



Bobcat, Yellowstone National Park.

© Dawn Osborn FRPS

This is what I had planned to be doing at the end of January this year - photographing wildlife, perhaps even this Bobcat - in Yellowstone National Park. My first visit there in the winter was January 2015 and unfortunately it wasn't the best year for snow fall. We planned another visit for the following January but due to circumstances beyond our control we had to cancel at the last minute. Our plans this time included two friends, our own private snowcoach, transport to and from the airport both here and in the USA. It should have been a great trip. C'est la vie! Even the best laid plans have no guarantee of success!

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Welcome to Issue 12 of Nature Group eNews.

It's very hard to find any good news to write about. Here we are again, in a locked down situation that is likely to last for quite a while longer. The news that deaths in England and Wales from Covid 19 have now surpassed 100,000 is tragic and distressing even if your family has not suffered the loss of a loved one.

Stuck at home for much of the last year and all our plans & trips for 2020 and 2021 aborted. It's difficult to make plans to do anything or travel anywhere because the situation is so fluid.

Despite the hope that all over 70s will have received their first dose during the next two weeks and their

second dose up to 12 weeks later, it will likely take the rest of the year to give it to all the other age groups. There still seems little known about how long the vaccine will be effective; how often will you need to have it again - every year like the flu jab perhaps? Then there is the question of more new variants coming along. All very depressing.

Putting off plans for a year or two, is disappointing for everyone, but even more so as you find yourself getting older.

Perhaps we will all be spending more time photographing within our own shores rather than heading overseas for more exotic species?

It would be very nice if more of our Nature Group Members would share information, images and experiences with fellow members. Please don't just think about doing it, sit down at that computer and do it!

I look forward to receiving your offers of stories of the projects you have begun or finished during lockdown, observations you might have made on the wildlife visiting your garden or nature photographs you have taken near to home.

Dawn Osborn FRPS, eNews Editor

Focus Stacking & the Novoflex Castel-Micro

(A motorised Macro Focusing Rail)

by Robert Thompson FRPS FIPF

Introduction

In the photographic world, we often strive to achieve a shallow depth of field in some of our images for several reasons. For example, separating the subject from its background to give it more prominence, or to reduce clutter and unsightly distractions behind it. In bird photography backgrounds are an important aspect to consider and photographers endeavour to obtain a soft or diffused look to their images where it does not detract from subject and the overall ambience of the photograph. To achieve this, large aperture lenses are often used, shooting wide open to create this effect.



Image 1 *Ophrys tenthredinifera*

Shooting with a longer focal length macro at f/8, (which is the sweet spot of the lens), ensured that the background was well diffused while at the same time it created a pleasant bokeh effect. I also checked that there was sufficient depth of field to cover the subject. A smaller aperture would have rendered much more detail in the background making it more obtrusive and diluting the impact of the orchid.

In the world of macro photography, it's a completely different approach. Limited depth of field is one of the biggest issues macro photographers have to contend with. Photographing subject's that are small often means having to work at much closer distances, where the zone of sharpness reduces considerably as the magnification increases; in some cases, it may only be millimetres. Retaining sharpness throughout the subject being photographed depends on two factors, magnification and the aperture value. Choosing a smaller aperture of f/16 or f/22 for example does not necessarily guarantee complete sharpness throughout the subject since magnification also has a bearing on the final image. Employing smaller apertures to get around the problem is not the ideal approach. Diffraction becomes an issue when the lens is stopped down, which leads to a decrease in sharpness and detail due to blurring and a reduction in luminosity. Also, the decrease in light means slower shutter speeds or higher ISO values (which may increase digital noise) to compensate.



Image 2 Slime Mould *Arcyria cinerea*
reproductive phase

The slime mould spheres were approximately 2mm in height and photographed at a magnification of 3.5X with the Laowa 2:5-5X macro. It would not have been possible to retain sharpness throughout the image even at the lenses smallest aperture. Also, diffraction would have been evident in the final image.

EXTENDING DEPTH OF FIELD

Since the evolution of digital photography, advancements in software development have seen many new techniques and workflow improvements become available. It is now possible, with a few clicks of the mouse, to overcome many of the time-consuming processes and issues that were challenging just a few years ago.



Image 3 (top) Scarlet Elf Cup *Sarcoscypha coccinea*
We are often restricted to composing images in a particular way to maximise the depth of field. Most of the time we compose with the camera back parallel to the subject as much as possible to achieve the greatest level of sharpness.

Image 4 Focus stacking or extended depth of field gives us greater freedom to select alternative viewpoints that would be impossible to retain sharpness throughout the whole image. In this example, I have photographed it from a more oblique viewpoint, but I am still able to retain sharpness beyond the subject. Viewpoints such as this often give a three-dimensional look to the image.

One of the biggest developments in macro photography is the ability to extend the depth of field by combining individual images using specialist software; recent editions of Photoshop also allow you to do this, but have their limitations in what can be achieved.

Focus Stacking, Focus Blending or Extended Depth of Field are terms used to describe the digital image processing technique. A series of images photographed at different focus distances are combined to produce a final photograph that has a greater depth of field than any individual source image. The collective images are then processed in a specialist piece of software which analyses and blends the in-focus areas within each image to form the final photograph. One of the advantages of applying the focus stacking technique is the fact that you can shoot at the lenses sharpest aperture, or sweet spot while

retaining maximum detail and contrast in the photograph. You can also photograph subjects from more oblique viewpoints; something that would have been difficult to achieve working in the normal conventional manner.

There are basically two techniques or approaches to focus stacking. Variable Focus Rotation, where you are altering the focus point by small incremental adjustments to the focusing ring. The second technique is manual advancement by moving the camera assembly mounted on a focusing rail in small incremental movements. The latter is often used when working at higher magnifications. Both methods have pros and cons, both of which I have discussed in greater detail in the review on the Castel-Micro focusing rail.

I should point out from the start that focus stacking is not the answer and solution for every image that lacks sufficient depth of field. If that were the case, we would end up with a series of photographs that are uniform in appearance and lacking in imagination and style. It should be used carefully and creatively when the image would benefit from its application. It is not always necessary to have complete sharpness throughout an image for several reasons. For example, you may want to create an artistic interpretation and in this context, the choice of aperture and focal length of the lens are important and dictate how the final image will look. Also, photographing mobile subjects, such as insects, presents a greater challenge when employing the focus stacking technique. Trying to capture multiple images of a moving creature brings its own frustrations. In my own work, I use it when I think the subject will benefit from it, or when working at higher magnifications when sharpness throughout is the most important aspect of the image.



Image 5 Oleander Hawk-moth *Daphnis nerii*
Variable Focus Rotation is the most frequently used of the two focus stacking techniques. It works reasonably well at lower magnifications if the advancements are kept as small and even as possible, as in this case, while the subject remains relatively still. The resting moth has been photographed at a slightly oblique angle. A wider aperture can also be used to control the background appearance.



Image 6 Early Purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*
 There are many situations particularly with flower photography where its desirable have a shallower depth of field as in this example. Using a long lens plus an extension tube, to reduce the minimum focusing distance, I shot through the bluebells in the foreground to create the blur and keeping the aperture virtually wide open to balance the background with the foreground.

Although focus stacking is an extremely useful technique, it also has some drawbacks. Technique and adequate tripod support are an important part of the process; lack of attention in the procedure will often bring disappointment. Achieving consistency in the stack sequence does require, in the vast majority of cases, working from a tripod to ensure continuity and consistency in the result. There are some photographers who claim they can work tripod-free and perhaps in a minority of cases it's possible, but if you want to produce high-quality images a tripod is the best approach in my opinion.

It is fair to say that static subjects tend to produce more successful stacks as the photographer has more time to execute the process carefully. Mobile creatures can be hit and miss, especially at higher magnifications, also movement caused by the wind can be just as frustrating. Shortcomings in any of these aspects can lead to increased artefacts and considerably more time spent in

software trying to correct them. Another fact to consider is what may look fine for the web may be unsuitable at higher resolutions due to other artefacts, halos or the lack of sufficient focus overlap which can go unnoticed in a smaller image.

Some camera manufacturers have incorporated a focus stacking feature within some of their cameras utilising the autofocus system to move the lens to different focus points as dictated by the parameters set by the photographer in the menu. However, this approach is of limited use in my opinion and best suited to images captured at lower magnifications since you have no control of the autofocus during the stack sequence. It can also be a bit hit or miss, also the degree of focus overlap is limited compared to an automated rail. Focus stacking is best carried out with autofocus switched off where you have complete control of the whole process.

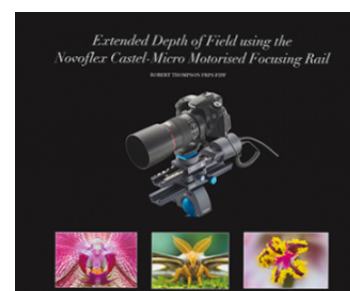
Novoflex-Castel Micro

Recently I have been testing and reviewing the Castel-Micro; a motorized focusing rail developed by Novoflex. There are many advantages to using a motorized rail, especially when working at higher magnifications. It can deliver greater accuracy in controlled focus advancement, and continuity in focus overlap producing images with fewer artefacts for software to correct. Another important advantage is you do not have to touch the camera assembly during the process thereby eliminating the risk of movement from the camera during the stack sequence. It is also quicker to complete the sequence than doing it manually. Photographing at magnifications beyond 1:1 opens up a whole new world of potential subjects that would be much more challenging to photograph at higher magnifications if doing it manually.

The Novoflex Castel-Micro, in my opinion, is an excellent product and takes much of the guesswork out of focus stacking. It is easy to use and quick to set up in the field and can be used with all types of lenses including, extension tubes and converters. If macro photography is your main field of interest and you want to take it to the next level, using a motorised focusing rail in my opinion, is a worthwhile investment. It will certainly make the process much easier and the results more predictable particularly at higher magnifications.

For a more in-depth discussion on focus stacking and to read the full review of the Castel-Micro and its use in the field click one of the links below:

[Novoflex Castel-Micro](http://www.novoflex.com/castel-micro)



or visit: www.robertthompsonphotography.com

Wintertime Orchid Hunting.

by Richard Revels FRPS

If you feel like doing something a bit different this winter, something that may raise eyebrows of your friends, tell them you are going on a mid-winter wild orchid hunt! While you won't find any orchids in flower, there are several species that produce leaf rosettes during the autumn and winter and these are often very visible, mostly on short grassy road verges and embankments, lawns and other such places, where the grass and other vegetation was cut (or grazed) in early autumn.

While most orchid species stay dormant underground until warmer weather in early spring, there are however some species and take advantage of extra winter sunlight reaching their leaves during autumn and winter, and some can (sometimes) be easily found and identified. A search during the winter months is by far the most likely way to find new Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) colonies. In recent decades the Bee Orchid has become much more widespread and plentiful in southern and central UK, and has considerably extended its range further north into Scotland.

Back in the 1940s and 1950s the Bee Orchid was considered rather 'local' nationally and was 'scarce' in Bedfordshire. However during the Bedfordshire Orchid Survey that took place during 2013 and 2014, it was found to be common and quite wide spread, being found in the hundreds in some places. It is now the county's second most widespread orchid. It seems to be one of the winners due to our warming climate.

Below:

Found on a road verge in Bedfordshire, June 2018. These twin Bee Orchids flower spikes have fairly typical markings on their lips, but even though they are the same plant they all have slightly different markings. Slight variation of markings is very common, but extreme variants are rare.



In my home county of Bedfordshire we have ten species of orchids that produce leaf rosettes in the autumn and winter months, these being;

- Autumn Ladies-tresses
- Fly
- Burnt-tip
- Green-winged
- Pyramidal
- and
- Bee Orchid
- Lizard
- Man
- Early Purple
- Frog Orchids.

By far the easiest to find during the winter months is the Bee Orchid, with many being found in the county's urban and suburban areas. Many new locations of this plant were found by BNHS members during the Orchid Survey back in 2013 and 2014.

The Bee Orchid in flower is a very photogenic plant, and is also extremely variable in its flower colours, and flower patterns, so keeping an eye on all flowering plants can provide photographers with some very interesting pictures come flowering time in June. Searching during the winter will show you where the plants are growing so that the locations can be checked quickly when in flower.

At the time of writing this, infection rates for Covid 19 are still increasing and another period of lockdown is affecting all our lives this winter and possibly for some



time to come. So a project that NG members can consider doing when going out for a local winter walk, could be to search for this year's flowering orchid plants. Not only does it give NG members an interesting project during any wintertime lockdown, it could result in finding next year's prize winning plant picture when they come into flower in June. The local plant recorders will also be pleased to receive all your orchid records, so please contact your local Wildlife Trust or Natural History Society for details of how to record your wild orchid finds. Good orchid hunting!

Top: The most famous variant of the Bee orchid is the 'Wasp Orchid' form, var. *trollii*. This is a genic form that is frequent only in a few colonies, mostly in the west country from the Cotswolds through Somerset and Wiltshire and into Dorset where it can occur every year. It is only rarely found elsewhere.

Top Left: Var. *atratrofuscus* is very rare, with only a few small colonies known. The normal yellow markings on the lip are missing, and the lip is squarer shaped than normal. This one was photographed at Weymouth, Dorset, in June 2018.

Opposite: Var. *chlorantha* lacks anthocyanin pigments, and has very pale almost white sepals and yellow petals. This is the only one recorded on in Bedfordshire, but in some counties there are a few colonies where it is frequently seen.



Bee Orchid, *Ophrys apifera*,
Leaf rosettes are often easy to find from October
and throughout the winter.
These were growing in a cemetery that had its
last cut in early September.



Bee Orchid leaf rosettes in January on a grassy
bank around a supermarket car park.
It would seem likely that several years previously
a stem with ripe seeds in seed pods had been
trodden on and carried here on someone's boots.

Exhibitions Calling for Entries:

The Annual Exhibition of the RPS Nature Group

**Entries must be received no later than
7th February.**

The exhibition is will only be receiving digital
images this year (no prints). However, Members
will be allowed to enter six images, instead of the
usual four, in each of the two categories:

A: All creatures - birds, mammals, reptiles, marine
life, insects, etc.

B: All plant life (incl. flora, fungi, lichens, etc.) and
all other subjects including geological and
microscopy, plus patterns, design and form
found in nature.

The link to enter is:

<https://rps.org/groups/nature/exhibition-entry/>

National Exhibitions

Basingstoke Camera Club National Open Exhibition

Closes 26th February 2021 - Digital Projection - 6 Classes
www.basingstokecameraclub.co.uk/exhib/indexed.htm

Vale of Evesham National Photographic Exhibition

Closes 28th February 2021 - Digital Projection - 4 Classes
www.eveshamphoto.net

South Birmingham 'Image 21' Open Exhibition

Closes 28th February 2021 - Digital Projection - 4 Classes
www.southbirminghamphotographicsociety.co.uk/exhibition/

Robin Hood Open Digital Exhibition

Closes 24th April 2021 - Digital Projection - 6 Classes
www.robinhoodexhibition.co.uk

Rushden Open Photography Exhibition

Closes 10th April 2021 - Digital Projection - 5 Classes
www.rushdenopen.co.uk

*Members are advised to check details of entry requirements,
rules and closing dates on Salon websites before preparing
their entry as image sizes may differ.*

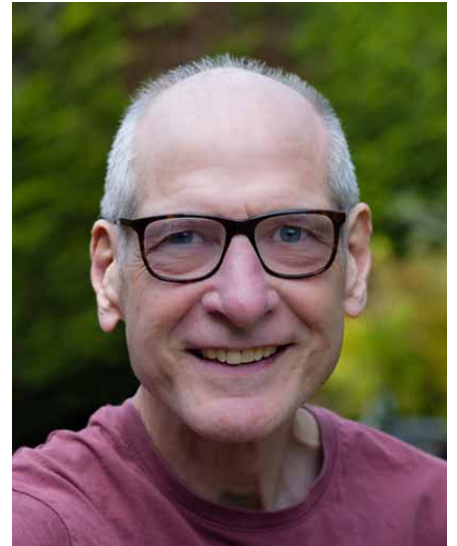
*Due to Covid 19 most exhibitions are being selected remotely,
using software like Zoom. Others are not running this year -
Southampton International has already made the decision
not to run their exhibition this year.*

Committee Profile:

Thomas Hanahoe FRPS - Chairman (2019-2021)

My photography was initially limited to family events but this changed in 2001 when I obtained a digital Canon Ixus camera, 2 megapixels! To be able to see the image immediately was fantastic and to print it, wonderful! A digital SLR, (Canon D60) soon followed and for the first time, I obtained photographs other than family snaps.

My photographic skills improved and I visited many parts of the UK photographing a variety of birds. RPS Distinctions followed and more recently, I have travelled overseas and photographed other species, particularly mammals. I continue to be gratified by the integration of art and science which is inherent in digital photography.

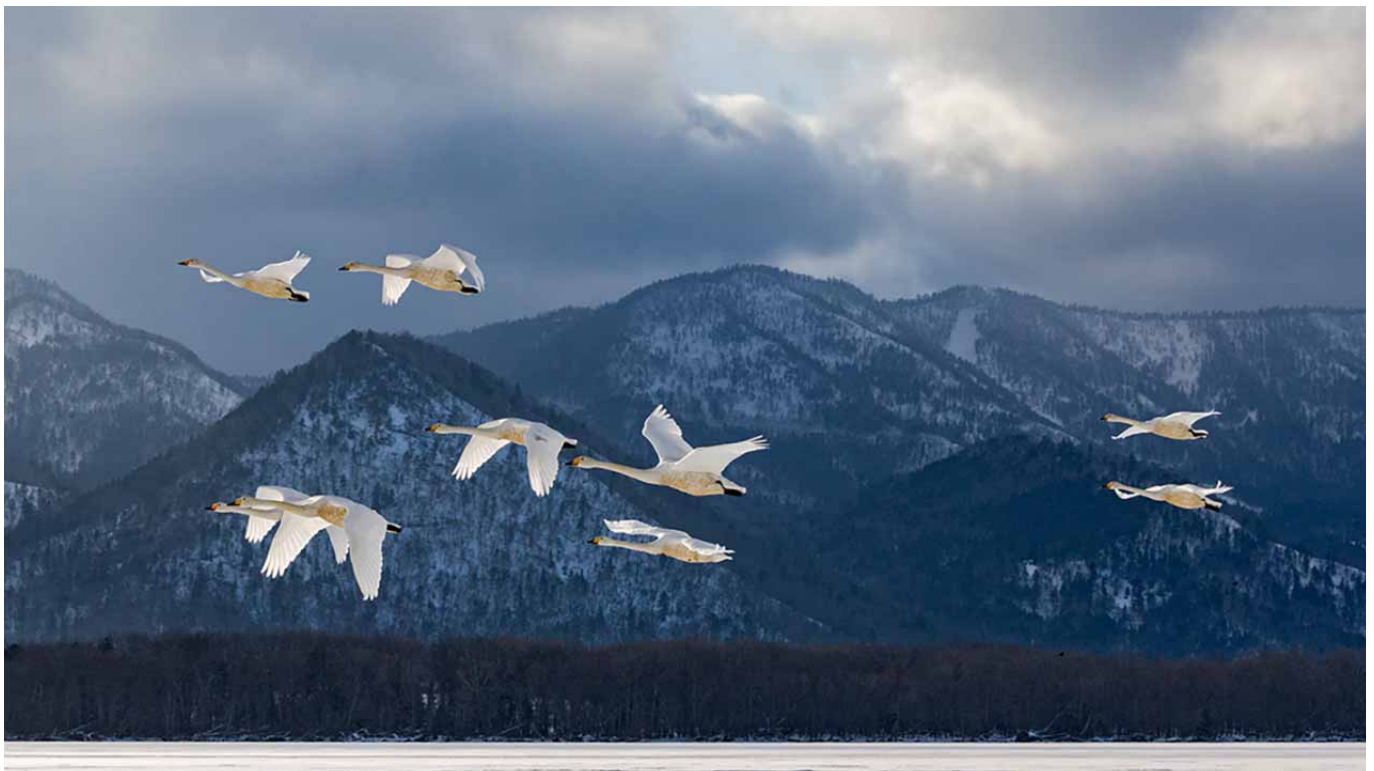


Committee Profile:

Duncan Locke LRPS - Hon. Secretary

After taking photographs for most of my life, I took up Nature Photography seriously in 2011. I have travelled widely photographing wildlife including to the Arctic, Antarctic, Alaska, Japan and many parts of Africa. But I get every bit as much pleasure in photographing plants and insects in the Nature Reserves near to where I live.

I joined the Nature Group in 2014 and became Secretary in 2017. With a background in Engineering and Technology, I am very interested in the technology of taking images. I've spent much time studying focus stacking and extreme macro plus trying Ultraviolet and Infra Red photography. Digital technology enables us to capture the nature and science of the world better than ever before – and it is getting better all the time!



Committee Profile:

Dawn Osborn FRPS - eNews Editor

I have had an interest in both nature and photography since childhood and have been an active member of a camera club for over 50 years. During that time my photography has become more and more focussed on wildlife and the landscapes in which they are found.

I became a member of the RPS in the late 80s and was elected to the Nature Group Committee in 1993. I was Chairman from 2001 to 2003 and then took over the role of Editor of The Iris - a position I held until 2018. In 2017 I started eNews.

In 1994 I gained my Associate Distinction in nature with a slide submission of 'Mediterranean Wild Flowers'. I switched from film to digital in 2004 and achieved my Fellowship in 2006 with a panel of prints entitled 'Birds of the Falklands Archipelago'. The Falklands is my favourite place in the world and I have visited on numerous occasions.

I've always enjoyed travelling and have visited several European countries including Greece, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Spain. Further afield Tanzania, Botswana, the Galapagos, Canada & Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, Utah and Vermont in the USA have all offered excellent opportunities to photograph a wide variety of wildlife and landscape.

I enjoy submitting my images to National and International Exhibitions as well as participating as a Selector at some of these - I've always enjoyed viewing the variety of work produced by other photographers both in natural history and other genres and have found that it frequently inspires me to try different techniques.



Committee Profile:

Ann Miles FRPS MPAGB - Programme Co-ordinator

I have been an active photographer since my early teens when I undertook to photograph all the British Wildflowers - something I have not yet completed!!

I had a career in scientific research and publishing more at the cellular than whole organism scale but continued nature photography as a major hobby branching out from my original interests to include insects and birds. Since retiring, surveying and recording at local nature reserves and in my garden have been added to my passions.

I joined the RPS in 2006 and achieved both an ARPS in Nature and an FRPS in Visual Arts the same year. The subject of my ARPS Nature panel was Alpine Flowers and the climatic problems they face. My Fellowship in Visual Arts covered Northern Finland and included images of both birds and landscapes.

I have been a member of the Nature Group for several years during which time I have lead many outings and gained a reputation for guaranteeing that it will more than likely rain on my trips!!

I joined the Committee two years ago taking on the role of Programme Co-ordinator.



Make your own Slide Copier

by Richard Revels FRPS

A friend wanted to copy and produce digital files of many hundreds of his old colour slides of his family, places they had visited, and the wildlife he had photographed. I loaned him my DV slide viewer light box and using his full frame camera and Macro lens on a tripod he managed to achieve some reasonable results, but it was awkward to use and set up.

To copy my slides I use a Nikon Super Coolscan 5000 ED scanner which works well, but although it produces good quality files, it is rather slow, and sometimes doesn't complete the scan, so I fear it may soon fail.

I decided to make up my own slide copier using my Canon 5D Mk3 and the Canon 100 mm Macro lens. This necessitated the manufacture of a stand for the camera and lens, a holder for the slide, a diffuser to produce an even spread of light behind the slide, and a flash unit behind the diffusers.

I utilised the base of a redundant flash bracket and sawed off the upright arm. The camera/lens was attached to this and allowed the camera to be moved backwards or forwards to give about 1 to 1 copies. The rest of the assembly was made from bits of wood and other stuff I already had in my workshop. The slide holder was made out of mounting board off cuts, with 3 layers glued together, leaving a centre slot for the slide, and held in place by 'Blu-tack' on uprights, so the slide holder can, if needed, be raised or lowered on uprights that are screwed to the wooden frame.

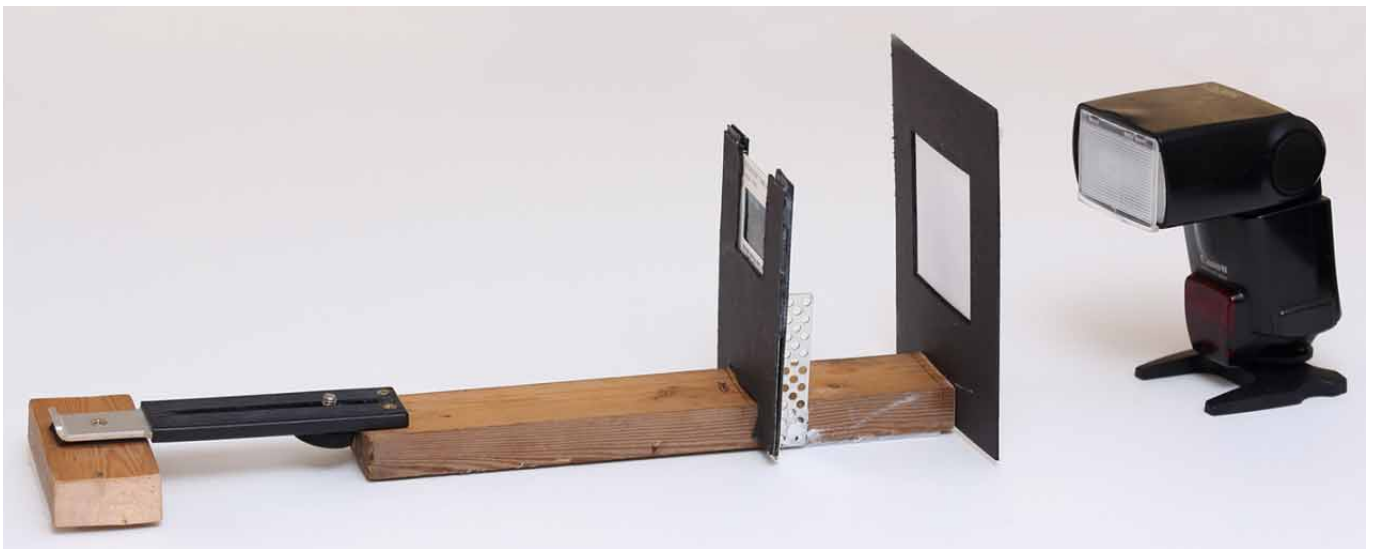
A card holding a diffuser is placed behind the slide holder and held in place with two drawing pins. For the diffuser I used ordinary 100 gsm writing paper.

The total cost to create my slide copier was almost nothing as all the components (2 drawing pins, 3 screws, some off cuts of wood, pieces of mount board, glue and blu-tack) were already in my possession. The cost of the Nikon Coolscan when new, was around £900.

The results compared to the same image scanned by the Nikon Coolscan slide copier? Any dust on the slide is usually detected by the Coolscan and mostly taken out of the resulting file, but is not when using the a camera, so make sure the slide is clean. Slightly more detail can be produced in the darker and lighter areas by doing 'multi scans' (up to 16) with the Coolscan, but if taken with a camera as a RAW file and adjusting in a RAW converter, I found there was very little difference.

Assuming you have the camera, lens and a few bits and pieces, etc in your workshop, its only a couple of hours of your time to make something similar to my home made slide copier.

If you still have slides and you've thought about getting them copied, why not use some lock down time to build yourself a slide copier and turn those old transparencies into digital files?



Events News

by Ann Miles FRPS

We have run three events since the last edition of eNews: Photographing the Unseen by Adrian Davies, Monochrome for Nature Photographers by Ian Wilson and Wildlife Introductions and Conservation by Nick Upton. All of these were very well attended and received many appreciative comments.

New Zoom Meetings ready for booking

1 Saturday February 6th

16.00 hrs

Passion Projects In Nature and the Landscape
by Robert Canis

RPS Digital Imaging South East in collaboration with the RPS Nature Group present Robert Canis, a well-known enthusiastic photographer, who will entertain us and share his passion for both nature and the landscape and showcase his wonderful images. Free to Digital Imaging and Nature Group members – £3.00 to Others. Your RPS membership number is required to book this event. Everyone welcome but Group Membership will be checked for a free ticket!

2 Saturday 27th February ,

16:00 to 17:30 hrs (includes time for questions)

Beneath UK Seas
by Charles Erb

The waters around the British Isles have a reputation for being cold and murky, and whilst this is sometimes true it is often far from the case. In this talk, Charles hopes to convey the beauty and diversity of wildlife which can be seen in our home waters, using images he has captured over many years of exploring our diverse coasts.

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

A further talk in preparation

Focus Stacking by Qasim Syed
Saturday 27th March

See Nature Group Events shortly for details and booking.

We are always looking for people to give talks or share outings locations when regulations are relaxed. Please contact Ann Miles with any offers or suggestions.

Email: annmiles70@gmail.com

Previously Held Zoom Meetings

If you have missed any of the online events run on behalf of the Nature Group, you still have another opportunity to see them. The list below shows youtube recordings that were made of some of these events.

[Nature Group Recorded Lectures](#)

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

Photographing the Unseen World (Dec.2020)

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

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

1 **Polar Bears of Svalbard**

by Thomas Hanahoe FRPS (Nature Group Chairman)

2 **Rewilding in Britain** by Mike Daniels.

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

3 **State of Nature 2019** by Daniel Hayhow.

Daniel is an Environmental Scientist at Earthwatch Europe.

Monochrome for Nature Photographers (Oct 2020)

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

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

Layers and Masks (Aug 2020)

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

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

Gaining a Distinction in Natural History (July 2020)

Presented by Mick Durham FRPS .

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

Raw Conversion of Nature Images

Presented by Dr Ian Wilson ARPS.

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

International Travel - some of the risks.

International Travel

The list of "unknowns" with regard to international travel during the pandemic seem to be never-ending and ever changing. The vaccines now available are good news but we do not yet know how long they will protect or whether they will prevent us from passing the disease on to others. Here are some of the things that concern us most and some questions you might want to ask yourself before committing to any long distance travel.

1. Spending ten hours or so in a plane with more than 200 others (depending on the capacity of the plane) and the potential of needing to wear a mask for the duration of the flight.
 - Current masks are intended to protect others from droplets when the wearer coughs or sneezes. They do little to protect the wearer from the coughs and sneezes of others and, as far as we know, they do nothing to protect from aerosols, i.e. the minute droplets circulating in the air. Given that on a plane we all breathe re-circulated air, this is a real concern.
 - An American Pilot my husband knew told him that only 10% of the air circulated was new intake from outside the plane. Reason being that several miles up the outside air was extremely cold and it had to be heated before it could be used in the a.c. system. He said that to take in much more was uneconomic, though he did not say whether it was physically/technically possible. I do not know if airline design has changed this, but it would seem unlikely.
2. The physical interaction with hundreds of other people (staff and public) in the airports, hotels etc. who may have travelled from countries less well protected than the U.K.
3. If you are transiting through an EU airport, how could your journey (outbound or return) be affected by EU requirements regarding the virus?
4. Given that all countries are free to impose their own regulations, you could find that as the time of your departure gets close quarantine requirements could become mandatory at your destination causing you to miss the start of your trip or necessitating re-arranging your flight to arrive earlier to accommodate the quarantine period.
5. Depending on the progress of the virus, and its possible variants, countries will presumably vary their responses over time. Therefore the country you are visiting may, at any time before or during your trip, choose to lockdown, closing hotels, restaurants etc. Do you (or the company you are travelling with) have a plan to deal with such an eventuality?
6. If, during your visit, a further outbreak of the virus should occur in the country you are visiting and the airline you have chosen to fly with finds it necessary to cancel its flights, or the country itself closes the airports and borders, how easy would it be for you to return home?
7. Under current regulations, returning to the UK requires a negative Covid test 72 hours before boarding/arriving back in the UK.
 - How would this be accomplished at the end of your trip? You could find that additional time is required at the end of the trip to wait for the results? If you were to test positive what would you do?
 - If you are travelling with a group and any of them were to test positive for the virus, how long and where would that person have to stay and would the other members of the group also have to stay?
8. If you are still working, how would a prolonged absence due to a quarantine period being imposed affect your job?

These are all questions we should ask ourselves. There are many things that can go awry during a trip, whether you are travelling with a partner or with a group. People can suffer accidents and/or injuries or become sick at any time; vehicles can break down; road traffic accidents on the road ahead can cause long delays; adverse weather conditions can negate journeys by road, rail, air or sea; the list of possibilities is endless. Hopefully you have not had to experience any of these. However, there have been occasions in the past when, as a tour leader, I have experienced all of the above and I can assure you that they can be stressful at best. Despite even the best preparation and planning, things sometimes just don't go to plan. This Covid 19 Pandemic just complicates things so much more. It's difficult to exercise good judgement when there are so many worst case scenarios and so many 'unknowns', all of them beyond your control. As desperate as we all are for the freedom to travel again, the risk of contracting Covid 19 is not one worth taking - not for ourselves, our families or friends. There's really only one good judgement decision to make - stay home and stay safe.

Dawn Osborn FRPS

Minutes of the 44th AGM of the RPS Nature Group

Saturday 31st October 2020

The 44th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group was held on Saturday 31st October 2020 starting at 15.00 hrs on-line using Zoom. It was attended by 62 Members. This Meeting was a replacement for the AGM originally planned for Saturday 4th April 2020, which had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions at the time.

Address by the RPS President Dr Alan Hodgson ASIS HonFRPS FlntP

The Nature Group Chairman, Thomas Hanahoe FRPS, welcomed Members to the Meeting and introduced the President of the RPS, Dr Alan Hodgson ASIS HonFRPS FlntP, who started the Meeting with a 15 minute address.

Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for Absence had been received from:
John Curgenvin and Peter Smith.

Minutes of the 43rd AGM 2019 (printed in Issue 134 of The Iris and available on the RPS Nature Group Website):

There were no corrections to the minutes and it was proposed by Stan Saunders and seconded by Ralph Snook that the minutes be approved.

Matters Arising:

None.

Post Meeting Note:

The Officers' Reports, the Young Photographers' Exhibition Proposal and the Update of the Nature Group Regulations with Explanatory Notes referred to in the following three sections of these minutes are on the RPS Nature Group Website under:

<https://rps.org/news/groups/nature/2020/2020-agm-reports/>

Questions on the Officers' Reports dated 1st April 2020 that were put on the RPS Nature Group Website on the 6th April 2020:

- **Chairman's Report** – Thomas Hanahoe FRPS
No questions were raised.
- **Treasurer's Report** – David O'Neill LRPS
No questions were raised.
- **Secretary's Report** – Duncan Locke LRPS
No questions were raised.

Questions on the Young Photographers' Exhibition (YPE) Proposal that was put on the RPS Nature Group Website on the 6th April 2020 – Ralph Snook ARPS

Ralph Snook said that it was proposed to introduce a YPE into the Group's Annual Exhibition. There would be one class covering all subject matter and the normal rules for nature photography would apply. There will be two categories: firstly age 14 years and under and secondly age 15 to 17 years. Entry will be for digital images only, no prints, using the same entry system as that used for the present Exhibition. Three experienced selectors will review all of the images and select a suitable number to go into the Exhibition; these images will also be included in the final slide show.

All entrants whose images are accepted will receive free copies of The Iris for the following year and those submitting what is judged to be the best image in each age category will also receive an engraved trophy and certificate. Certificates will also be awarded for Commended and Highly Commended images at the discretion of the selectors.

Given present Covid-19 restrictions, promoting the Exhibition will be difficult in the near future so the plan is to introduce it for the 2022 Exhibition.

Colin Smith suggested advertising the YPE through the Awards Section of the John Muir Trust, which encourages exploring the natural world through image, film and sound recording. There was a need to reach a wider audience in addition to schools and the youth community and an NGO like the John Muir Trust could help to promote the YPE more widely. Thomas Hanahoe thanked Colin for his suggestion and said the Group Committee would take it forward.

In response to a question from Malcolm Gee, Ralph Snook said that entry into the YPE would not be confined to RPS Members and their relatives; the aim was to reach as wide an audience as possible.

In response to question from James Foad, Ralph Snook said that entry into the YPE will be for digital images only and added that mobile 'phone images will be accepted.

Thomas Hanahoe asked the Members on-line if they were happy for the Committee to proceed to develop the YPE. No comments were received.

Thomas Hanahoe added that it had not yet been decided if the YPE would be run as part of the existing Group Annual Exhibition or separately at a different time of year. He thanked Ralph Snook for the work that he had put into developing the YPE.

Update of the Nature Group Regulations (available on the RPS Nature Group Website) – Duncan Locke LRPS:

Duncan Locke reported that he had put two documents on the RPS Nature Group Website: firstly a proposed set of updated Nature Group Regulations and secondly a set of Notes explaining why the previous Regulations needed updating and including details of the proposed changes.

The previous set of Nature Group Regulations had been approved by the RPS Council in December 2006 and accepted by the Group Members at the AGM in March 2007. It was not proposed to make any major changes to these, but to update them in the light of changes in:

- Communication technology: this meant that roles on Committee had to change to include, for example, a Webmaster.
- Finance: the almost complete elimination in the use of cheques for payments.
- Changes in the structure of the RPS: the titles of positions in the RPS had changed, for example, there was no longer a Director General as this post had been replaced by a Chief Executive Officer.
- The almost 50% increase in the Nature Group membership: the number of Members required for a quorum at, for example, the AGM has been increased slightly.

Thomas Hanahoe asked the Members present if they had any questions on the proposed updated Regulations. No questions were raised and Thomas Hanahoe thanked Duncan Locke for the work that he had put into the update.

Any Other Business:

None.

Date and Venue of the 45th AGM 2021:

The 45th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group will be on Saturday 24th April 2021 at either Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, B69 2AS or on-line via Zoom dependent upon any Covid-19 restrictions in force at the time.

The Chair, Thomas Hanahoe, thanked the Members present for attending what was probably one of the Nature Group's best attended AGMs. He thanked the Members of the Committee for the work they had put into making the overall Chairman's Day such a success and particularly thanked the speakers and the President of the RPS, Dr Alan Hodgson for their presentations. James Foad added thanks on behalf of the Group Members to the organisers of Chairman's Day and AGM for their work they had put into the day.

The RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting including the 45th Annual General Meeting and Annual Exhibition Saturday 24th April 2021

The format of the meeting will depend upon any Covid-19 restrictions in place on the 24th April. If possible, the Meeting will follow the format of previous years and be held at Smethwick Photographic Society in the West Midlands. If not, it will be held via Zoom. The day will commence at 10.30 hrs. Further details will be published nearer the time both on the Nature Group Section of the RPS website and via the RPS Bulletin news.

Nature Group Committee Elections 2021 Would YOU like to join the Committee?

The Nature Group Committee is elected to serve for two years. We are keen to hear from any Nature Group Member who would like to join the Committee and assist in the running of the Group. Perhaps there are things that you would like to see the Group doing more of? Why not join the Committee and put your ideas forward? We meet on-line approximately every six weeks, allowing Committee Members from all parts of the UK and beyond to attend meetings without the need for travelling. All Committee Members are expected to make a full contribution to the operation of the Group. We are particularly keen to find a new Honorary Secretary and a new Honorary Treasurer.

**The Committee roles to be elected are: Vice Chair, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer,
Special Interest Group Representative to RPS plus
Four Committee Members**

Nomination Form for RPS Nature Group Committee Elections 2021

**Nominees, Proposers and Seconders must all be Current Members of the RPS Nature Group.
Closing Date: Saturday 27th March 2021. (Note: revised date from that published in The Iris).**

I wish to nominate:

For the Post of: RPS Membership No.

Name of Proposer:

Signature: RPS Membership No.

Name of Secunder:

Signature: RPS Membership No.

If elected I agree to serving on the RPS Nature Group Committee in the above Post:

Signature: Date:

After completion by all three persons this form should be returned to:

Duncan Locke LRPS, RPS Nature Group Honorary Secretary.

Please email: duncan.locke@btinternet.com or Tel: 07989 49423 for the postal address.

Photocopies or scanned PDF copies of the completed form are acceptable and may be returned by post or email.

Publication information

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

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

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

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

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

Distribution:

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

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Design & layout

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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Ex officio Committee members:

President of the Society;
Vice-President of the Society;
Director General of the Society;
Hon. Treasurer of the Society;
Chairman of the Nature A & F Distinctions Panel

* Members please note:

David O'Neill is currently acting as Nature Group Hon.Treasurer. He cannot continue in this role beyond the 2021 AGM. If you have the necessary experience, please help the Nature Group by volunteering for this very important role. Please contact David O'Neill for further information.
Email: david.oneill_nh@outlook.com

Nature Group Exhibitions:

CDs/DVDs of Nature Group Exhibitions are available for purchase by camera clubs/photographic societies for use in their programme. Please contact the Exhibition Secretary,
E-mail: rpsngexsec@btinternet.com

