even do a poo and then look around for any danger before taking off. That is your last opportunity for a photograph and also serves as notice to be ready if you want to catch the bird in flight.

Attract the attention of your subject by mimicking. The response to the mimicked sound is usually immediate - ears go up and are focused towards where the noise is thought to come from. Eyes are directed in the right direction - towards the camera! Indeed, the subject will adopt an alert stance, ideal for a shot. However, use the technique sparingly because it puts the subject on alert and may detract it from a real danger.

- Mimic the call of an Impala lamb in distress to attract the attention of larger predators such as lion, leopard and cheetah. This technique was used to obtain photograph of the leopard on this page - it was hidden in the grass beside the road when I first saw it!
- Grunt like a leopard to attract the attention of antelope such as impala! This technique was used to capture the photograph of the three impala shown in Part II in the Spring 2016 edition!



Young Hyena responding to strange sound



Male Lion projecting its roar to the sky



Cheetah responding to mimicked cry of impala lamb



Burchell's Coucal drying in early morning sunshine

- Lesser predators such as jackal and mongoose respond to the mimicked squeak of a mouse (see the photograph of the Dwarf Mongoose opposite). Try biting your lower lip and sucking air through your teeth.

Photographing wildlife has a lot in common with portraiture. Shadows, and therefore the position of the sun, are important in putting shape to a 2-dimensional image. Apply your portraiture skills to your wildlife subjects!

General Points

Dust

One of the disadvantages of dirt roads is that it gives rise to dust that enters your vehicle and settles everywhere, including on your lenses! The air-conditioning unit sucks air into the car and, with it, dust. Turn off the air-conditioning unit (and the fan!) and open the windows of the car. The draft of air through the car, as you drive, should keep you cool enough! In any event, you should always drive with your car windows open. It is as important to listen as it is to see and by travelling with the windows closed, you are denying yourself the chance of hearing a subject before you are able to see it! Listen for unruly noise from birds – it is often an indication that a predator, such as a snake, is present in the area. The snort of an impala is also a give-away that a predator may be around. Towards evening, the roar of a male lion may indicate where it is.

Always close the windows when another vehicle is approaching and passing you or when you are overtaking a vehicle.

I mentioned the use of camouflage sleeves to pull over telephoto lenses. Wildlife Watching Supplies also make camouflage cloth caps to fit over telephoto lenses. When my equipment is not in use, I have one of their caps on each of my lenses. The caps have an elasticated hem that engages round the barrel of the lens. It is an easy and quick operation to pull the cap off the lens with one hand as one lifts the lens onto the beanbag with the other hand.

The Camp as a rich hunting ground

There is a lot of wildlife in the Kruger camps. Birds may include Glossy Starling, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Golden Oriole, African Scops Owl and animals such as Bushbuck, Dwarf Mongoose, African Wild cat, Honey Badger and, of course, Monkeys and Baboons. This wildlife is accustomed to being in relatively close proximity to human beings and will



Southern Spotted Eagle-owl

tolerate a near approach. It is therefore a good idea to do a walk around the camp during the day and again once the gates have closed for the night, if the light permits. The African Wild Cat and the Honey Badger are often around before dawn in Satara.

A note on monkeys – in the camps, they subsist partly on stolen food and it is therefore wise not to leave any food unattended, even for a moment. Wind up car windows, close the car boot and the chalet door if food is around. They can be remarkably brazen.

Night Drives

Organised night drives are usually available at all camps. In the past, they were conducted by informed rangers who took you off the beaten track and provided a constant patter of interesting facts. My recent experience is that the night drives are now conducted by silent drivers who take you up and down the tarred road that you had driven back on 30 minutes earlier! Check therefore with the driver, the night before, as to his likely route and then make a decision. Booking is advisable. Establish the approximate return time so that you do not miss out on dinner at the restaurant!

During a night drive you are likely to see some of the wildlife you saw during the day and also, Nightjar (Fiery-necked and Mozambique), Thick-knee (both Spotted and Water), Spotted-eagle Owl and other owls, lesser cats such as Serval, Spotted Genet and Civet, both species of Bush-baby, Scrub Hare as well as the larger predators including Hyena.

You are likely to be perched high on an adapted truck and therefore Nightjar and the like will be far below you on the road, but the lesser cats, owls and bush babies may be in trees at your level.

I usually fit a 100 – 400mm lens to my camera for the drive and add a flash unit on a bracket to ensure that the lighting is not “flat” but that there is some shadow and therefore shape, small as it may be.

Always conduct a few trial shots, while waiting for the truck to move off, to check that your camera and flash settings are correct and that the trial images meet your requirements. I usually set the camera's shooting mode to 'Program' and the flash to ETTL (Canon) .

Elephants

I am told never to travel with oranges in the Park. If elephants scent the presence of oranges, they may go to extremes to get to them!

When approaching a herd, make sure that you leave yourself an escape route. The best approach, if that is possible, is to pass beyond the herd, while the



Bushbuck at Letaba Camp



Dwarf Mongoose



Warthogs



Hammerkop engaged in allopreening

road is still clear, and then look back. You are then in a position to move forward instead of having to reverse with an elephant charging you!

Always maintain a watch to ensure that you are not trapped by other members of the herd emerging, unexpectedly, from behind a bush in front of you. If you do find yourself caught between elephants of a herd, SIT QUIETLY AND DON'T MOVE. In this way, you will not present a threat. Don't start the engine and don't move the vehicle unless the escape route is safe and clear.

There are few incidents in the Park involving elephants, a tribute to their generally placid nature. The problem arises when a cow is separated by a car from her calf, a bull is in musth, i.e. has heightened testosterone levels, or adolescent elephants are in a playful mood!

Malaria

The Park is in a malaria area. I spray the chalet against mosquitoes before going out to dinner. With screens over the windows and the door closed, there is less likelihood of mosquitoes being around when I head for bed. By the time of my return from dinner, the insecticide has dispersed and cannot be smelt. See Part 1 on anti-malarial tablets.

Crime in South Africa

The crime rate is high in South Africa. You are unlikely to be affected provided you are sensible, take reasonable precautions and always avoid putting yourself at risk.

Enjoy the Kruger!

Ludi first visited the Kruger in June 1956 and has been a regular visitor to the Park ever since. He is not sponsored and receives no benefit for promoting the

Park or any products mentioned in these articles. He lectures and writes about the Park to share his love for it with other fellow photographers!

Further Reading

- Kruger Self-Drive - Routes, Roads and Ratings van der Berg Family HPH Publishing 2015 288 pages
- Guide to the Kruger Park Andy and Lorraine Tinker Andy Tinker Photography 2013 24 pages
- Kruger National Park - Questions and Answers late PF Fourie and Chris an der Linde Struik Nature 1978 – 2014 279 pages. A very useful book that will answer many questions about facilities, do's and don'ts and other questions that visitors may ask. The late author was and the updating author is the Information Officer with S A National Parks)
- The Behaviour Guide to African Mammals R D Estes Russel Friedman Books 1991. 611 pages (Also available as a reprint with different covers and publisher An academic approach to the subject but, nevertheless easy reading and very informative.)
- Beat about the Bush - Mammals Trevor Carnaby (Updated Edition - 2012) Jacana 372 pages. This and the following three books contain interesting information on the wildlife of the Park
- Beat about the Bush - Birds Trevor Carnaby (Updated Edition - 2010) Jacana 764 pages
- Wild Ways by Peter Apps Struik Nature 2014 208 pages
- Shaping the Kruger by Mitch Reardon Struik 2012 208 pages



Impala ewes drinking at waterhole

Birds of South-West Florida – A Fellowship Submission

by Mike Rowe FRPS

I have visited Florida more times than I can now remember, so a panel of Florida birds seemed a natural subject on which to base my Fellowship.

In recent years, a fortnight in November has been a regular fixture in the calendar, but to increase variety in my Fellowship submission, we added an April visit in 2013. November is a pleasant time to visit Florida as the weather is generally excellent and less humid – just like a fine summer's day in the UK if you can remember what that's like – and it's out of season so there are relatively few visitors. Arguably January to March may be better for bird life, but Florida becomes crowded as Americans flock south to avoid the northern winters, so it's both busy and expensive. Of course, avoiding November weather back here in the UK has to be a bonus!

We stay on Sanibel Island which lies just off the Gulf Coast of south-west Florida, and is linked to the mainland by a causeway and bridge. By staying at the same place each year, one gets to know the best times and places to photograph the wildlife.

Sanibel is justly famous for the J N Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, which I visit most days when staying on Sanibel. (Tip: ask for a season ticket which costs \$12 and lasts to the end of the month of the following year, so if visiting the same time each year, you only need to buy a new ticket every other year.) From the photography point of view, early morning is best at Ding Darling as the light is in the right direction, whereas in late afternoon you can often find you are shooting into the sun. The state of the tide is also important, and generally you will find that there is a lot more to see either side of a low tide, when the water is shallow and there are areas of mud exposed. Although Ding Darling is a magnet for bird watchers and photographers, in the event, only three images in my Fellowship panel were taken there.

Another favourite spot on Sanibel, and one that yielded eight images in my Fellowship panel, is the area around the Fishing Pier at the extreme eastern end of the island. There are invariably large shoals of 'bait fish' in the waters around the Fishing Pier, which are netted and used by anglers, and which attract,

Birds of South-West Florida

FRPS Submission in Natural History

30 March 2016

Michael Rowe ARPS



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amongst other things, gulls, terns, egrets, herons, cormorants, ospreys and pelicans. Birds congregate there in numbers, and it is therefore a good location to try to capture interactions between individuals, that being a major feature of my Fellowship submission. The birds also tend to be quite close, so a 300mm lens, with extender if necessary, provides sufficient reach whilst being easily hand-held to capture the action.

My third favourite location is Bunche Beach, which is just off Sanibel Island at the end of John Morris Road. Large expanses of muddy-sand are exposed at mid to low tide, interspersed with pools of water a few inches deep. The beach attracts many waders that search the sand for invertebrates, and with stealth, you can often get quite close. I always wear swimming trunks at Bunche Beach, allowing me to kneel, crouch or sit on the beach or in the shallow pools. You will need the longest focal length you possess (in my case a 500mm with a X2 extender) for the smaller waders. Setting this on an old monopod, that you don't mind getting sandy or wet, allows you to get some nice low angles on the birds, whilst taking the weight of the camera and enabling mobility. It's worth wearing some beach shoes as there are sharp shells underfoot, and do avoid lingering at the head of the beach in the evening as you'll be eaten alive by no-see-ums. Six images in my Fellowship panel were taken on Bunche Beach.

My Fellowship panel is the result of six visits to Florida, totalling 13 weeks over five years. During that time, I estimate that I spent around 350 hours 'on location' taking photographs, and probably double that back home in preparing my submission. We will be going back to Florida again this year, and it will be refreshing to just enjoy the wildlife and photography, without any agendas or lists of 'must get' images.



8



Statement of Intent

Birds make fascinating natural history subjects, displaying a wide range of behaviours in their everyday lives. Their gift of flight further adds to our delight in watching them.

In preparing this panel I have sought to show some of these behaviours, and in particular I have illustrated a few of the many interactions occurring between individuals, be they of the same or different species, as they live their lives in a challenging world.

All photographs were taken at locations in South-West Florida, and all subjects were unconstrained, wild and free.





4

Subject Identification

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Juvenile Ospreys simulating mating | - <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> |
| 2. Royal Tern chased by Laughing Gull | - <i>Sterna maxima</i> and <i>Larus atricilla</i> |
| 3. Semipalmated Plover with worm | - <i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i> |
| 4. Wilson's Plover courtship | - <i>Charadrius wilsonia</i> |
| 5. Double-crested Cormorant with fish | - <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i> |
| 6. Sandwich Tern in flight with fish | - <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> |
| 7. Reddish Egret pursuing Double-crested Cormorant | - <i>Egretta rufescens</i> and <i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i> |
| 8. Reddish Egret fishing | - <i>Egretta rufescens</i> |
| 9. Great Egret pestered by Laughing Gull | - <i>Ardea alba</i> and <i>Larus atricilla</i> |
| 10. Willets fighting | - <i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i> |
| 11. Sandwich Tern harassed by Laughing Gull | - <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> and <i>Larus atricilla</i> |
| 12. Little Blue Heron with eel | - <i>Egretta caerulea</i> |
| 13. Black-bellied Plover with dragonfly | - <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> |
| 14. Snowy Egret bullied by Laughing Gull | - <i>Egretta thula</i> and <i>Larus atricilla</i> |
| 15. Black Skimmer skimming | - <i>Rynchops niger</i> |
| 16. Squabbling White Ibis | - <i>Eudocimus albus</i> |
| 17. Flock of Marbled Godwit with Willet | - <i>Limosa fedoa</i> and <i>Catoptrophorus semipalmatus</i> |
| 18. Brown Pelicans synchronised diving | - <i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i> |
| 19. Marbled Godwit in flight | - <i>Limosa fedoa</i> |
| 20. Snowy Egret fishing | - <i>Egretta thula</i> |



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English Nature - My ARPS Journey

by Darron Matthews ARPS

As a member of Lichfield Camera Club, myself and a few other members planned to gain distinctions in photography. The Royal Photographic Society was favoured by most members to gain an award with. However, I was in a predicament. Should I go for my Licentiate, or bypass this and go straight for my Associateship? Having been successful with some of my images in competitions and after much discussion with other members of the camera club, it was agreed I'd already found my niche in photography, and that it was the Associateship I should aim to gain.

Now the problem was selecting my images. After narrowing down the images to supposedly my best fifteen and trying to arrange them together, as a panel, created a dilemma. The images were good enough but they didn't sit well as a panel. It became obvious I needed more images that would suit the panel I was striving to create.

In the meantime I decided to attend an advisory day in Birmingham, just to see if I was going down the right path. I took my selected fifteen and a few

more, along to the venue. After the panel was seen, I was told that I should consider removing some of them and use some of my spares. At this point I was not one hundred percent sure of what I was hearing. This was due to the fact that spectators in the audience had told me not to touch it, as it was good enough as it was. I pondered for a few days, and then decided. This is not a sprint, this is a marathon. If I'm going to be successful at this distinction, then I should listen to people who know best. So I ditched the so called weaker images and filled in some of the spots with my spares. Although I was missing three images, I was pretty confident in producing these through the coming spring and summer (2014), so now was the time to book my assessment (March 2015). If you're considering sitting in on one of these assessments, my advice is to keep an eye on the RPS website. These places fill pretty quickly.

My panel was partly made up of a variety of damselflies. These are one of my favourite subjects to photograph, and the closer I can get, the more



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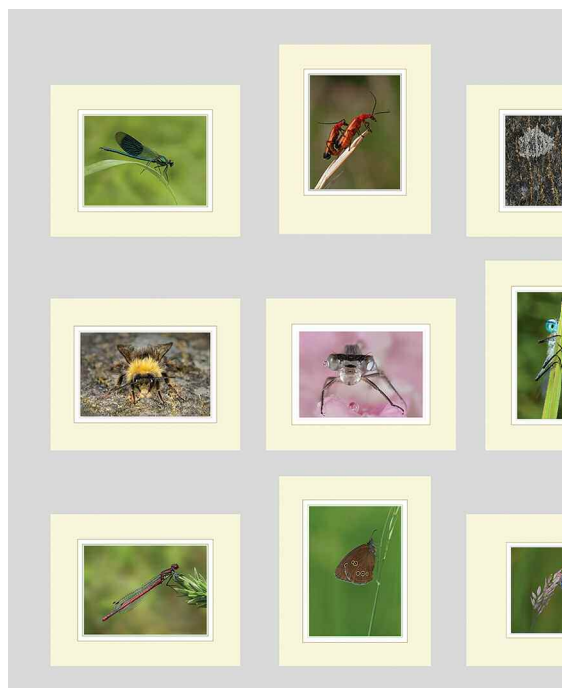


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fascinating they become. The central image is of a Common Blue Damselfly. It was taken quite early in the day - the insect is pretty dormant due to the lower temperature, so there is no panic setting up your gear to get the image you're after. I used a 5 x Macro lens with a diffused twin flash on the front. I then set up a slave flash to put some light on the grasses in the background, otherwise this would have been completely blacked out and probably, would have killed the image. The final image consists of two stacked images. One of which is focused on the eyes and the other focused on its legs. This image was featured on the front cover of the 2014 RSPB 'Love Nature' Calendar and also won a VW Up car in Germany 'Heartbeat of Nature 2013'. I decided this had to be the central image of my panel.

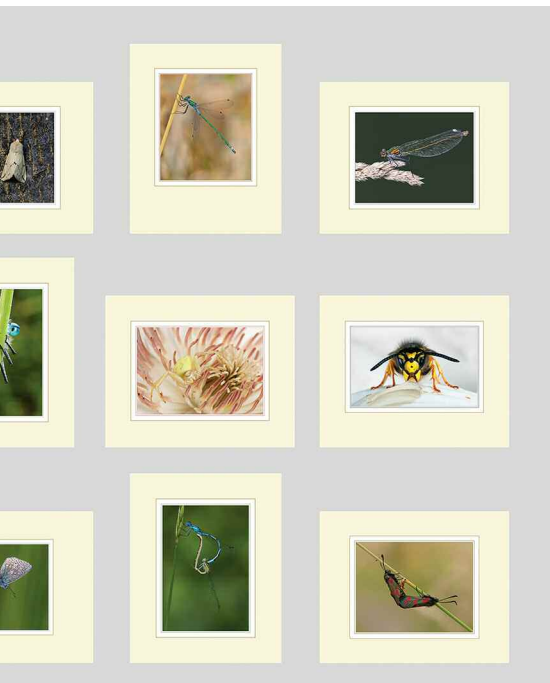
Spring and summer arrived, so out came my macro lenses. I didn't have many butterfly images taken in the wild and felt this was lacking from my panel. The only shots I had were taken a few years ago at butterfly farms I visited when I was developing my skills. I would advise anyone starting out in this field of photography, to visit such places, as it does enable you to practice - the butterflies are more docile and you can improve your technique at a slower pace. I'm quite lucky because, where I live in



Statement of Intent

What fascinates me about macro photography are the surprise elements that always appear through the lens. Those surprises are fine details that either can't be seen or aren't noticed with the naked eye.

I like macro photography and specifically shooting pictures of bugs and insects. When you get really close to these creatures, they are even more alien than you could imagine. It can be a challenge to find and photograph these tiny creatures, but that only adds to my enjoyment.

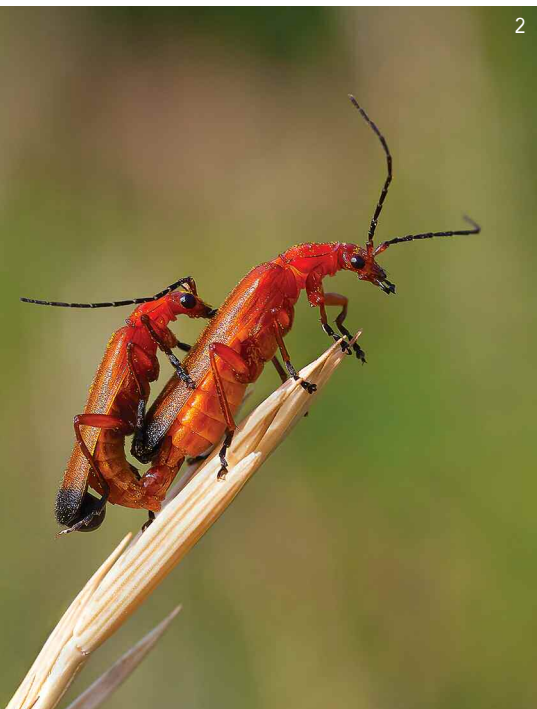




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Staffordshire, there are quite a few meadows nearby with good habitat for butterflies. So on a regular basis after work, or at weekends I was off shooting anything that became of an interest.

After sifting through my new images, I was able to complete the panel I envisaged by adding two butterfly images and the 'Tree Bumblebee'.

Now it was the time to get my images printed. As a rule, if I only have a couple of images to print then I would print them myself. But in this instance, I had decided to have them postal printed. I find it much less expensive and the quality is excellent. The returned prints were mounted with Antique White board and labelled. I then waited for judgment day.

On the Assessment day I journeyed to Bath with a couple of friends. The projected panels were shown first. From what I can recall, one set out of five actually gained the Associateship award. Of the print panels about four sets (40%) were successful, of which I'm pleased to say one was mine. Eighteen months of planning had finally come to an end. Or had it?

I'm inspired, fascinated and most of all, enjoying my photography but I need a new challenge and the next one is the Fellowship.

Image Titles

- 1 Male Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*
- 2 Common Red Soldier Beetles Mating *Rhagonycha fulva*
- 3 Buff Ermine Moth *Spilosoma luteum*
- 4 Male Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa*
- 5 Female Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*
- 6 Tree Bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum*
- 7 Immature Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*
- 8 Male Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*
- 9 Green Orb Weaver on Clematis *Araniella cucurbitina*
- 10 German Wasp and Mites *Vespula germanica*
- 11 Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula*
- 12 Female Ringlet Butterfly *Aphantopus hyperantus*
- 13 Male Common Blue Butterfly with Bug *Polyommatus icarus*
- 14 Common Blue Damselflies Mating *Enallagma cyathigerum*
- 15 Six Spot Burnets Mating *Zygaena filipendulae*

Projects through the years

by Richard Revels FRPS

I have always been keen on working towards photographic projects - for me it gives purpose when picking up the camera and going out seeking pictures. I bought my first SLR camera back in the late 1960s and joined both an evening class teaching photography as well as a local camera club. My main projects at that time would have been trying out my new 'toy' and looking for subjects for the camera club's set competitions.

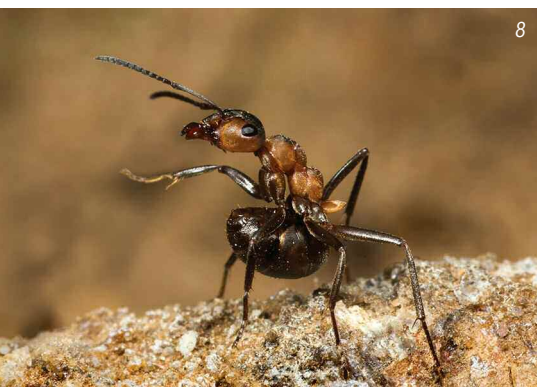
My main interest back then, as now, was photographing the natural world, particularly butterflies, moths and other insects. After a few years my interest in camera club activities declined, and I concentrated on photographing a wider range of natural history subjects. In the early 1970s I was contacted by Natural Science Photos, a natural history photo agency who asked if I would like to submit some pictures for inclusion in their library. This I was keen to do as it gave me an opportunity to earn some money from my pictures and as a result I became keener still to go out with my camera and

photograph a wider range of the natural world, although insects were always my favourite subjects.

From time to time the agency would send me a 'pictures wanted' list of creatures and plants that they required, usually for a book that they would be supplying pictures for in the coming months. The lists were usually sent out well in advance of the deadline date and gave me some time to go out and search for the subjects and take pictures. Some of these projects proved quite lucrative, as I became the agency's main photographer for supplying pictures of insects and other invertebrates.

The subjects they required often covered a range of different types of wildlife, with some in areas that I had not ventured before. Sometimes I needed to purchase new equipment and learn new techniques to get the desired pictures. These new 'projects' ranged from extreme close up pictures, sometimes several times life size, to photographing aquatic subjects that required the setting up of aquariums. New techniques had to be learned for using flash to





illuminate these extreme close ups, and the subjects in aquariums. Cameras and flash in the 1970s and 1980s did not have TTL flash metering, so I had to manually allow for the drop off of light when using bellows for extreme close ups, and also when photographing creatures in an aquarium, due to light being reflected off of the aquarium glass.

I was using transparency film at that time. It had to be correctly exposed - even half a stop error would render a slide useless for reproduction and would go straight in the trash bin. Getting to know your camera and flash was a high priority in those days!

My butterfly and moth pictures usually sold well, but some of my best selling pictures proved to be the un-glamorous ones, like a Slug eating a vegetable! Unfortunately, about 10 years ago, that agency closed down rather than face the huge cost and effort needed to convert everything to supplying digital files. Over the years that agency gave me many different 'projects' some of which took me outside of my photographic 'comfort zone', for which I am grateful, as it extended my photographic abilities into areas that otherwise I would not have ventured.

From time to time I had other projects in the form of commissions to supply pictures for displays. One that I particularly enjoyed was to find and photograph all the different species of the larger British Ladybird beetles (24 at that time) for a museum display. Many projects I set myself, included photographing the life cycles of butterfly and moth species, insects in-flight using high speed flash, and Dragonflies flying, and hovering, which did not need flash.

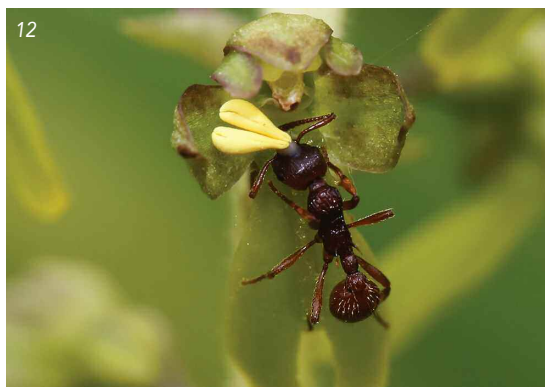
Whenever I have a chance to photograph something that I may never see again I will grab the opportunity before it disappears. So when a friend told me that a Queen Hornet *Vespa crabro* seemed to be nest building in a bird box, I was there like a shot to see what photos I could get. Opening the top of the bird box revealed the queen tending her brood, with two capped over pupae cells, a dozen or so larvae in various stages of growth in other cells, and a few newly laid eggs. Later when the workers were flying regularly to and from the nest, pictures were obtained of them in flight by using my high speed flash setup.

Several years later I was alerted to a Hornets nest being built inside a bird hide, and this provided me with a totally different set of Hornet pictures, this time of them nest building. The Hornet is Britain's largest species of social wasp, and although they seldom attack people unless their nest is being disturbed, I would advise anyone attempting to photograph near an active nest to use protective clothing, as stings can be painful and dangerous.

Another insect that I always enjoy photographing is the Wood Ants *Formica rufa* as they carry prey and other things back to their nest across a woodland ride, which can make interesting pictures. However getting good pictures of them is far from easy. It involves lying down on the track to get down to their level, and resting the camera on a beanbag. In so doing I would soon get covered by the ants, and although they don't sting, they do bite! Sometimes we wildlife photographers have to suffer to get our pictures! But I don't mind too much as long as I end up with some interesting shots.

My most recent project has also been my most time consuming and interesting. During 2013 and 2014 I led a Bedfordshire Natural History Society (BNHS) two year survey of the wild orchids of the county, with the promise of the findings being published in a lavishly illustrated book funded by the BNHS. Most of the photographic side of this project was fairly straight forward, although finding some of the early leaf rosettes was not always easy, and photographing the minute orchid seed (c1 mm length) proved a challenge using my conventional camera equipment. Photographing pollinating insects was often far from easy and involved spending many hours on site, with usually few if any worthwhile pictures to show for my efforts.

The main task of everyone involved in this project was searching suitable areas of the county as thoroughly as possible for all the 27 orchid species recorded in Bedfordshire since records began back in c1790. Fortunately this project also caught the imagination of around 250 other people in the county, who sent in over 2500 records from the length and breadth of the county during the two years of the survey. It was necessary for me to check all reports of new (previously unknown) colonies of the rarer species, and in some cases identification proved to be incorrect. However, we managed to find 25 of the 27 species, which included three species that had not been recorded in Bedfordshire since the 1980s and were thought to have become extinct in the county. These were the Lizard Orchid *Himantoglossum hircinum*, the Marsh Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia densiflora* and the Lesser Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera bifolia*. The two species we failed to find were the Bog Orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*, last recorded in the county in 1792 and with no suitable habitats left in Bedfordshire, and the Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris* which was last seen in 1971. This orchid has several suitable habitats in the county, mostly in damp areas of several disused chalk quarries, so there is hope that it may return at some time in the future.





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As expected, the most widespread and abundant orchid in the county was the Common Spotted *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, closely followed by the Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, which has become much more common in recent years, and now grows on many road verges and even on some garden lawns. During the 1950s this orchid was considered a local and scarce plant of disused chalk pits and ancient calcareous pastures. Today it is likely to turn up almost anywhere.

Although this project involved a huge amount of both time and travelling, I found it very rewarding. It was very much a 'labour of love' and a team effort, with the BNHS plant recorder Chris Boon and the former local Wildlife Trust's Conservation Manager and later the Reserves Manager Graham Bellamy, both contributing enormously to the project. It would have been quite easy for me to produce a 'coffee table' type guide of Bedfordshire's orchids on my own but it would not have contained half the information that we compiled. I always think that if a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well and in this case it was, even though I needed the help of others.

As you may have gathered from reading the above, I like having a project to do. What will my project for 2016 will be? You may well find out in the pages of The Iris in a year or so.



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Captions

- 1 Smooth Newtpole *Triturus vulgaris* - a set up 'mini' aquarium was used to take this shot.
- 2 Male Chalkhill Blue butterflies *Polymnatus coridon* feeding on Carline thistles.
3. 10 spot Ladybirds *Adalia 10-punctata* mating.
- 4 A parasitic wasp *Perilitus coccinellae* attempting to inject an egg into a 7 Spot Ladybird.
- 5 A Hornets nest being built in a bird hide. The opportunity to take such pictures are rare.
- 6 The Queen Hornet *Vespa crabro* tending her brood in a partly made nest in a bird box.
- 7 Wood ants carrying a Wasp back to their nest.
- 8 Wood Ant *Formica rufa* in the defence position.
- 9 Migrant Hawker Dragonfly hovering.
- 10 Elephant Hawkmoth *Deilephila elpenor* feeding on honeysuckle flowers.
- 11 Male Raspberry Clearwing moth in flight.
- 12 Ants can be major pollinators of some species of orchids - this ant is carrying two pollinia sacs on its head as it visits this Twayblade Orchid.
- 13 Orchid seeds about 1 mm long.
- 14 Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* with a 'double' flower-head. Extreme freaks like this one are very rare.

Northern Iceland - a mixed bag for bird photography.

by **Conor Molloy ARPS**

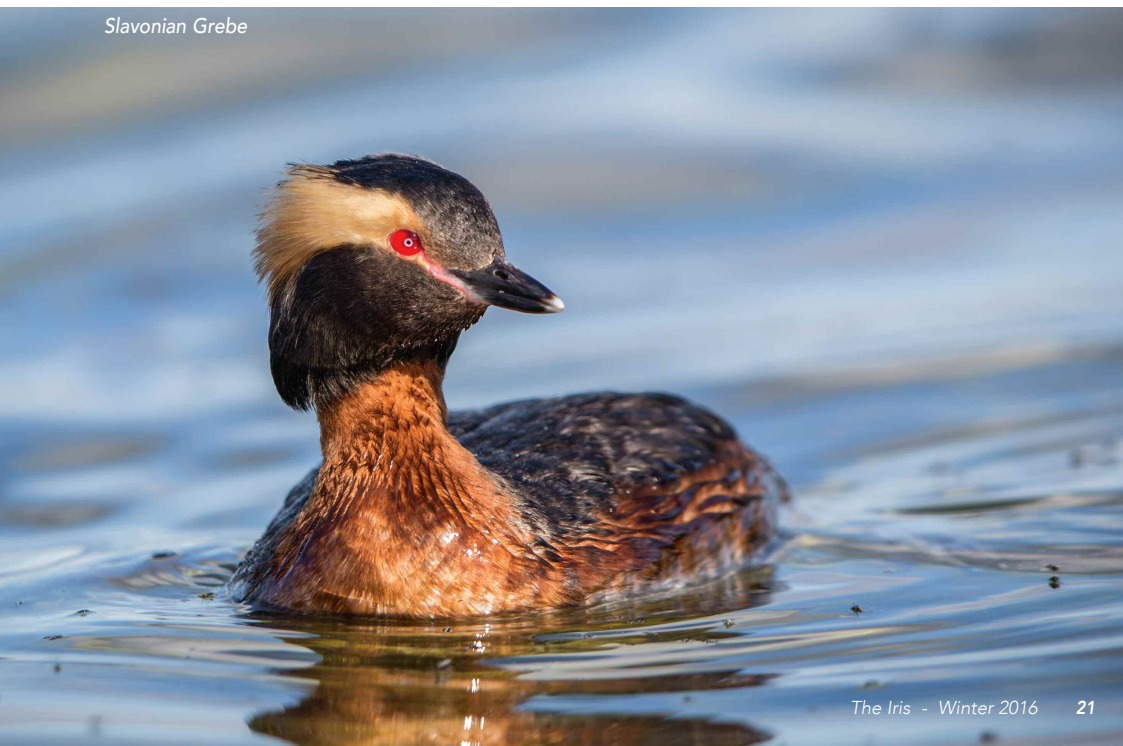
As photography holidays go, Iceland is I am sure on many people's list and, even if you have already been, it's a place you would want to go back to. Early June means you are in for 24 hours daylight - it simply never gets anywhere close to dark - and in our case the weather was positively Mediterranean, beautiful sunshine throughout. I think we were very lucky as the weather in Iceland is notoriously unpredictable even from hour to hour.

It is always a tough choice when deciding which lenses to bring with the airline carry-on weight limits and your own physical weight lifting capability. In the end I chose only one lens for bird shots, the Canon 600mm f4. I sensed that bird life was going to be a bit distant and I would need the reach - it proved a good choice and just occasionally I had to make use of the 1.4 extender. My other kit was purely for landscape work - another big Icelandic attraction.

My main aim was to get good close images of the Great Northern Diver as it's one of the very few places in Europe where this bird can be seen and I had never encountered it. Having spent one night in Reykjavik a short internal flight to Akureyri brought us close to the shores of Lake Myvatn which is in my book of "The best birding sites in Europe".

I should have remembered that the 'best birding sites' are not necessarily the best bird photography sites and Myvatn was a disappointment in terms of photography. I thought I could realistically expect to see flocks of waders and get really close to large groups of birds, but not here, birds were in their one's and two's and very scarce at that. My best experience was getting up at 6am and settling down next to a group of rocks by the shore of the lake by myself and just sitting there quietly - it is often said that if you can't get to the birds then just sit there and let them

Slavonian Grebe





Long-tailed Duck



Red-necked Phalarope



Harlequin Duck



Photographer with flies

come to you. It wasn't long before a rather empty scene was enlivened by the appearance of a couple of Red-necked Phalarope, which was to be one of the most commonly sighted throughout our time in Iceland. These birds seem unperturbed by humans and come quite close - perfect for image capture. Then into the scene wandered Slavonian Grebe and Long-tailed Duck, also within good photographing distance. Superb - what a good start.

The one thing we were warned about at Myvatn (locally its pronounced 'Me-Vat') was the flies - little black non-biting flies. You need a head net otherwise you just wouldn't survive as there are trillions of them. They cover all your equipment and in the process of putting your hand on your camera you kill about 50 of them in one go as they don't move. Occasionally they will wander onto the glass of your lens - but hey, that is what spot removal in Lightroom is for!!

The three species mentioned above were the most easily photographed, we also saw Redwing, Snipe, Pied Wagtails, Whooper Swans and Barrows Goldeneye but never particularly close. A trip to one of the fast flowing rivers produced sightings of the Harlequin Duck, another Iceland speciality but again, there were only two and their time with us was fleeting. Nevertheless, they are one impressive duck!

My three nights in Myvatn had not proved very productive for photography and I was already giving up hope of seeing the Great Northern Diver as this was surely the prime spot to see it. An 8 hour long drive to Latrabjarg in the very north west part of Iceland beckoned. This was where cliffs 'teeming' with seabirds would be found. Puffins, Fulmars, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills etc. Going there at 9pm and staying until midnight gave the best quality of light for photography. We visited there for three nights. The first time there were very few Puffins, I mean about twelve, and fewer of the other seabirds than I had expected. Was this first hand evidence of the decline of our seabird population? It sure looked like it! There were slightly more Puffins on the next two nights but nowhere near the quality of encounter that you get on our own Farne Islands or Skomer.

Luckily, again in early morning, I took myself down to a small harbour a few hundred yards from our hotel and set myself up near the rocks just sitting quietly. There were Oystercatchers squeaking in the distance and Arctic Terns fishing out at sea but my main interest was the Eider ducks flying close by, so I set myself up to do some 'in flight' photography. After a while I could see something strange had suddenly popped up out of the water reasonably close by, the shape of the head profile alerted me to



Juvenile Great Northern Diver

the fact that it could be a Great Northern Diver! A second one appeared, but unfortunately they were not beautiful black and white adults but two juveniles. So I scouted around with my binoculars to see where the parents could be and spotted one way out at sea. For a good ten minutes or so I made the best of the opportunity to photograph the youngsters as they fished inshore before they finally disappeared. It was, nevertheless, a precious moment and well worth the effort of getting up early. The adult stayed about half a mile away - just a tiny black dot on the horizon. On our way to the seabird cliffs one evening we spotted some Red-throated Divers with the binoculars but they were never within range for a good camera shot.

From Latrabjarg a 2 hour ferry trip took us to Flatey Island. It may as well be re-named Redshank Island as they were everywhere, posing nicely for pictures in some beautiful lighting conditions. Flatey is very small - about a fifteen minute walk from one end to the other - with a small summer population, one hotel, a church and no cars. Other birds to be seen were Arctic Tern, Puffin, Fulmar, Snipe, Ringed Plover, Snow bunting, Dunlin, Eider duck and Black Guillemot. I was led to believe that Black Guillemot (which I hadn't seen before) would come fishing in numbers at the small harbour around 4am - 5am. So, as you do, I set the alarm clock to be sure of catching this spectacle. Only to find that there were only three in the harbour and not terribly active. So I was soon back to bed to resume sleeping which with all the daylight was becoming a bit problematic.

Iceland proved to be a bit of a mixed bag. I did get some excellent images of new birds to add to my portfolio and the quality of light can be superb but I remained disappointed that the main objective of my trip - a beautiful image of the adult Great Northern Diver did not happen. Luckily there was all that geo-thermal activity and landscape beauty to provide alternative shutter clicking therapy.....and I will have to add my name to the list of those who have been but want to go back again!



Puffin



Ringed Plover



Redshank



Eider Duck

Yellowstone National Park

by David Cantrille FRPS

Yellowstone was the world's first national park, founded in 1872. It is home to over 10,000 thermal features, including 300 geysers and many bubbling mud pools and hot springs. During winter much of it is snowbound until April, with access only by jet ski or alpine snow coach, a strange contraption on caterpillar tracks with skis at the front.

We visited Yellowstone with Photoventures, run by Roger Reynolds FRPS and were thus able to enter the park as a group by snow coach, in order to capture images of the wildlife and landscapes of a Yellowstone winter. The weather was not as cold as the seasonal norm but was still 20 degrees below zero.

Arrival by air was at Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Nearby are the Grand Teton mountains. We placed our tripods where Ansel Adams placed his for his shot of the Tetons and Snake River. Outside Jackson Hole, Elk congregated in the National Elk Refuge where they are fed. A horse-drawn sleigh

took us among the Elk for close-up photographs. Nearby, Bighorn Sheep searched for grasses under the snow on the lower slopes of the Grand Tetons.

Inside the park there were huge vistas of deep snow that glistened in the sun. One of the most spectacular was Hayden Valley where only a few trees were dotted across a white landscape with blue sky above. Early morning entry to the park showed us bison with a coating of snow and ice over their thick coats. As the sun came out and warmed them up, they were on the move to forage under the snow.

Geysers are spectacular features of the park, Old Faithful being the most famous. Hot springs, like Mammoth and Old Prismatic Springs produced atmospheric shots with steam rising into the air and dead trees standing starkly where the heat had killed them. Bubbling mud pools and multi-coloured hot springs like Artist Paint Pots were also well worth a visit.





We travelled on to Gardiner by four wheel drive and, at the edge of the park, we found strange-looking creatures called Pronghorn, antelope-like animals which apparently are the fastest land mammal in the Western Hemisphere, and the second fastest on the planet after the Cheetah.

From Gardiner, we travelled east to Cooke City, the north east entrance to Yellowstone National Park. Here, we had access to bird feeders and were able to capture images of birds in snowy conditions, including Pine Grosbeak, Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee and Hairy Woodpecker. During our overnight stay in Cooke City it snowed heavily and we woke to an extra two foot of snow.

Our trip to Yellowstone in winter was an exciting and different photographic expedition. Though we had to wrap ourselves in many layers of clothing and operate in temperatures well below freezing, it was a fruitful trip both for wildlife and for landscapes, though we failed to get any images of wolves. Camera equipment operated well, though my wife's camera battery failed once, just as the Old Faithful geyser was erupting, so she missed the shot.

Yellowstone is a fascinating park, well worth a visit at any time of the year, but particularly special in winter.

Of Otters and Skimmers, Seals and Hummingbirds

by Michael Gore FRPS



Rufous Hummingbird



Northern Elephant Seals sparring

Since studying his books at college I have always thought that John Steinbeck was the finest writer of the 20th Century. Not only was he a great writer but he had a very real social conscience. So I took the opportunity of a trip to California for a family wedding in the summer of 2015 to go to Monterey especially to visit Cannery Row and see where he lived and the places he wrote about. Unfortunately, after a short trip to Cannery Row I was diverted by the incredible wildlife to be found around Monterey Bay and along the Californian coast and I spent the rest of our visit by the water with my camera!

First creature to captivate me was the Sea Otter. I had seen and photographed them before in a partly frozen inlet in Alaska but they are such endearing animals that I could not stop myself from taking more photographs. In reality they are not very nice and have been known to rape female Harbour Seals! But they are magical even when they are doing nothing other than sleeping on their backs, floating on the water. Brought close to the point of extinction for their skins (they have the densest fur of any creature with an incredible, almost unbelievable, one million hairs per square inch) in the early part of the 20th century, they are now common, almost abundant, along the coast around Monterey.

Then there were Californian Fur Seals and Northern Elephant Seals, also both brought close to extinction around the same time but both now common. The Elephant Seals are the only seal which migrate long distances, from Mexico to northern California. They can dive to more than 2000 feet and stay under water for over an hour! Declared functionally extinct in the late 1880s, with less than 100 individuals remaining, they recovered under protection from both the Mexican and American governments and today number about 150,000 animals. Unfortunately, because the herds come from a small gene pool, scientists are worried about the future strength of the species.

Venturing out on a whale watching trip we passed hordes of California Fur Seals basking on the

rocks and buoys at the entrance to Monterey harbour and Sea Otters floating in the kelp fields which abound off this coast. We saw Humpback Whales and managed some images of them 'peeping' and of their tails and flukes but were not fortunate enough to get a breach.

On the shore were groups of Long-billed Curlew, American Whimbrel and Marbled Godwit, all remarkably approachable on foot. I have never understood why American waders are so easy to approach whereas those on our side of the pond are so shy and difficult to get close to.

Moving south down the magnificent Pacific Coast Highway we stopped off to see a large group of male Elephant Seals lounging on the beach, moulting and intermittently going into the sea to spar. We then stopped at the beautiful (and expensive!) city of Santa Barbara where there is a small coastal pool, which I remember from a previous visit, and here I came across a party of ten Skimmers resting on a sandbar and occasionally taking off to skim across the water in search of small fish.

Our journey through the west of the United States ended with a week in New Mexico where I had an opportunity to photograph an assortment of hummingbirds attracted to garden feeders. Most beautiful, in my opinion, is the Rufous Hummingbird, a common summer visitor in New Mexico and elsewhere through the mid-West which readily comes to feeders, as indeed will most hummingbirds.

Travelling a lot by air I have to keep my kit to a minimum. Some five years ago I made a major decision and moved from the Canon 35mm SLR system, which I had used for more than 30 years, to the Panasonic 4/3 GH system. I am more than happy with the results. I often use a beanbag rather than a tripod and always carry a monopod with a 'V' fitting on the top which, because of the incredible stabilising system on the Panasonic, I find gives me sharp images even at quite slow shutter speeds. All of the images accompanying this article were taken with this system.



Sea Otter sleeping



Sea Otter



Long-billed Curlew



Black Skimmers



Humpback Whale 'peeping'



Captions

1. Common Loon female incubating
2. Parent with chick
3. Parent offering a naiad to its chick
4. Adult Common Loon stretching after preening
5. Song Sparrow
6. Marsh Wren displaying.

EOS1DX, 300mm f2.8 MkII +X2 MkIII



Great Northern Experience

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

A white mist shrouds the surface of a lake and then you hear the sounds of tremolos and yodels floating through the air across the water. You peer into the mist and across the water - the sound carries far in the quiet of early morning. Finally, you see the source of the sound - a Great Northern Diver - and for no logical reason you are filled with a tingling of emotions.

I had long wanted to photograph Great Northern Divers but with little opportunity in the UK it was an dream I had been unable to achieve. So, this last June I travelled to Alberta, Canada in the hope of realising my dream.

In Canada and the United States, Divers are known as Loons. The Great Northern Diver is called the Common Loon. I strongly object to anything being called Common just because it is (or was) more frequently seen than another. Nevertheless, the Common Loon is represented on the reverse of every Canadian Dollar coin affectionately known as a Loony.

June is the time when the Loons are nesting. They are highly territorial and build their floating nests on the water's edge. On large lakes you could find three or four pairs nesting, while on smaller lakes you might find only one. The eggs, usually two, take about a month to incubate and generally hatch in early June.

Canadians love the 'great outdoors' and enjoy camping, hiking, canoeing and fishing. Many of the larger lakes have a variety of boats for hire and there are always plenty of them on the water. For this reason the Loons are very relaxed in the presence of

humans, especially if those humans are in boats. You can be much closer to a Loon when you are in a boat low to the water. The chicks will often come right up to the boat for shelter while their parent is below water hunting for their food.

My mornings on the water began as the sun was coming up - about 05.30. The adults seemed most active feeding their young at that time and the light is often attractive. The food they brought in was mostly naiads or nymphs of dragonfly or mayfly species, although when older, the chicks will accept small fish. Sometimes groups of unpaired males would land on the water and the resident male would attempt to drive them away. It is not unknown for the male parent and the chicks to be killed by a bachelor who would then attempt to mate with the female.

The lakes are also frequented by Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, the margins by small birds such as Marsh Wren and Yellow-throat Warbler; the surrounding forests contained Chickadees, Red-naped Sapsucker, Rufous Hummingbird, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Grackles, Cowbirds, Tree Swallow, and many others. I also had opportunities to photograph Muskrat, Yellow-bellied Marmot, Columbian and Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Least Chipmunk, Elk, Black Bear and more.

My most memorable moment though was quietly observing two Loon chicks emerge from their eggs. Truthfully though, it was more like a couple of hours, but oh so special.



The Iris seeks a new Editor

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the member who had offered to take on the role of Editor from Dawn Osborn FRPS at the AGM in 2017 has had to step down. Therefore we are once again searching for someone with the necessary skills to take on the role of Editor.

The role mainly involves sourcing articles from within the nature group membership; page design and layout of images and text, including editing; preparation of print ready digital artwork and images to and liaison with our printer.

Additional responsibilities include proof reading and correcting, where necessary, ordering copies and supplying details necessary for posting to members.

The Iris typically contains 32-40 pages and is currently published three times a year - early March, July and November. It is prepared using print industry standard Quark Xpress software and a working knowledge of this application (or similar) is essential. A sound knowledge of Adobe Photoshop and MS Word are also necessary. Applicants should have their own Mac or Windows based PC.

Although only three times a year, preparation of The Iris can nevertheless be quite time consuming and applicants must be certain that they have sufficient time to commit to the role.

If you feel that you have the necessary skills and time available to become the Nature Group's new Editor, please contact either the existing Editor, Dawn, or the Chairman, Richard Revels FRPS. Contact details can be found on page 2.

Dawn cannot continue in the role indefinitely so please do get in touch if you have the skills to enable publication of The Iris to continue on schedule.

2017 Annual Exhibition of Prints & Digital Images

Exhibition Selectors:

John Chamberlin FRPS, Barbara Lawton FRPS and John Bebbington FRPS

Exhibition Calendar:

Closing date for entries	31st January 2017
Selection Day	8th February 2017
Report cards	by mid-March 2017
Exhibition Opening	8th April 2017
Returned unaccepted entries	Late April 2017

Entering the Exhibition

The online entry system used in 2016 will be available and is the preferred method of entry. The entry system can be accessed from the Members Exhibition page of the Nature Group section of the RPS website. Members who cannot or do not wish to use the online entry system, can download an entry form from the same location on the RPS website. If any member is unable to access the website they can obtain an entry form by contacting the Exhibition Secretary: Ralph Snook ARPS.
Email: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com or
Tel: 01454 620817

Awards and Acceptances

A Gold Medal will be awarded to the best print and digital image of the exhibition, and a Bronze Medal, plus Selector's, Highly Commended and Commended Certificates will be awarded in each section. The 'Tony Wharton' award will be presented to the most successful entrant in the exhibition. The acceptance list, plus the award winning images, will be published in the Summer issue of 'The Iris'. The awarded images will also appear on the RPS website. A DVD of all accepted images will be sent to each entrant.

Important Change to Print Entries

In 2017, as well as being displayed at the Exhibition Opening held at the club rooms of Smethwick P.S., The Old Schoolhouse, Churchbridge, Oldbury, West Midlands, they will also be displayed at additional locations, in Edinburgh and East Anglia. Therefore accepted prints will be retained until the AGM of the following year, ie prints accepted in the 2017 exhibition will not be returned until the 2018 AGM. Unaccepted prints will be returned at or immediately after the 2017 AGM. In order for the prints to be displayed at the additional locations this year the mount size MUST be 40cmx50cm. This change allows the accepted works to be viewed by a wider audience of members and the general public. We encourage all members to enter their prints into the 2017 exhibition to take advantage of, and support this initiative.

Entry Conditions

Further details of the entry conditions can be viewed in the online entry system, the Nature Group area of the RPS website, and the manual entry form.

Request for Field Meeting Leaders

Hello Everyone

On behalf of the RPS Nature Group, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who hosted or attended a field meeting during 2016. The weather conditions were often challenging, nevertheless it was very disappointing that not all field meetings were well supported and some not at all, which is quite disheartening for the members who have gone to the trouble of organising the events.

RPS Nature Group Field Meetings have always been an integral part of the Nature Group's activities, and offer members opportunities to visit sites of natural history interest which they may not otherwise know about, and also meet and share ideas with other natural history photographers.

There are Nature Group members all around the country and it would be wonderful if a field meeting could be arranged in each of the RPS regions during the course of next year. So I am appealing to all members to consider hosting a field meeting.

If you know of a site with interesting subjects to photograph, please consider becoming a leader – you are not expected to instruct others in photographic techniques or to be an expert at identifying all the wildlife subjects.

Many members of the Nature Group are retired, and therefore mid-week meetings are quite well attended.

To ensure inclusion in the Spring issue of *The Iris* please complete the form overleaf or send details to me before Friday, 20th January 2017. Please contact me if you require any further information.

Barbara Lawton, FRPS, DPAGB
78 Leybourne Crescent
Pendeford,
Wolverhampton, WV9 5QG

Tel: 01902 787811
Email: barbara.lawton@talktalk.net

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Barbara Lawton

Elections 2017

New Members required to join the Nature Group Committee.

Every two years at our AGM the Nature Group elects its committee for the following two years. This will take place again in 2017.

We have a number of committee members retiring from the committee after many years of service and we would welcome the nomination of any member who feels they could assist in the running of the group, i.e. 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 twice a year, usually (but not exclusively) at Smethwick P.S. 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 overleaf and return to:

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

Please respond by the end of November.

If you do not wish to cut this page of *The Iris*, you may scan or type out the nomination form and either post or email it. Please state the RPS membership numbers of all those named.

Nomination Form for Elections 2017

Please complete and return before
30th November 2016

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

RPS Nature Group Field Meetings 2017

Please return this form before 20th January, 2017

Day and Date:

Time:

Location:

Grid Ref/Post Code:

Meeting Place:

Subjects of Interest:

Additional Information:

Items to bring:

Cost: (eg Car Parking Fees)

Leader:

Address:

Tel:

Email:

Field Meeting Report

Ainsdale Dunes - June 25th, 2016.

We timed this field meeting two weeks later than in previous years in order to find and photograph later species of plant and insect. Eighteen members spent a full day in the dunes and, after a damp start, the day remained fine except for the ever present coastal breeze.

The decision to have a later meeting was well rewarded with very good displays of Pyramidal Orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and Early-marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata*) of the ssp *coccinea*, and some late but spectacular hybrids. We also found good specimens of Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), though most were past their best, and there were good numbers of the small but beautiful Dune Pansy (*Viola tricolour* ssp *curtisii*); an uncommon plant mainly restricted to Western coasts.

Late, first generation, Northern Dune Tiger Beetles (*Cicindela hybrida*) were found and photographed, and members had opportunities to photograph Buff-tip moths (*Phalera bucephala*) and a variety of moth caterpillars including Emperor (*Saturnia pavonia*), Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*) and Buff Ermine (*Spilosoma luteum*).

One or two members managed to get decent images of a resident male Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) that scolded us whilst photographing the hybrid orchids.

Our thanks to Dr Phil Smith, MBE, for sharing his knowledge of this wonderful area with the group, and to the officers and staff of Sefton Coast and Countryside whose kind assistance is much appreciated.

Trevor Davenport ARPS

Female Common Field Grasshopper



Trevor Davenport ARPS

Narrow-bordered 5-spot Burnets



Trevor Davenport ARPS

More images from
Mick Rowe's
successful
Fellowship Panel.

