

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS  
Issue No. 142 / Spring 2022

# THE IRIS



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THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY





# Masai Mara Photographic Safaris 2022 & 2023

The Masai Mara is regarded as one of the best wildlife destinations in Africa and a photographer's dream. Renowned for the Big Cats: lion, leopard and cheetah, but not forgetting elephant, giraffe, hippo, hyena, zebra, antelopes and the huge variety of birdlife.

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Experience one of the world's last true wildernesses and bring back your own photographs of its iconic wildlife and landscape. Photographers of all levels welcome, if you are a non-photographer and have a great love of wildlife you are very welcome on the safari.

Contact me by email at:  
[alisonmeesphotography@gmail.com](mailto:alisonmeesphotography@gmail.com) or  
[www.alisonmeesphotography.com](http://www.alisonmeesphotography.com)

Contact me soon as spaces are limited for June & November 2022.

Dates now available for January & February 2023

Covid safety measure and protocols are implemented across all camps.

*Image by Alison Mees ARPS*



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Images by  
Richard Revels FRPS.  
See his article  
"Wildlife Visits to the  
Gower"  
on page 16



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- Copy should be sent as txt, rtf or docx files by email. Please do not send hard copy.
- Digitally captured photographic images to support your article (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied as 8bit jpg files, 216mm (2555 pixels) on the longest edge, at 300 pixels per inch, quality 12, file size approx 5 MB. Please send images via WeTransfer.
- If your image is selected for use on the cover of The Iris you will be asked to supply a larger file.
- No payment will be made for material used.

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

### Distribution:

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**Cover Image: Burnt Tip Orchid by Keith Polwin ARPS**

**Inside front: Images by Richard Revels FRPS**



### Inside Back and Back Cover:

Images by Nature Group  
Members attending the  
Foxlease Residential Weekend.

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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

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Welcome to the latest issue of The Iris. Another bumper issue and a big 'Thank You' to all who contributed articles and images. I cannot promise that all future issues will contain as many pages - without the support of Nature Group members sending in their stories and images there would be very little for me to work with.

This issue contains some interesting reading and equally interesting images. Grahame Soden ARPS, a member living in Finland, writes about the Aurora Borealis while John Nathan ARPS gives us an account of a trip he made to the Antarctic a few years ago.

From the far north of the British Isles, Brian Boyes, a resident of the Isle of Mull, shares his passion for photographing Otters and Robert Galloway has provided a short insight into a Badger that visits his Scottish garden regularly. The Gower in South Wales is the topic of past Chairman Richard Revels FRPS who reminisces on his visits there and shares images of the wildlife he photographed along its coast.

Trevor Davenport ARPS gives us an insight into the life cycle of the Vapourer Moth and John Bulpitt FRPS shares his experiences and images from his local Nature Reserve in Norfolk and if you've ever fancied a photographic set-up of your own, Roger Hance offers some tips on how to go about setting one up.

Ann Miles FRPS has provided a review of the Field Meetings held in 2021 together with a selection of the images taken by the members who attended them and Booker Skelding ARPS shares her experiences with the Nature Group at the Foxlease Residential Weekend held in October 2021.

Finally, two announcements. The Nature Group is holding its combined Spring Meeting, AGM and Annual Exhibition Opening on Saturday 9th April at The Old Schoolhouse, home of Smethwick P.S., located near exit 2 of the M5 in the West Midlands. An excellent day out. The second is for the Kingcombe Residential Weekend.

The next issue will be our Summer issue in July and should contain some successful Associate and Fellowship panels as well as the award winning images from our Annual Exhibition plus a list of the accepted images.

If you have something you would like to share with your fellow members, please contact me.



Dawn Osborn FRPS

Email: natureeditor@rps.org



# From the Chair

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## The Iris

Welcome to the second edition of our new look Iris. I would like to start by congratulating Dawn Osborn for her excellent work which has received a lot of very positive feedback from members, regarding both the printed and electronic versions. The following examples are short extracts from the comments received.

- The Iris has just arrived and my goodness - what a difference! Well done everyone and including the contributors.
- I really love the new format, which allows images to be fully enjoyed at a much more suitable size to give justice to the photographers. A significant improvement that is to be applauded.
- I realise how much time and effort Dawn would have put into preparing the copy ready for publication and she is to be applauded for producing such a fine product.
- Thank you to the committee and, particularly, to Dawn Osborn, for the new look – excellent.
- It's very much 10/10 from me. I'll be curious to see how the take-up of an electronic version goes, since this is the way a lot of the wider newspaper and magazine market is going.
- In response to your request for feedback on the new format, I found it excellent and a real inspiration.
- The change of size to A4 is a positive move and makes it easier to read. I would also be happy to receive it in an electronic format.
- I welcome the change to the format of the Iris. The A4 format is much better all round - it really does justice to the high quality of images and articles presented and is much easier to read.
- The new Iris format is great and really does justice to some fantastic images. Really interesting articles too. Even the electronic version is super. Well done to everyone involved and especially for Dawn taking it under her wing again.

To summarise, the larger size makes it more flexible for organising the content and layout of articles. It also allows more space for members images to be shown at a more suitable size to showcase the photographers work.

The feedback also suggests a need to support both printed and electronic versions and we already have a system in place for anyone who prefers to receive their copy as a PDF instead of a printed magazine. We will monitor and report on the take-up of an electronic version.

Feedback from members is always welcome and we also hope that you will be inspired to submit articles to Dawn for future editions.

## Nature Group Advisory Days

The RPS is encouraging the Nature Group to run more Advisory Days thus allowing us to build on the success of our last one in 2020. All the places for advice on the next of these, held via Zoom on 26th March, were fully booked. We will be arranging another Advisory Day for later this year, when we hope to be able to include prints.

## Events – Field Trips and Zoom.

Ann Miles continues to organise an impressive number of field trips with new events planned in several parts of the country.

She would like to extend this to as many counties as possible and in order to achieve this, we are hoping to encourage many more members to offer to host events in their local areas. All suggestions and support will be welcome.

We are also looking for Zoom speakers so that we can continue to offer a variety of talks that are available to all members regardless of geographical location. All suggestions will be welcome.

## Environmental and Social Responsibility

We have been approached by the chair of the Environmental and Social Responsibility Committee, Martin Hancock ARPS, and have agreed to work with him to devise a policy for the Nature Group.

The Landscape and Travel Groups have draft policies documented, but there appears to be no commonly agreed standard for this at the moment, although it is a relatively new initiative that will undoubtedly change over the coming months.

Our current approach is to be mindful of the environment and make common sense decisions to reduce our impact, such as encouraging more local events to reduce travel and increased use of zoom for both committee meetings and online talks for members.



# The Northern Lights (Aurora borealis)

by Grahame Soden ARPS, ABIPP

Hi – I’m Grahame Soden and I’ve been making photographs for around 50 years. I’m English, but live now in Swedish Lapland and am an Associate of both the RPS and The British Institute of Professional Photography. When I lived in Berlin I had press-passes for many pro-sports events such as boxing, speed skating, ISTAF Indoor Athletics, Berlin ePrix, Paralympic Swimming, etc. I love sports photography and have found it to be the most exacting of genres which tests your reflexes, photographic skills and workflow to the maximum.

BUT... in 2013 I relocated to Sweden and ended up in the most beautiful location of Vormsele, in Swedish Lapland. Lapland has a population density of around 2 people per square kilometre and in the winter months there can be more reindeer and elk than people. I can see the Vindelälven River from my house and, while it is still frozen over, the Sami (our indigenous people) reindeer herders drive their animals along it in spring, back to the summer pastures. Elk & deer tracks criss-cross the frozen river, and every year (except in the pandemic ones!) there is a 400 km over 4 days dog & ski relay race along its length (reduced last year to 300 km over 3 days due to poor ice).

The winters are long, but beautiful. It can start snowing in November and then the ground will stay white until April or even early May. Temperatures of -20°C are common and it can go down to -35°C, but with global warming who knows what the future holds. It’s a bone-dry cold though, and much easier to endure than the grey, damp 0°C common in London or Berlin. As an added bonus, we get a minimum of 4 hours of daylight per day in the winter.

Before 2013 I was vaguely aware of the Northern Lights as a concept, but had never seen them. Then, one night during my first months here, they appeared and I was blown away – captivated forever. That first display was one of the best I’ve ever seen with the sky directly overhead dancing with green and purple. I decided then to learn how to photograph them and was even more surprised by how easy it is, assuming you are far

enough north. I’m about 300 km south of the Arctic Circle, so far enough north – 64.9033 degrees north to be exact.

The Lights are, of course, caused by our Sun’s activity and (so I’m told) this rises & falls in an 11 year cycle. Winter 2021/22 is the start of a new cycle which should peak in 2025, so start planning!

I’m sure there is some solar activity most weeks, but this far North the sky is only dark enough to see the Lights (or the stars) from September until April. The early and late part of each season is kinder to the photographer.

Every Lights display is different, varying in duration, intensity and colour. Green is the predominant colour but purple pillars and dancing magenta curtains are common. However, in April 2021 I was fortunate enough to see & photograph a display with vivid cobalt blue, which is quite rare and is caused by the very last rays from the sun, well below the horizon, just being able to strike the Lights. This display not only had the unique colour but was also very fast, racing across the sky like waves breaking on the shore. If I am never able to photograph the Lights again, then April 2021 was truly a *grande finale* ...

I honestly don’t know what our ancestors thought of their night sky suddenly turning green. It must have been terrifying, and even now a major display can be terrifyingly beautiful - almost beyond comprehension. The Sami folk-lore attributes the Lights to the dancing souls of women who have died childless. Aurora hunters travel miles to see “The Green Lady Dancing” and I am convinced that I can see a dancing, long-haired woman, in one of the images that accompany this article.

There are many internet sites, and mobile phone apps, which will provide you with an aurora forecast. They are all full of numbers but the important one is the “KP Index”. This is a scale from 0-9 of the possible geomagnetic activity. The higher the number, the more likely you are to see the aurora. At my location, I have



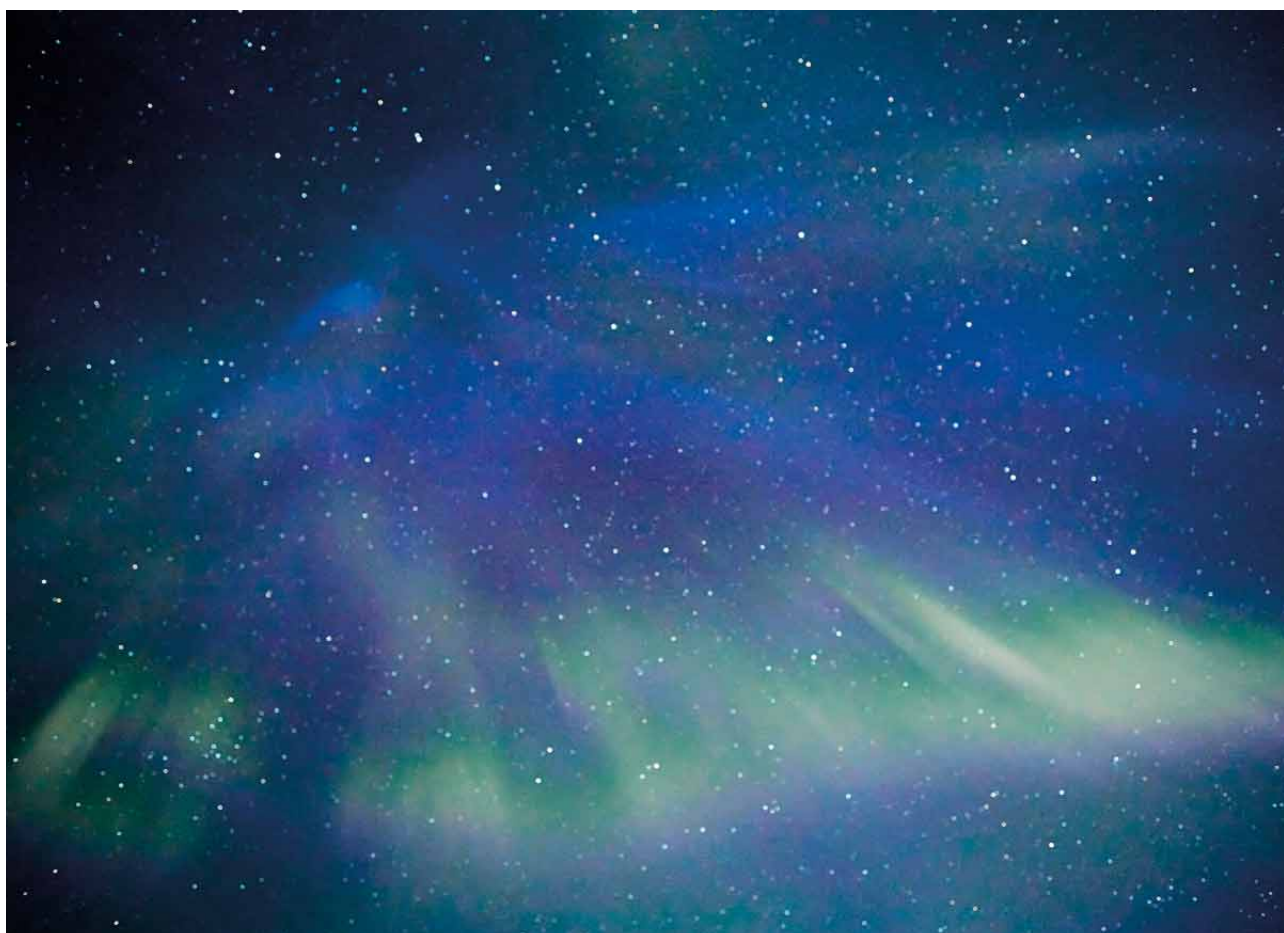


photographed the aurora with a KP of 3, but if you are further south then you might need KP4, 5 or 6. You also need a clear sky, low light pollution, no wind and infinite patience. When all the conditions align perfectly then your patience is well rewarded.

My "go to" forecast site is:

[www.gi.alaska.edu/monitors/aurora-forecast](http://www.gi.alaska.edu/monitors/aurora-forecast) which is the Geophysical Institute, Fairbanks, Alaska, but I also use another more local forecast service on Facebook, plus an app on my phone.

I have found the online Aurora hunting communities to be very helpful and generous with their advice. If you





have an online group near you then it's a good idea to join it as they usually post a "heads up" if there is a possibility of incoming activity.

For photography, the basic minimum requirements are a camera with a wide-angle lens, a decent tripod and a remote release (or a self-timer) although people do get results with just a mobile phone, I don't know how. The deluxe set-up is a DSLR with good high ISO capabilities, a rock-steady heavy duty tripod, and camera RAW. I always assume that everyone shoots in RAW. For me, it has been the easiest way to improve my digital photography and correct my mistakes. I shoot with Canon gear and post-process in Capture 1 now, but I used the free Canon RAW processor, DPP, for many years and it's very good too.

The tripod head is quite important as, if you are well north, the Lights may be directly overhead and you need to be able to tilt your camera almost vertical. The tripod head is not as important further south, as the Lights will be low in the sky towards the northern horizon.

My camera settings are usually iso of 1600, with an f2.8 28 mm lens one or two stops down from wide open, and an exposure of anything from 8 to 15 seconds depending on how bright the display is. Sometimes you can scarcely see the Lights with the naked eye, but the camera image will surprise you! It sees a lot more.

For focussing, set your lens to manual focus. If the foreground is interesting then focus on that. I usually focus manually to infinity then back it off a little. The Lights move a lot so will never be wholly in focus. I don't bother too much about the white balance as RAW lets me adjust it, but Daylight WB gives an OK result too.

Check and adjust your camera settings as much as possible and mount it on the tripod, before you leave the house. It's a good idea to turn your lcd brightness down too. You will be working in the near-dark and possibly extreme cold so get as much of the fiddly stuff as possible done first. I've done a Lights session in -34°C and you really don't want to be working without gloves in temperatures like that, your fingers will freeze to anything metal. Do not breathe over your camera, its screen or the lens. Your breath will freeze on them. If you have to pop back indoors, leave your camera outside – otherwise condensation will render your gear unusable for at least half an hour. After your session, let all your gear warm up gently indoors, leaving the lens cap off.



Some people pre-cool their gear outside before shooting. I've never had a problem in taking my gear from the warmth into the cold – but that might just be that the cold air here is very, very dry. In more moist air then you might need to pre-cool.

I have never had a camera or battery fail in the cold (although one lens didn't like it too much and started 'grating' if I tried to refocus). I usually give up well before the equipment does. I can wear 3 pairs of gloves (thin cotton, chamois-leather flying gloves, topped with fur lined mittens) and a mat or thick plywood panel to stand on can help; it's your hands & feet that die first.

Digital noise can be an issue, as can hot or dead pixels, so images do need some in-camera help such as long exposure noise reduction (which will slow your shooting rate down a lot) and post-processing work. You need a clear dark sky as you can't see the Lights through cloud, and wind is a killer, too, both for the wind-chill and camera shake.

**To summarise, you need:**

- A good location. Swedish Lapland, North Norway, Iceland, and North Finland each have their own merits and drawbacks but all are far enough north;
- Confidence that you and your gear can work in the cold and the dark;
- Suitable clothing;
- Patience;
- Clear Skies!
- Luck.

So that's it – that's what works for me and I did get my Associate qualification with BIPP (The British Institute of Professional Photography) for a panel of 40 Northern Lights images.

If you're keen on trying your hand at the Northern Lights photography and are planning a trip then I'm happy to help – just get in touch.

Remember, if you are fortunate enough to see the Lights then take some time away from the viewfinder to just enjoy the spectacle - you will always remember your first time.

Cheers - Grahame  
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# The Life Cycle of the Vapourer Moth

by Trevor Davenport ARPS

Two years ago, a friend gave me three caterpillars of the Vapourer Moth (*Orgyia antiqua*), which had been found in their garden. The caterpillars are polyphagous, which means they will eat most native broadleaved trees and shrubs and some cultivated plants. They have readily adapted to bramble which is plentiful. The Vapourer caterpillar is quite attractive - for a caterpillar - having four coloured tufts, a head cockade, and a tail of hairs.

Shortly after I received them they pupated, since they had been in their final instar when obtained. The pupal case is surrounded by a cocoon of fine, sticky hairs which may be an irritant. Pupation is quite short - usually just two or three weeks - before the adult emerges.

I was pleased to see that one of my hatched specimens was a female. The females of this species have rudimentary wings and are flightless. (Several moth species have flightless females; they stay where they hatch, usually on or near the empty cocoon and

attract males by releasing a pheromone). Whilst the Vapourer males could be considered an attractive moth, the female is short, squat, light brown in colour, and little more than an over-developed abdomen full of eggs.

According to the literature, male Vapourer moths can be attracted to light; however, in many years of moth trapping in my garden, I had never seen one. It was a surprise then - when I started to photograph the newly hatched female - that three fluttering males appeared within minutes. The male moth has disproportionately large antennae - almost like parabolic receptors - which can detect the pheromone from significant distances.

One of the males attached to the female and copulation took place, lasting about twenty minutes. In less than an hour she started to lay eggs, eventually laying around four hundred. Most of the eggs were laid in the first few hours but she continued to lay smaller

*Vapourer Moth Caterpillar on Bramble*







*Male Vapourer Moth Antennae*

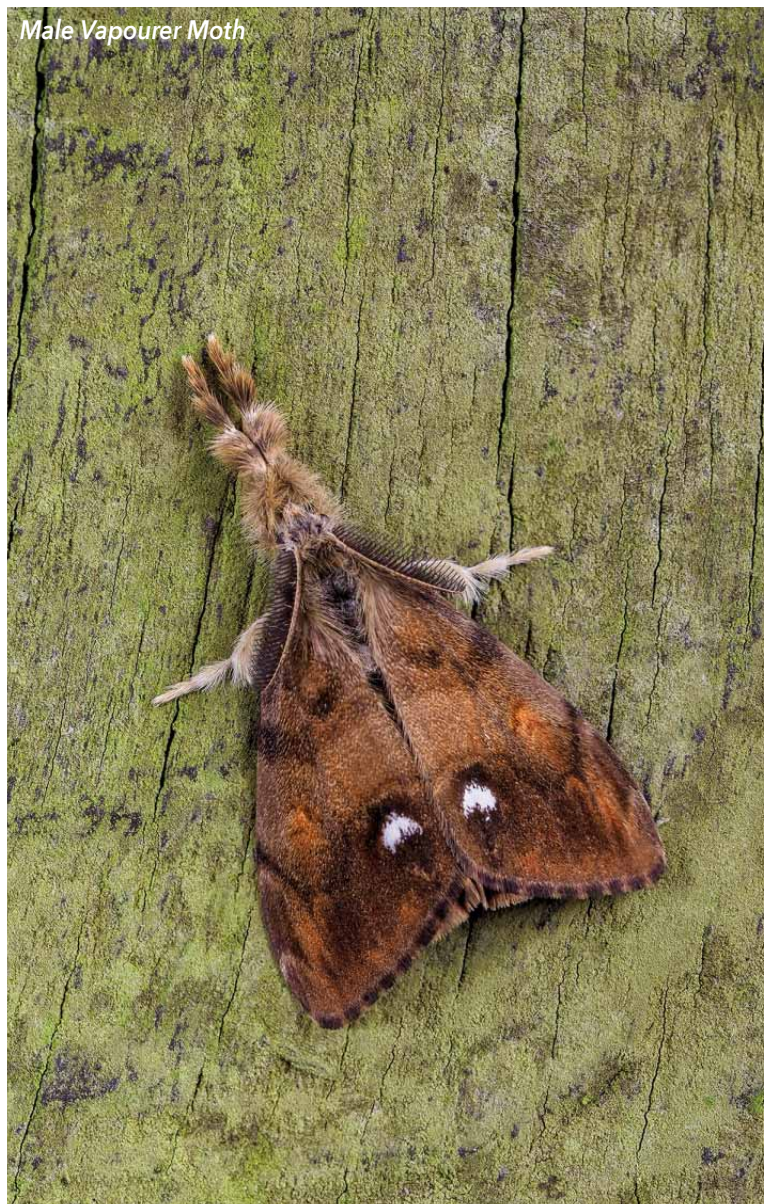
amounts over the next few days. Close observation showed that she was alive for many days after egg laying ceased, but then she died close to the egg cluster - her job completed.

I put the eggs - in a safe, predator proof container - outside in my garden where I could watch them over the winter. They were exposed to months of rain, wind, and several degrees of frost before hatching the following early May as tiny first instar caterpillars. Rough reckoning showed that most of them had survived the winter and I was now in possession of hundreds of small caterpillars. I retained a few and took the remainder to patches of bramble in the wild. I imagine most of them would fall prey to predators.

It's been fascinating to raise another brood of this interesting moth and record their life cycle during the summer. They are now safely tucked up - as batches of eggs - in my garden, awaiting the return of Spring.



*Vapourer Moths paired*



*Male Vapourer Moth*



*Female Vapourer Moth oviposting*



# Toll's Meadow Nature Reserve.

by John Bulpitt FRPS

Wymondham Nature Group manages this small reserve on behalf of the Town Council. When I first moved to Wymondham in 2017, I ignored Toll's as I reasoned that there couldn't be much of interest in a 5 acre reserve. However, when lockdown came I decided to look again, as it is less than a mile from my home.

What I discovered was an extraordinary variety of habitats in a small area: wet meadow, dry meadow, woodland, brambles, nettles and a variety of other plants loved by insects. Moreover, the River Tiffey runs through the centre of the reserve. Water voles are resident here but the environment is challenging for the photographer and I am not happy with my results to date.

During the second week of June 2020, I spent a good deal of time self-isolating in a large patch of nettles (with appropriate PPE). My aim was to record the life-cycle of the ladybird. Two of my favourite images from that project are shown here. I observed that ladybird larvae pupate within a few minutes, but they are still at risk of predation for an hour or so until the pupa case

has hardened. Image 1. shows a Black Snipefly injecting an egg into the newly-formed pupa of a 7-spot Ladybird. When the egg hatches the larva will eat the pupa from the inside. For comparison a mature/hardened pupa is also shown in the photograph. Image 2. shows a 7-spot emerging from the pupa. I hadn't realised that the spots take an hour or so to show.

One of the most interesting insects that I've photographed at Toll's is the Carrot Wasp (*Gasteruption jaculator*) - Image 3. This parasitic solitary wasp female pushed her long ovipositor into the nests of various other solitary wasps and bees, depositing her eggs onto the eggs of the host. On hatching they will feed on the grubs of the host.

Another interesting species is 4. the Locust Blowfly (*Stomorphina lunata*). It is a major predator of some African agricultural pests such as locusts. Adults are migratory and are appearing in increasing numbers during the summer months here in the UK where they feed on umbellifers.



Toll's Meadow





1. Black Snipefly and 7-spot Ladybird pupa



2. 7-spot Ladybird emerging from pupa



3. Carrot Wasp (*Gasteruption jaculator*) grooming



4. Locust Blowfly (*Stomorhina lunata*)

For insect photography I use a Canon 7D Mk11 body usually coupled with a 100mm IS macro lens, often with an extension tube attached. When I'm sure that the insect won't be disturbed, I may also use a small flash gun set at very low power. Since purchasing Topaz deNoise software I can comfortably use this equipment at ISO 1600, allowing me to shoot at f13/16 when necessary.

I'm a member of the Wymondham Nature Group and when I 'discovered' Toll's meadow I volunteered to create an insect species list on a spreadsheet. To date I've recorded 100 species and there are a further 50 or so from historical records. As I find something new on most visits I am sure that there are many more species still to be recorded.



7. Golden-bloomed Longhorn Beetle



5. Green Nettle Weevils



6. Sawfly with prey



# Otters of the Isle of Mull

by Brian Boyes



Since visiting the Isle of Mull for my holidays some ten years ago and returning year after year I have become, as Simon King told me, an 'Otterhollic'. I became so engrossed in watching and photographing Otters that I moved permanently to the Island in December 2019.

I was fortunate enough to be awarded my LRPS just before I moved onto the island, and it was at that point that I decided I would try for my ARPS with the subject being "Mull Otters", this is still work in progress.

The island is situated on the West Coast of Scotland and forms part of the Inner Hebrides. It is a large area, covering 338 sq miles with some 300 miles of coastline. Many of the roads down the south and west of the island are single tracks that follow the edges of lochs which makes them ideal for spotting Otters.





Over the years of studying Otters, I have had the privilege of watching many Otters and families playing and feeding in several lochs that circumvent the island. Some of these encounters have been amazingly close and sitting quietly in the rocks waiting for a feeding otter to come ashore with its prize catch has been worth all the aching joints and stiff muscles.

Since Covid 19 hit the UK many people/families have decided to have staycations and holiday in the UK rather than risk going abroad. This has put a strain on the wildlife all over the country including Mull. Many visitors to the island are looking to take photographs of wildlife with Otters being the main target and unfortunately this comes at a cost to the health and wellbeing of the Otters.

Mull otters live in saltwater lochs, this does not make them Sea Otters. They are the same species of Otter as live in the freshwater rivers in the rest of the UK. The Otter that we have in the UK is the Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) and a member of the Mustelid family which includes badgers, weasels, ferrets, pine martins, mink etc.

The Isle of Mull has Otters all along its coastline which means you can see them literally anywhere. Most people, myself included, stick to lochs that have single track roads running alongside. This can cause problems as the passing places can get congested with 'enthusiastic' photographers, a small minority of which have no fieldcraft and lack the skills to track and get into good position to photograph these amazing creatures.

I run wildlife photographic workshops on Mull and specialise in Otters. I can be seen most days out in the field with my trusty Canon 1DX MkIII and 600mm f4 lens. At the beginning of a week-long workshop, I always give a one hour PowerPoint presentation on the Wildlife of Mull and in particular the 'Do's and Don'ts' of photographing Otters.





I always follow the Guidelines of the RPS Nature Group Code of Practice in that "The welfare of the subject is more important than the photograph". In addition to that I have a few golden rules.

1. Never chase an otter but wait for the otter to approach you.
2. Do not position yourself on the water's edge, you will be too close. Most of us have 500mm plus lenses and there is no need to get that close. In fact, with the rocky terrain, being too close can be a hindrance and leave the photographer very frustrated. I find that staying just below the high tide kelp line works best. This is in line with Mull & Iona Ranger team guidance.
3. Wear subdued colour clothing and be aware of your background. Don't be a silhouette on the skyline.
4. Never wear perfume/aftershave. Otters will smell you and be constantly aware of the wind direction.
5. Never move when an otter is on the surface. Always wait until it is submerged and stop moving immediately it resurfaces.
6. Ensure you get ahead of a feeding otter and use all available cover to disguise your body outline. Never interrupt a feeding otter, especially in winter months and early spring when food can be scarce.

7. Try wherever possible to use single shot on your camera. I have seen many photographers in 'Gatling gun mode' which often frightens off the Otter. Obviously, if you are photographing with a mirrorless camera this doesn't apply.
8. Be aware that your presence may affect other wildlife such as nesting or feeding shorebirds.
9. At the first sign of an animal being affected by your presence, withdraw.

Finally, there is an organisation on the island called Mull Otter Group (MOG) who are a group of Otter enthusiasts who aim to assist with the welfare and conservation of Mull's Otters. They carry out research and investigation into the current population of Otters and provide information through education programmes, including working with local schools. Other activities aim to reduce Otter road casualties' using road signage, culvert cleaning and locating reflectors at various high risk sites across the island. Funding comes through membership fees and donations.







As well as running my photographic workshop on the island I also run a Facebook group called Passionate About Mull (PAM). I ran a raffle earlier this year for the benefit of MOG and its members kindly raised over £800 which was duly presented to its Treasurer, Sue Morely. The money will be used to fund more educational leaflets and roadside reflectors to help make the Isle of Mull a safer place for our beloved Otter population.





# Wildlife Visits to the Gower.

by Richard Revels FRPS

One of the benefits of belonging to the RPS Nature Group (NG) is having members host field meetings in their areas - these enable other NG members to visit new locations and photograph the wildlife of that area. Over the years I have learned much about the wildlife in many different locations by attending many such field meetings and have always been grateful to the leaders for showing visiting members around these locations and offering them the opportunity to photograph new species. Very occasionally, when the weather forecast predicted wet and windy conditions not suitable for photography, I have contacted the leader to say I would not be attending. However on most occasions the weather was fine and I enjoyed the experience of new locations and meeting both the group leader and other NG members. Usually after a good day out, everyone takes home plenty of good pictures.

Although I have visited both Scotland and Wales many times over the years; both countries have some fantastic scenery and wildlife but Wales, being considerably closer,

was an easier place for me to visit for short photographic breaks. One of my favourite Welsh areas is the Gower Peninsular in south Wales, which subject to travelling conditions being OK I can usually reach in just over four hours driving. On my first visit to Gower in the mid-1990's I booked a B&B near Rhossili for a couple of nights and explored the nearby areas on my own. The area has a very rich flora and fauna on the nearby limestone cliffs and along the shores. I returned to the Gower again the following year to explore a different area.

Several years later I returned to Gower, this time to attend a field meeting at Oxwich Bay organized by the late Margaret Hodge FRPS. This was a new area to me and also the first time I had met Margaret. It was fairly easy to spot the NG members from the holiday makers, as they had cameras and were mostly carrying tripods. When all the expected NG members had arrived, Margaret gave a brief pre-meeting talk to the group and explained what was planned for the day and the techniques she used to photograph rock-pool wildlife.



*Dunes at Whitford Sands Nature Reserve*



Being low tide during the morning we explored the rock pools first, then after lunch we ventured into the nearby Oxwich Bay sand dune area. The dunes also had some freshwater pools which added greatly to the species seen. There was plenty of wildlife around. Several orchid species in full bloom, although the Marsh Helleborines *Epipactis palustris* in the dune slacks were still in bud. As well the flora there were several species of Dragonfly and Damselfly to be found around the fresh water pools. plus other creatures. Adders occupy the dunes so being careful where you put your feet was advisable - being bitten would definitely have spoiled your day! Both habitats provided us with a good range of excellent and varied subjects for our cameras.

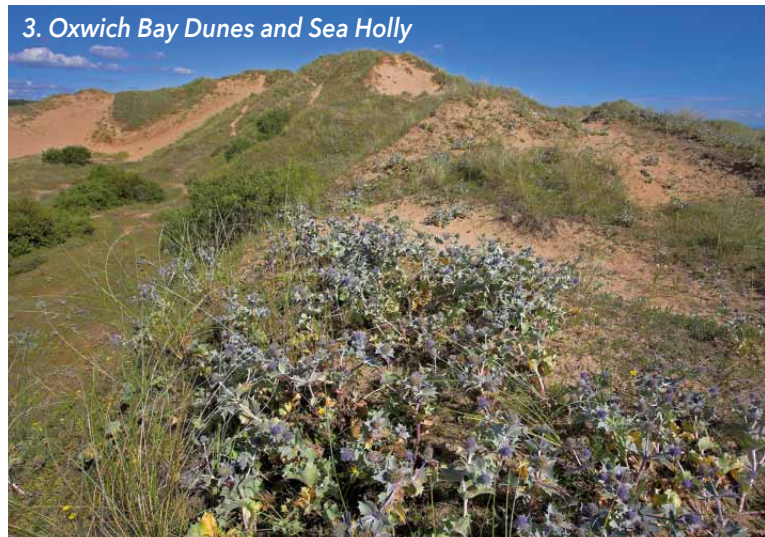
Oxwich Bay, with plenty of easy parking, beachside toilets and nearby shops selling snacks and drinks, was an ideal NG field meeting venue. Unfortunately I was only occasionally able to attend Margaret's Saturday field meetings there because of my professional wedding photography commitments that usually took place on most spring and summer Saturdays. However, Margaret kindly invited me to contact her whenever I intended to return to that area of South Wales and I made several mid-week visits over the next few years. I would drive to her home in Swansea and after having some refreshments would drive us to several other locations around Gower and nearby areas.

One new place Margaret introduced me to was Welshpool Moor that had some wet habitat in the centre of Gower; here there was a colony of the now rare Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* with several nectaring on the Heath Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and other flowers. Not far away in the nearby runnels (streams) we found Britain's largest Dragonfly the Gold-ringed *Cordulegaster boltonii*. When not actively searching for prey they would settle, some were very approachable which made them easier to photograph. Also in the runnels were a number of the much smaller and rarer Southern Damselflies *Coenagrion mercuriale*, which again I was able to photograph.

Another memorable place we visited on Gower was the western coastal dune areas of Whitford Sands NR., an area of mostly dry sand dunes with a few damper dune slacks. We took a leisurely 6 miles round walk around the dunes and coastal sands. Besides our camera kit we took plenty to drink and also our lunch. We found and photographed two nationally rare Beetle species - this was the highlight of this day for me. Several Dune Tiger



2. Nature Group Field Meeting at Oxwich Bay, Margaret Hodge centre.



3. Oxwich Bay Dunes and Sea Holly



4. Rockpools at low tide near Worm's Head



5. Limestone Cliffs along the southern coast.





6. Dune Tiger Beetle *Cicindela maritima*



7. Gold-ringed Dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii*



8. Sea Bindweed and Bumble Bee



9. Strandline Beetle *Nebria complanata*

Beetle *Cicindela maritima* were found scurrying around in the dunes. They were rather difficult to approach until one caught a smaller beetle and stopped to eat it. After its meal it faced me showing off its fearsome jaws!

The other Beetle is even rarer having only been recorded in a few other British locations, all being around the Bristol Channel, and apparently none recorded elsewhere in recent years. The Strandline Beetle *Nebria complanata* hides by day mostly under driftwood at the high tide mark, coming out at night to feed. Margaret advised me to be ready with my camera as just a few seconds after lifting a piece of driftwood they would run and hide. Unfortunately that year there was less driftwood than usual in the area, most having been removed along with plastic and other debris despite Margaret's advice to the conservation authority for that area, that most small pieces of driftwood should not be removed because they were essential for the survival of this critically endangered beetle.

The Gower peninsular has a variety of different kinds of habitats with completely different geology, one such that we visited was Worms Head, a rocky out crop that is only accessible for a few hours at low tide. A few years earlier, at low tide, Margaret had found a small colony of a rare Cushion Starfish *Asterina phylactica* in a rock pool along the causeway. This time we managed to find them again only this time they were giving birth!

A return visit to any location at a different time of the year is likely to show a different set of creatures and plants. An early July visit to rocky cliffs provided me with photos of the Grayling Butterfly *Hipparchia semele* and Rock-sea Lavender *Limonium binervosum* in bloom, as were the Marsh Helleborines in the Oxwich Bay sand dunes. Another scarce British plant of the limestone cliffs near Rhossili is Hoary Rockrose *Helianthemum canum*, at its best in late May and early June, flowering slightly earlier than the much more widespread Common Rock-rose *H. nummularium* that often grows nearby.

The pictures accompanying this article show a very small selection of wildlife that Richard was able to capture during his various visits to the Gower. Some of his earlier pictures are copies from colour slide film, as described in the NG eNewsletter in the January 2021 issue.

More of Richard's images from the Gower can be seen on the inside of the front cover.



Image captions:

1. Whitford Sands NR is a site for two nationally rare Beetle species.
2. Margaret Hodge FRPS at Oxwich Bay NR with people attending one of her many field meetings.
3. Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum* is common on the sand dunes.
4. At low tide, rockpools are exposed along the causeway to Worm's Head
5. The limestone cliffs along the southern coast are rich in wild flowers and other wildlife.
6. Dune Tiger Beetle *Cicindela maritima* found at Whitford Sands NR.
7. The Gold-ringed *Cordulegaster boltonii* is Britain's largest Dragonfly.
8. Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella* and Bumble Bee.
9. Strandline Beetle *Nebria complanata*, hides under driftwood at the high tide mark on Whitford Sands NR.
10. Rare Cushion Starfish in rockpools near Worm's Head.
11. The Velvet Swimming crab *Macropipus puber* is a very aggressive species and the only species Margaret would not pick up.
12. The Grayling butterfly *Hipparchia semele* was seen in small numbers along the cliffs.
13. The Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* is one of Britain's most endangered butterflies and I was delighted to be taken by Margaret to a small colony in central Gower, where they were nectaring on Heath Spotted Orchids.
14. Southern Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* on the Oxwich Bay sand dunes.

Inside Front Cover

15. The Southern Damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale* is a rare species in Britain occurring in the runnels (streams) in central Gower.
16. Scarlet Pimpernels *Anagallis arvensis* flowering where Gorse had been burnt in the winter to control the shrub.
17. During the early June meetings at Oxwich Bay the Marsh Helleborines *Epipactis palustris* were still in tight bud, but fully out when I returned in July.
18. A Marsh Helleborine in full flower in July.



14. Southern Marsh Orchids  
*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*



10. Cushion Starfish *Asterina phylactica*



11. Velvet Swimming Crab, *Macropipus puber*



12. Grayling Butterfly *Hipparchia semele*



13. Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*



# Setting Up a New Bird Feeding Station.

by Roger Hance FRPS

Over the last 20 years, I was fortunate to have been allowed to have a feeding station and hide on private land. I shared this location with another photographer and during those years we regularly topped up the feeders and put out food to attract Foxes. During the first few years we attracted lots of birds and other wildlife. We both took some fantastic shots at that location and spent many happy hours there. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and the location became less productive than it had been previously - the quantity and variety of birds and wildlife declined, and we came to the joint decision to call it a day.

Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to set up a new feeding station at a local orchard, just a few miles away from where I live. This new location has been very successful, and I have been amazed at both the range and numbers of birds that are coming in. Certainly, far more than at my previous location even in its 'heyday'.

Initially I set up a few feeders and a small bird bath, just to see what birds would be attracted. I put up a small portable canvas hide and after a few days I sat in it so that I could watch to see the birds that were coming in. I was amazed at both the range and numbers of birds that were visiting and how quickly the feeders were being emptied.

I located the feeding station in an area where the sun would be over my shoulder for most of the day. This enabled me to have decent lighting conditions from early morning until late afternoon. It was also essential that the background was a distance away so that I could obtain clean, uncluttered backdrops to my pictures. The feeders were initially set very close to trees, bushes, and patches of bramble, so that there was plenty of cover for small birds should a Sparrowhawk come down.



The location and positioning of feeders



Clearview scrim netting allows you to see out from the hide



The created pool



Hide and pool



A week later, I decided to remove the bird bath and make a slightly larger 'pool' for birds to bathe and drink at. This 'pool' was a black plastic cement mixing tray I purchased from B&Q. It was hexagonal and measured 2ft x2ft by 2" deep. I also placed small stones near the far edge of the pool. This was so the small birds could bathe without getting out of their depth, whilst at 2" deep in the middle, it was deep enough should a jay or woodpecker came down to bathe.

I set this 'pool' on a wooden bench. This enabled me to photograph the birds at a level that would give me a cleaner background than if I was looking down on the pool from a 45-degree angle. The problem I had was the black plastic edge, which would look unnatural in the pictures. I had a tip from Mike Lane on how to overcome this. I painted clear glue all around the edge and then coated the edge in sieved earth, which I then compacted into the glue. I left this for a day to dry out and then brushed away the excess earth. This made the edge look a lot more natural, and by the time I had built up some logs, branches, and moss around the outside of the 'pool', it all looked quite realistic.

On my first photographic session I was surprised at the number of birds that it was attracting. Lots of Blue and Great tits as well as a few Coal and Long-tailed Tits.



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Goldfinch and Greenfinch around the pool



Create an attractive natural looking perch



Goldfinch perched on Bramble



Greenfinches





Long-tailed Tit flying in to the feeder



Long-tailed Tit



Greenfinch drinking

The number of Goldfinches and Greenfinches that were coming in amazed me. At times there would 20 + Goldfinches coming down. Until then I hadn't realised how much Goldfinches and Greenfinches fought with each other. Hopefully they will provide me with some good action shots in the coming spring. The highlight of that first day was a male Blackcap that came down to bathe at the edge of the pool.



Blackcap bathing



Brambling on an old timber gate post



Goldfinches



Nuthatch





Blue Tit



Robin

Since my first session there I have now constructed a wooden hide. Canvas hides are fine in the spring and summer but can be quite uncomfortable in the winter. I have used `clearview` scrim netting in the new hide, it allows me to get a clear `all around` view of the outside, but the birds cannot see me inside the hide. Other birds that regularly visit the feeding station are Wren, Nuthatch, Jay, Magpie, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blackbirds, Wood Pigeon, Pheasant, Collared Dove and also, of course, a Sparrowhawk.

One big advantage of this hide is that it is quite close to home and I can drive there in 10 mins, so keeping the feeders regularly topped up is not a problem.

Providing that I supply the owner of the orchard with some of the images I take, he is quite happy for me to continue to use the location. So, the decision to move from my previous hide's location has been a good one.

I have made a YouTube video on how I set up the location, so please feel free to watch this for more information.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4K7iQEd4c8>



Great Tit



Starling



Great Tit

More of Roger's YouTube Videos can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPvqPEO3tT6KMpHRPw1mLcQ>

# A Long Way South

by John Nathan ARPS

I think I must be an addict - no, not a drug addict, but addicted to photography in cold places. In the last 25 years I have visited the Himalayas three times, Patagonia, The Arctic, Antarctic and Yellowstone in winter. In March 2010 I visited The Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica. It was a long way south but, in my view, it was worth every minute of the long journey to get there. Indeed it is a very long way, from us at 50 deg North, to Ushuaia at 54 Deg South. It is a two-day flight, but commonsense would dictate that you should build a few extra days in, to allow for delays. My wife is not keen on boats or the cold, so I went with a friend – the same pal with whom I visited the Arctic two years earlier; I wrote an article about Spitzbergen for The Iris some years ago. Neither visit was one specifically for photographers, but in both there were keen amateur photographers.

Our first flight was from London to Buenos Aires, 'The Paris of the South' - a lovely city, with wide avenues, a 'steel' magnolia statue, opening and closing entirely with heat from the sun; and Eva Peron's grave. We spent a couple of days there before flying on to Ushuaia, at the tip of Tierra del Fuego, another three and a half hours. We arrived two days before our ship left the port, enough time to visit the Tierra del Fuego National Park. There is more vegetation than you would think, including southern beech trees which have the same leaves as our beech trees but are much more gnarled and half the size. I think this must be due to the fierce climate. This area is the most southerly in the world, projecting into the southern ocean. Fierce westerly winds encircle the globe, and southern South America is the only land mass in the way. From Cape Horn, an island just off the southern tip, it is only five hundred miles to the northern tip of the Antarctic peninsula.

Our ship, the 6500-ton Akademik Sergei Vavilov, was dwarfed by the large cruise ships in Ushuaia harbour – but being smaller gave us many advantages. There were many places we could go which were too shallow for the bigger ships; also, we could get all our one hundred passengers ashore in Zodiacs within half an hour.

Regarding equipment, I took a Canon EOS 5D MkIII, Canon EOS 40D and six lenses - total weight some 20Kg. It is quite important to find out how much hold luggage you are allowed and you can use a special padded and reinforced case to carry some equipment. The most valuable equipment I carried as hand luggage, pretending it was as light as a feather. I took, or to be more accurate I imported into Adobe Lightroom, about five thousand shots. Of the lenses I took, by far the most useful was my Canon 70-200mm f/2.8. About half my pictures were taken with this. It is a fantastic piece of equipment. Before I bought this lens, I wondered why some people paid so much more for an f/2.8 lens over an f/4.0, afterwards I knew the reason - you can get sharp shots in much duller conditions. Also this lens has internal focussing, so the lens barrel does not lengthen and there is no chance of getting water or grit inside it, quite a risk on beaches and with the weather down there.

*View of Southern Tierra del Fuego over the Beagle Channel.*



*Icebergs on approach to South Georgia.*





I used my Canon 28-105mm quite a bit, whereas my Canon 500mm f/4.0 lens was hardly used at all. It subtends an angle of only 4 degrees so standing on a remote beach in foul weather it was impractical. In order to get as wide a range of shots as possible, I also carried a wide-angle lens and a 90mm macro, which I hardly used. Learning a lesson from my Arctic trip, I took a very sturdy tripod. Each camera had a quick release plate- you do not want to be standing around in the cold and wet fitting it on. The wind can be fierce, and not all shots can be hand held. We were not allowed to use flash, in order to avoid frightening the wildlife. Apart from the Falklands, there are no landing stages, so every day you are in a Zodiac, either to land in shallow water or on a beach or to cruise around. Sea water does camera equipment no good at all, so you need to carry it in a diver's dry bag. I had mine in a rucksac inside the dry bag. When we landed, the crew would put a long rope secured by tent pegs on the ground, and you would fix your life jacket and dry bag to that, to avoid it being blown away.

It is no good having your camera looking good in its case. It's a good idea to set the camera to your chosen ISO, depending on the weather, bearing in mind that wildlife moves, sometimes fast. Nowadays I usually use aperture priority which I change depending on what depth of field I want. Things often happen quickly with wildlife, so you should have your camera, or cameras ready - power turned on, lens hood on and lens cap off. I carried both cameras all the time, each fitted with a different length lens - usually the 70-200mm on the EOS 5D and 28-105mm on the EOS 40D. Every lens fitted with a glass lens protector to save the front element from dirt or water, especially sea water. In March it was not very cold, but it was damp, so batteries did not last long and I had to carry spares and recharge them every night. I took a Gitzo fibreglass tripod with a Kirk head - a very large ball head, for quick positioning. All of this I carried in my dry bag. Sometimes we were just ferried ashore; other times we cruised round islands. For the cruising the quickest way to stop sea water splashing the camera was to make a hole in the base of a medium sized plastic bag just big enough to push the lens through. The lens hood fixes the bag in position, so that the camera and lens are protected from sea spray. It was also a good idea not to sit at the bow of the Zodiac because, although you get the best view, you are also at the highest risk of getting yourself and your equipment splashed.



*King Penguins on South Georgia.*



*Large Leopard Seal (possibly pregnant) on South Georgia.*



*King Penguins on Gold Beach, South Georgia.*



*Crabeater Seals on Antarctic Peninsula.*





*Striated Caracaras on Saunders Island.*



*Nesting colony of Black-browed Albatross, Saunders Island.*



*Black-browed Albatross chick on nest, stretching*



*Black browed Albatross adults bonding.*

### **West Falkland.**

This was a day and a half sailing from Ushuaia. You leave down the Beagle channel, named after Charles Darwin's ship. Immediately you get into the Southern Ocean, you can understand its reputation. We had a 6-8ft swell; fortunately our ship had stabilisers, which helped a lot. Also our cabin was at sea level amidships, a good place to be; some passengers with much smarter cabins higher up near the bow did not come down to breakfast when the weather was bad.

We stopped at Saunders island and saw a colony of Black-browed Albatross - an endangered species whose numbers have dropped by over 60% in forty years. This is thought to be due to long line fishing. Lines of many miles are laid in the ocean, the birds think that the floats are prey, and get caught on the hook and drown. We were allowed to observe these beautiful birds from a distance, and not allowed to use flash. We witnessed adults beak tapping on returning from sea, behaviour used to reinforce their bond. We saw young on the nest, a raised platform made of mud. We also saw King Cormorants with their very striking blue eye, as well as Rockhopper Penguins while down on the beach there were thousands of Gentoo Penguins.

We spent an interesting day in Stanley, the capital of the Falklands, unfortunately not the subject of this article.

### **South Georgia.**

Although in a remote place in the South Atlantic, two days sailing East of the Falklands, South Georgia was by far the 'must not miss' place on this trip. It is in fact an extension of the Andes, its highest point being Mount Paget at over 3,000 metres. It is a banana shaped island about sixty miles long and no more than ten miles at its widest point. It is also the last resting place of Sir Ernest Shackleton. As we approached we began to see icebergs - some were enormous - the size of many blocks of flats!! We cruised round the northern aspect, stopping at various places. The first stop was Salisbury plain home to the largest colony (two million) of King Penguins in the world. Emperor Penguins get all the media attention - Kings are a little smaller but not dissimilar. At 3ft high, they are larger than most other penguins. With strict instructions not to disturb them or use flash and to keep well away from seals, we walked to the edge of their colony. In order to get a good background I often found it was necessary to lie on the ground. Later in the day we came across a huge Leopard Seal lying on the beach.



Another stop was off Stromness, an old whaling station. The remains of this grisly trade are all around, nearly sixty years after it was stopped - old sheds and huge ships propellers. In 1915, when Shackleton did his heroic sail from Elephant Island on the Antarctic Peninsula, he and his friends landed, exhausted on the south side of South Georgia. He and two friends then walked over the mountains ending up at Stromness Whaling Station. It is a very historic place. There I saw seals (including one albino seal) and an Elephant Seal, looking miserable in the pouring rain. You have to accept the weather as it is. There is no question of going back the following day - you take your shots there and then, or not at all.

We then sailed overnight to Grytviken, the largest whaling station, and also the home of the British Antarctic Survey. Here in the graveyard, is buried Sir Ernest Shackleton. We paid our respects to 'The Boss' with a tot of Bushmills Irish whisky.

At the southern tip of South Georgia lies Gold Beach. This is the most astonishing place of all. On a beach four hundred yards long, the weather was fine and sunny when we were dropped. Within half an hour it had started snowing and then the wind got up. For most of my two hours ashore it was blowing a blizzard and freezing cold. On this beach were thousands of King Penguins, some standing on stones to stop their feet getting too cold. Skuas were wandering around looking for easy pickings. There were also Snow Petrels, the only bird whose whole life is spent at these latitudes. An American passenger said that she could not say 'petrel', so they became snow pretzels!! The weather was so bad that at first I did not notice them, but eventually my attention did alight on about twenty or so three ton monsters lying at one end of the beach - Southern Elephant Seals. The largest seal species, they spend most of their lives at sea, but come ashore to breed. Just like humankind, there are sometimes squabbles between competing males. A year or two after I came home, my shot of the two young seals fighting on the beach was shown at an exhibition. While opening the exhibition, the mayor likened my shot to two of his councillors at a meeting!! On the beach all the compact cameras packed up, probably because of the damp and cold. I believe mine persisted because it was substantially made, and my Zoom lens had an internal Zoom. The wind was fierce, and I took all shots using the tripod. Eventually, I was the only person left on the beach, but had secured some of the best wildlife pictures I have ever taken.



*Rockhopper Penguin.*



*King Cormorant with blue eye.*



*Young Male Elephant Seals fighting - Gold Beach, S. Georgia.*



*Huge old whale bones and Gentoo Penguin on sub-Antarctic*





*Sir Ernest Shackleton's grave on South Georgia.*

We passed Cape Disappointment at the Southern tip of South Georgia in a gale, then ploughed south west across the Southern Ocean for two days in a force ten gale - an interesting experience in a small ship!. We lost time here, so could not land on Elephant Island, where Shackleton's men spent four months living on Penguins, while waiting for him to collect them - which he did. There are signs of whaling even on the Antarctic Peninsula and sub-Antarctic islands - the whalers made a good job of almost making whales extinct - for candle wax and soap!! On one island huge whale bones were lying around - also Gentoo and Chinstrap Penguins, Crabeater Seals and adolescent Fur Seals, which are aggressive if you get too close. They can move fast on land and have sharp teeth. This far south, late in the season, we saw Gentoo Penguin chicks, more Leopard Seals and occasional Adele Penguins. 'Iceberg Alley' was full of icebergs, including a few ice bridges. We did not get as far as the British Antarctic Station, though we did reach the Chilean Station.



*Old Whaler beached at Grytviken.*

This has been a very brief description of on the most exciting wildlife trip I have ever been on and I would recommend it to anyone. Do make it if you get a chance. I am a bit old now to carry that heavy camera gear. Whether the lighter kit I have now would be robust enough to stand up to that weather, I may never know. If you get a chance, even half a chance, you should take it - especially to South Georgia. It is simply fantastic.

John Nathan. ARPS. August 2021.  
<http://j-nathanphotography.co.uk> .  
 All pictures copyright John Nathan.



*Ice bridge in Iceberg Alley.*



# Field Meetings 2021

by Ann Miles FRPS

*With the third National Lockdown in place from January to the beginning of April 2021, Field meetings were postponed during those months.*

## **Royston Heath Herts, 8th April 2021**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

The Nature Group resumed Field meetings with a trip to photograph the very delicate Pasque flowers. They grow low in the turf so the only method to get a good photograph is to find flowers on the edge of a patch so you can lie down without damaging any plants and shoot the blooms at ground level.

## **Paxton Pits Cambridgeshire, 17th April 2021**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

We enjoyed an ideal warm sunny day, photographing the Cormorants who were busy carrying nesting materials and the large numbers of insects who were active in the sun.

## **Lake Vyrnwy Wales, 5th May 2021**

**Leader Ann Miles.**

We hoped that, by the beginning of May, the summer visitors would have set up territories and be in full song and display. However, it turned out to be a very cold day with occasional hail storms and snow visible on the hills so it was not surprising that the birds were mostly silent and stayed in shelter. We did manage a variety of birds: Meadow Pipit, Siskin, Nuthatch, Dipper, Common Sandpiper, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Redstart and Red Kite gliding along the valley.

## **Wicken Fen Cambridgeshire, 15th May 2021**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

A party of eight braved the rain, walking over to Burwell Fen in the morning. We were fortunate to see a pair of Barn Owls hunting and a few other birds of the area including several Warbler species and Stonechat. Towards lunch, the clouds lifted a bit and it was warmer so suddenly Mayflies and Stone Flies were crawling up every available reed and launching into the air or caught by Spiders. The rain returned for the afternoon!



*Ladybird by Mark Perkins*



*Pasque Flower by Chris Holt*



*Cormorant by Chris Holt*



*Redstart by Jonathan Ashton*





Reed Warbler by Peter Ward



Great Crested Grebe by Gary Briggs



Four-spotted Chaser by Nick Bowman



Grizzled Skipper by Duncan Locke ARPS

## Rutland Water Leicestershire, 26th May 2021

**Leader: Peter Ward.**

A cool but mostly dry day passed too quickly exploring this reserve, one of the best places to watch birds and other wildlife in the UK with over 20 wildlife hides to explore.

## Strumpshaw Fen Norfolk, 14th June 2021

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

Unfortunately, like other butterfly species, the Swallowtail numbers are very low this year though some of our group did manage a few photographs of one in the meadow. The Dragonflies made up for the absence of butterflies with Norfolk Hawker, Scarce and Four-spot Chasers, and numerous Damselflies providing us with plenty of subjects.

## Martin Down National Nature Reserve Hampshire, 9th June 2021

**Leader: Duncan Locke.**

After a cold and misty start, Martin Down provided a group of nine photographers with a glorious sunny day. The Greater Butterfly Orchids were mostly still in bud, but this was offset by the Burnt-tip Orchids still being in full flower. Butterflies photographed included Adonis Blue, Brimstone, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper and Small Blue.



Orange Tip Butterfly by Jane Moore



Lackey Moth Larva by Derek Trendell ARPS





*Burnt-tip Orchid by Keith Polwin ARPS*

**Prestbury Hill Butterfly Conservation Reserve,  
16th June 2021,**

**Leader: Duncan Locke.**

Seven photographers gathered in the parking area at the top of the hill and spread out across the Reserve. Despite being between seasons and too early for the Marbled Whites (and a good display of Musk Orchids), a good variety of butterflies and moths were photographed.

**RSPB Snettisham Norfolk, 2nd July 2021**

**Leader: Nick Bowman.**

This reserve stretches along the coastline from Heacham to Snettisham and is famous for the Wader spectacles at high tide at dawn or dusk, which we photographed last year. This year we primarily concentrated on other birdlife along the beach, in woodland and around the large lakes where there are several hides.

**RSPB Titchwell Norfolk, 16th July 2021**

**Leader: Nick Bowman.**

An ideal warm sunny day to visit the seaside! We spent the morning around the reed beds photographing dragonflies, other insects and Marsh Harriers. After lunch we walked to the beach and waited until the mussel beds were revealed and the waders flocked in to feed.



*Small Heath Butterfly by Jane Rees ARPS*



*Nature Group Members at RSPB Snettisham*



*Skylark by Nick Bowman*





*Silver Washed Fritillary by Ann Miles*

## **Bradfield Woods Suffolk, 23rd July 2021**

**Leader: Matt Clarke.**

After many hot sunny days, our visit was cloudy and considerably cooler so the butterflies were not very active. The hoped-for Purple Emperors and White Admirals stayed high in the trees but we did have good views of Silver-washed Fritillaries and a host of other insects.

## **Sharpenhoe, 1st August 2021**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

The early morning was cool so we had great opportunities to photograph the moths and butterflies before they got too active. Chalkhill Blues were present in large numbers roosting on stems and flower heads. As the temperature rose, the butterflies became more active opening wings and eventually flying and pairing.



*Silver Y Moth by Matt Clarke*



*Chalkhill Blue by Christine Holt*



*Marbled White by Peter Ward*



*Six-spot Burnet Moths by André Neves*



*Blue-tailed Damselflies by Ann Miles*





### **Summer Leys Northamptonshire, 22nd August 2021**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

The reserve is one of the country's best wildlife reserve for breeding, migrant and wintering waders, ducks and other birds, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects. The day started with damp conditions but gave us lots of opportunities for insects, etc covered in rain drops. The sun came out and the rest of the day was warm and sunny, ideal for insect photography, especially the challenging dragonflies in flight.

### **Lakenheath RSPB Suffolk, 22nd September**

**Leader: Nick Bowman**

On a wonderfully warm and sunny day, we split into two groups and enjoyed views of Hobbies catching the abundant dragonflies, lots of Spiders of several species plus a few rarer sightings including a White Stork and Bearded Tits.







*Fallow Deer herd by Sue Grief*



*Rhodocollybia butyracea by Ann Miles*



*Members at Frampton Marshes by Ann Miles*



*Stonechat by John Harvey*

### **Holkham Park Norfolk, 11th October**

**Leader: Nick Bowman.**

On a warm sunny day - more like summer than October, seven Members of the Nature Group met to photograph the very large herd of Fallow Deer. There was quite a lot of Bellowing from the males and a bit of chasing around though no full-scale fights. We also found a great area for water birds with Great and Little Egrets, Heron, Cormorants, Grebes and Ducks all conveniently perched and flying for photographs.

### **Macro and Focus-Stacking Workshop, Epping Forest Field Studies Council Centre Essex, 23rd October**

**Tutored by Qasim Syed and Duncan Locke.**

This was our first workshop since Lockdown of March 2019. There were fungi around to practise our techniques but, with so much human activity in the Forest now, these tended to be small and require sharp eyes to spot them and close-up techniques to photograph them.

### **Frampton Marshes RSPB Lincolnshire, 10th November Organised by Nick Bowman and led by Ann Miles.**

Seven Members of the Nature Group met up on a cold day and spent several very enjoyable hours exploring the large RSPB reserve with its abundant birds and wonderful marshland vistas stretching to the North Sea in the distance. The Egrets were probably the stars of the show.

### **Bradgate Park Leicestershire, 28th November**

**Leader: Ann Miles.**

With storm Arwen due on the day of our proposed visit, it was not surprising that a number of people booked to come on the trip decided that it would be unwise to commit to long journeys. So, on the day, a group of four (rather than 16) set off to walk around the Park in search of deer, birds, fungi etc. Our first encounter was with a very confiding Grey heron, which visited a number of backdrops for us posing well at each. The main targets were the Fallow and Red Deer herds.

### **Blacktoft Sands South Yorkshire, 29th November**

**Leader: Peter Ward.**

Five Nature Group members visited this remote but very appealing RSPB reserve on the Humber Estuary. One of the 6 hides gave excellent views of Snipe, Black-tailed Godwits and Redshank foraging on the shoreline. We also managed shots of a rare vagrant from Iran - the White-tailed Lapwing.

Many thanks to Steve and Janet Parrish for being our guides for the visit.



*Snipe by Steve Parrish*



*Black-tailed Godwit by Peter Ward*



*Grey Heron by David Belton*



*Red Deer Stag by Duncan Locke*

*Marsh Harrier by John Harvey*



### **Starling Roost at Ham Wall**

Unfortunately this Field Trip had to be cancelled due to high water levels and adverse weather.

Thanks to Annette Beardsley for planning this trip – better luck another year.



*Forester Moth by Gina Stead*



# A Weekend at Foxlease with the Nature Group - October 2021

by Booker Skelding ARPS, BA.



Robber Fly by Duncan Locke ARPS

I decided to book a residential weekend away with the Nature Group and on the 1st Oct 2021 at 1600hrs I arrived at Foxlease, a Girl-Guide Estate with Manor House surrounded by beautiful grounds and wildlife. With 'The New Forest' upon its doorstep it would provide endless opportunities to roam with the camera. After dropping my bag in my allocated room, I sat on the veranda and soaked up the view, before returning to unpack and then meeting up with the host, James Foad LRPS, in reception. I was made to feel very much at ease.

My name is Booker Skelding - I am a mature student recently graduated with a First Class Honours Degree in Photography. Prior to this I studied for five years, part time, to gain a Foundation degree in Photography. The Foundation degree enabled me to qualify for the RPS Licentiate Distinction (LRPS) and the BA for the Associate Distinction (ARPS). I am predominantly a fine art documentary photographer and am currently applying for Fellowship with my documentary project 'Finding My Religion'.

Altogether, including myself, 16 members attended the Autumn Residential weekend at Foxlease.

## Day 1 - Moth Traps in the Marquee.

Unfortunately it rained for most of the day and we were fortunate that Foxlease allowed us to use their marquee. Two of the attendees, Jeremy Malley-Smith and NG Vice Chair Duncan Locke ARPS, had kindly set up moth traps over-night in order to provide the group with a selection of moths to photograph the following morning. I thought to myself, this can't be technically hard, I have a macro lens and decent tripod, job done. How wrong I was!



Moth by Booker Skelding ARPS



Angle Shades Moth by Andrew Chu ARPS



Moth by Stephen Hyam ARPS



I learned about focus stacking. Duncan Locke was so kind and patient in showing me where to manually set my focus point, before setting the in-camera focus stacking facility to take 15 shots at f/5.6 with default steps of 5. My kit is Nikon mirrorless made up of a Nikon Z7II and a mix of Z and F (DSLR) mount lenses. I used my Micro-Nikkor 105mm f/2.8 VR lens with the necessary FTZ adaptor. When using the 'in camera' focus stacking the Nikon Z7II starts shooting from front to back - some systems, such as Olympus, start the process in the middle of the image. It was fascinating to learn about the technology process. The Nikon system does not have the facility to merge the images 'in-camera' therefore another skill had to be learned in post processing.

Duncan supplied two Manfrotto Lumimuse LED lights mounted on two flexible support arms, these were positioned to light a moth resting on some tree bark. I was surprised at how static the moth stayed, allowing for stacked shooting. I was keen to know why it was so important to have the subject sharp throughout, as my photography is usually one shot creating a bokeh around the subject. Jeremy explained the importance, using the example of a museum wanting to archive a subject or a nature magazine wanting to show every detail for education purposes.

The rain was so bad that we had to change our plans for the rest of the day. Jeremy volunteered to give a presentation in the meeting room on flash photography, which was really useful and we learned about syncing flash guns manually. After the workshop, we had an hour before dinner to prepare/edit up to five of our images taken that day to show at our evening session. Dinner at Foxlease was prepared by a professional local chef and was faultless.

Immediately following the evening meal we met to show our images. I had been anxious about the evening as I was very much a 'new kid on the block' and it was evident that some members had known each other for years. Nevertheless I was completely welcomed and embraced into the group. Other members of the group showed a selection of their images taken that day and I showed some of my wildlife and landscape imagery. Afterwards Jane Rees ARPS gave a presentation on her method of focus stacking and Edmund Fellowes FRPS gave a very interesting talk about the Cuckoo accompanied by some excellent images of the species.



*Photographing Moths in the marquee by Booker Skelding ARPS*



*Working in the marquee by Booker Skelding ARPS*



*Macro photography in the marquee  
by Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS*





*Brownsea Island by Booker Skelding ARPS*



*Leader, James Foad LRPS by Booker Skelding ARPS*



*Young Sika Doe by Booker Skelding ARPS*



*Earth Balls by Booker Skelding ARPS*

## Day 2 - Brownsea Island, Poole

BrownSea Island is run by the National Trust and famous for Red Squirrels, wildlife and Scouting. The Island is located at Poole Harbour, with spectacular views across to Purbeck Hills. The short ferry trip was a delightful transition from a busy harbour to a tranquil island.

For me, the trip to Brownsea Island was the highlight of the three day residential trip. I insisted I would travel to Poole harbour in my own vehicle and unfortunately ended up at the ferry port and not at the harbour-side where our vessel awaited embarkment. I rang James to let him know I would be late because I had not read the guidance and instructions properly. James was calm and understanding, told me where to leave my vehicle and said he would wait for me. Unfortunately I couldn't find a parking space in time to embark on the same ferry that the rest of the group were on. When I finally arrived at Brownsea Island, I was met by National Trust staff who were very helpful, and guided me to where the Group were to be found.

There is an array of woodland and a lagoon creating a haven for wildlife. The rare Red Squirrel, Sika Deer and a wide variety of birds, including Dunlin, Kingfishers, Common and Sandwich Terns and Oystercatchers can all be found at Brownsea.

Some of the group had split off into different groups, depending on what they wanted to photograph. I headed off towards the area where the old church was located, where I found Sika Does and Red Squirrels. This is where I captured a beautiful image of a six month old Sika Doe, grazing under a tree where beams of sunlight shone through the branches and leaves.

Sika, the Japanese Deer, have the ability to swim as I learned from the Guide looking after the Church of St.Mary's, a quaint Anglican Christian Church built in the 1850s and still in active worship today. The Guide informed me that deer are frequently seen swimming off the Island shore. The Doe was not startled by my presence, which allowed me to fumble around with my settings and attempt to steady my heavy Sigma 150 to 600 mm contemporary lens which I had perched on a monopod. My hand to eye co-ordination is somewhat clunky and hinders my ability to be 'speedy' when it comes to wanting or needing to change a lens and/or camera settings. This is why I am naturally suited to documentary/fine art photography rather than journalism, sports or wildlife photography.



Brownsea Island is a photographer's paradise and was the highlight of the residential weekend for many of us. We were able to photograph birds such as Spoonbill, Avocet, Redshank and Oystercatchers. I wanted to practise my newly learnt skill of focus stacking. I found 'Common Earth Balls' and made two alternative stacks, which turned out pretty awesome. We returned to Foxlease at 5pm and had an hour to process our images in preparation for the evening 'show and tell' session. This was a mad rush. I considered not engaging with the group that evening as I was so exhausted. However, I processed one stack of images with the help of 'step by step' YouTube tutorials. I only had time to process one stack, luckily it was good enough to convince me that I would join the image sharing session. I thoroughly enjoyed seeing such a wide array of wildlife and nature photography. My stacked image of the Earth Balls received much positive feedback, resulting in my energy being restored. Succeeding at this new skill that I have been wanting to learn for some time boosted my confidence and I highly recommend it. This was shot in 20 frames at f/8 using the Nikon Micro f/2.8 at 1/25 sec, ISO100. After the 'show and tell' session, Jeremy Malley-Smith gave a talk about Scottish wildlife.



*Earth Star & Fly by Edmund Fellowes FRPS*



*Sika faun by Edmund Fellowes FRPS*

### **Day 3 - Blackwater Arboretum**

A trip had been arranged to visit the woods at Blackwater Arboretum, the purpose being to find fungi. Unfortunately however, despite considerable foraging very little was found.

### **Highlights**

I thoroughly enjoyed the evening presentations. I learnt so much from members presentations. Duncan Locke for post processing advice on software programmes such as Helicon and showing how Photoshop has been improved to produce outstanding stacking results. Jeremy Malley-Smith for his speed-light flash syncing tutorial and how he set up his baited Badger set creating a natural looking rockpool to photograph them. Andrew Chu is a Nikon user and shared great tips with me on stacking techniques and how specifically the Nikon Z7 performs. Edmund Fellowes presentation on his self-built bird hides, sharing his award winning imagery and a life-time dedicated to photographing wild birds in their natural habitat, it was inspiring and magical. The skill and experience of members and their willingness to share was refreshing and I felt very welcomed by all. I hope to reserve a space on the next residential weekend.

*More images on the inside back and back covers.*



*Red Squirrel by James Foad LRPS*



*Hornet by Duncan Locke ARPS*



# A Badger in our Garden

Robert Galloway LRPS

1. "Our" Badger.



2. Note his claws on front feet.



3. Plodding round the garden in May.



4. Frontal view of characteristic face.



5. Profile in July.



6. Muddy face.



7. In the rain, July.





I first saw a badger in our garden in the Scottish Highlands when setting up a camera to photograph a Pine Marten - the badger appeared from behind a bush. In the previous 37 years I had never seen a badger in the garden nor in the district for miles around, indeed I had never seen a badger. Since then he has visited with increasing frequency and now visits so regularly that his absence, rather than his presence, is a matter of comment. The badger is always alone and looks like the same animal, so is possibly a lone male. A badger is a nocturnal animal, but our 'friend' is not disturbed by outside lights being switched on nor, I discovered cautiously, by flash - essential to photograph our night time visitor if going beyond infrared views.

- 1: Crossing an area of grass with buttercups. The characteristic badger face and short white tail are clear, but the grass prevents the paws from being seen. The badger usually plods about but can run if he wishes. Unlike many mammals that can show various expressions and appear 'cute' to humans, badgers have faces that are rather expressionless.
- 2: Standing on a stone surface, his large strong claws on his front paws are clearly visible.
- 3: Plodding around the garden passing forget-me-nots.
- 4: The striking symmetrical face is visually dominant.
- 5: A profile view of our Badger.
- 6: Badgers do not waste their time trying to impress photographers with their appearance. They make badger-nose-sized holes in the earth in order to search for food with a muddy nosed result .
- 7: It can rain in Scotland and our wet badger looks out from under a bush.
- 8: With no shelter he is drenched and well described by the scots drouk it.
- 9: Badger visits throughout the year, here in December.

8. *Drenched in June.*



9. *December, in the snow.*



10. *Surprise meeting.*



- 10: It makes one wonder who was the more surprised when our Badger and a Pine Marten met. They paid little attention to one another. Another occasion which I observed, badger was close to the foot of a pine tree when three pine martens came down the trunk of the tree and one by one jumped over the badger to the ground, then a little later returned to the tree and jumped up and over the badger to land on the trunk, up and away. No hint of conflict!



# **RPS Nature Group Spring Meeting 46th Annual General Meeting Opening of the Annual Exhibition**

**Saturday 9th April 2022**

**Smethwick Photographic Society**

**The Old Schoolhouse, Churchbridge, Oldbury,  
West Midlands, B69 2AS**

## **Programme:**

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>10:00hrs</b> | <b>Doors open, tea and coffee available</b>                                   |
| <b>10:30hrs</b> | <b>Welcome and Introduction by RPS Nature Group Chair, David O'Neill LRPS</b> |
| <b>10:40hrs</b> | <b>Presentation by Wildlife Photographer and NG Member Mike Lane FRPS</b>     |
| <b>12:15hrs</b> | <b>Break for Lunch and to look at the Exhibition</b>                          |
| <b>13:15hrs</b> | <b>46th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group</b>                    |
|                 | <b>Agenda:</b>  |
|                 | <b>1. Apologies for Absence</b>   |
|                 | <b>2. Minutes of the 45th AGM 2021 (printed in Issue 140 of 'The Iris')</b>   |
|                 | <b>3. Matters arising</b>   |
|                 | <b>4. Chair's Report</b>  |
|                 | <b>5. Treasurer's Report</b>  |
|                 | <b>6. Secretary's Report</b>  |
|                 | <b>7. Programme Coordinator's Report</b>                                      |
|                 | <b>8. Any Other Business</b>  |
|                 | <b>9. Date and Venue of the 47th AGM 2023</b>                                 |
| <b>14:00hrs</b> | <b>Opening of the 2022 Exhibition</b>   |
|                 | <b>Presentation of the Awards</b>   |
|                 | <b>Projection of the accepted images</b>                                      |
| <b>16:15hrs</b> | <b>Close</b>  |

**Throughout the day the prints accepted for the 2022 Exhibition will be on display**

**Please bring your own packed lunch as lunch will not be available.**

**There is a dining area. Tea, coffee and drinks will be available at the bar.**

**Watch the RPS Nature Group website for further information and how to book or contact:**

**Duncan Locke ARPS, Honorary Secretary**

**E-mail: [duncan.locke@btinternet.com](mailto:duncan.locke@btinternet.com)**



# **Nature Group Summer Residential Weekend 2022**

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## **The Kingcombe Centre Dorset**

**Friday 10th to Monday 13th June 2022**

For the 2022 Summer Residential Weekend, the Nature Group is returning to The Kingcombe Centre in West Dorset. Not only does Kingcombe provide a central point to visit Dorset's many Nature Reserves, but the Centre is situated in Kingcombe Meadows, one of southern England's best Nature Reserves. A full programme of visits to Dorset's Nature Reserves will be planned.



For further information on the venue visit:

<https://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/kingcombe-centre>

Up to sixteen places are available dependant on the mix of single and shared twin bed occupancy.

All rooms have en-suite facilities. One bedroom with disabled access is available.

The final cost for three nights full board accommodation is £290 for shared twin bed occupancy and £350 for single occupancy.

A deposit of £150 for single occupancy or £125 for shared occupancy will secure a place.

Final payments will be required by: Friday 8th April 2022.

For further details on the Weekend and to book your place, go to the RPS Nature Group website:

<https://rps.org/events/groups/nature/2022/june/summer-residential-weekend-at-the-kingcombe-centre>

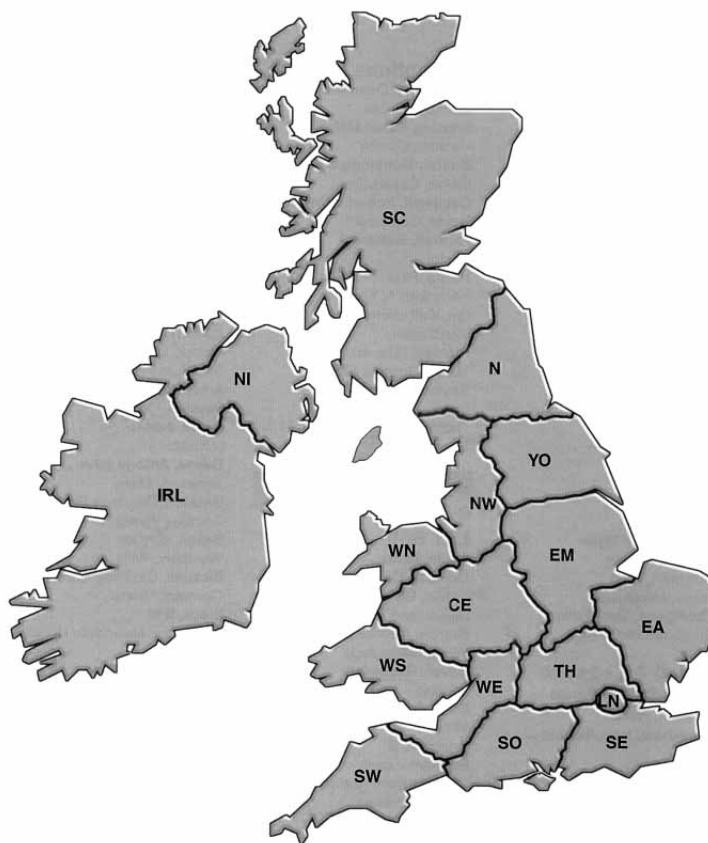
or contact: Duncan Locke ARPS. E-mail: [duncan.locke@btinternet.com](mailto:duncan.locke@btinternet.com) Tel: 07989 494232



## Membership Statistics

Shown below are Nature Group Members per RPS Region, together with regional codes and other statistics.

Regions:	Jan 2022	Jan 2021
CE - Central	57	61
EA - East Anglia	104	97
EM - East Midlands	60	50
IRL - Eire	7	9
LN - London	74	68
WN - North Wales	11	12
NW - North Western	56	55
NO - Northern	27	27
NI - Northern Ireland	2	3
SC - Scotland	60	52
SE - South Eastern	90	86
WS - South Wales	18	18
SW - South Western	34	35
SO - Southern	79	73
TH - Thames Valley	77	71
WE - Western	78	79
YO - Yorkshire	49	53
<b>Total UK + Eire:</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>849</b>
<b>*Overseas:</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Total Membership:</b>	<b>955</b>	<b>913</b>
<b>*Includes the Isle of Man and Channel Islands</b>		
Distinctions:	Jan 2022	Jan 2021
Honorary FRPS:	3	3
FRPS:	63	63
ARPS:	256	246
LRPS:	246	229
No Distinction:	387	372
<b>Total:</b>	<b>955</b>	<b>913</b>



## Obituary

## Margaret Hodge FRPS APAGB

We were very sorry to learn recently of the death of member Margaret Hodge FRPS, APAGB, in late 2018.

Margaret began her photographic journey in 1967 while accompanying her R.A.F. husband on a posting to Malaya. She described herself as having no knowledge but lots of enthusiasm. In 1968 they moved to Cornwall and Margaret became a member of Saltash Camera Club, enjoying landscape and seascape photography. In 1981 she purchased a used macro lens and became hooked on photographing the wildlife found on the sea-shore, which became the subject of her successful Fellowship application in 1985. Margaret was a Nature Group Committee Member for many years, finally retiring in 1995. She also served as a member of the Nature Distinctions Panel for a number of years until 2001.

A past President of the Western Counties Photographic Federation, Margaret was well loved and respected in the photographic community. When her presidency at the WCPF came to an end, she moved to Swansea and became a member of the camera club there. She really enjoyed her years in Wales. In 2009, she moved to Norfolk to live with her daughter. Unfortunately, we're told that Margaret never really found another camera club to equal the enjoyment she had experienced while living in Swansea.

Margaret will be most fondly remembered by all who were members of the Nature Group during the 1990s and attended any of the Field Meetings that she hosted annually at Oxwich Bay, South Wales. These meetings were always extremely well supported and enjoyed by all those who attended. They were very much missed when they finally came to an end in 2008 prior to her move from South Wales to Norfolk.

*The Editor and Nature Group Committee would like to thank Ann Owens, Publicity Officer for WCPF for providing some of the information above.*





*Spider by Annette Beardsly LRPS*



*Spoonbills in flight by Jon Mullin LRPS*



*Red-Green Carpet Moth by Duncan Locke ARPS*



*Redshank by Jon Mullin LRPS*



*Hornet by Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS*



*Red Squirrel by Annette Beardsly LRPS*





*Common Earth Balls by Jeremy Mallen-Smith LRPS*



*Common Darter by Jon Mullin LRPS*



*Bracket Fungi by Andrew Chu ARPS*



*Russula species by Jane Rees ARPS*



*Spider by Annette Beardsly LRPS*

**More Members' Images from the  
October 2021 Residential Field Meeting at  
Foxlease, Dorset.**



*Spoonbills by Derek Dewey-Leader LRPS*