

THE IRIS



Magazine of the Nature Group of the RPS

Spring 2011



Mountain Hare by Ron McCombe ARPS

A Date for your Diaries

Chairman's Day

Sunday 6th November, 2011.

10.30 am for 11.00 am start

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

Full programme of nature photography which will include a talk by Spike Walker (awarded the RPS Combined Royal Colleges Medal in 2010). In addition, John Bebbington will present his talk 'In my back yard'. Full details will appear in the next issue of The Iris.

Register your interest in this bi-annual event - contact: John Bebbington FRPS at john.bebbingtonfrps@btinternet.com

* The Old Schoolhouse is the home of Smethwick Photographic Society and is conveniently located close to junction 2 of the M5.

Now Available - Version 3.0 - revised and rebuilt CD ROM

'An Interactive Guide to Obtaining your Nature Associateship'



Over three hundred copies of this interactive CD have been sold since its conception. Now thoroughly revised. The whole interface has been rebuilt to incorporate:

- Covers every aspect that needs to be considered, before preparing your application!
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- The screen resolution size is increased to 1280 x 1024, with automatic monitor adjustment.
- The 'Guide' is best run by copying the file from the CD to your hard drive.

The CD-ROM (PC only) costs £10 incl p&p. Cheques payable to 'RPS Nature Group' should be sent to: Trevor Hyman LRPS, 3 Northcourt Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire. OX14 1QA

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All contributions should be submitted to the Editor. Items covering any aspect of nature photography and/or natural history are welcomed, including reviews on equipment and relevant books.

Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or on CD, or printed using double line spacing on one side of the paper only - please do not send hand written copy.

Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images should be supplied on CD (no DVDs please) as RGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 ppi (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Original transparencies may be submitted, however, the Editor cannot specify how long they may be away from the author.

No payment will be made for material used and whilst every care will be taken, neither the Editor, the Nature Group or the printers can accept liability for any damage that may occur to photographic material submitted.

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:

'The Iris' is forwarded to members using address labels produced by the RPS Membership Dept in Bath. Any member not receiving their copy should contact that department so that their name appears on a label in the future. However the Secretary will be pleased to post single copies to members who have failed to receive them.

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Nature Group Exhibitions

Copies of Nature Group Exhibitions dating back to 2000, are available to book for camera clubs/photographic societies. 2000 to 2007 are available in slide format. Since 2008 a CD of the Exhibition has been produced and is available for purchase. For more information please contact the Exhibition Secretary, details above or go to our website: www.rpsnaturegroup.com

From the chair

2nd February 2011.

Well it's nearly the end of my two year term. I have enjoyed every minute of it. Although I suffered some health problems which slowed me down a bit, I got through with help from my excellent team, and would like to take this opportunity to thank all members who sent their best wishes for a speedy recovery.

It has been a fairly quiet two years during which the group has not suffered from any major problems. Furthermore, the membership has steadily been increasing which is always good news.

As always, we are still looking for members to volunteer their time and local knowledge to lead a field meeting. One doesn't have to be an expert - just have some knowledge of the area you have chosen - there will almost always be another member attending the field meeting who will be able to identify most flora and fauna if you are not able to. Attendances at Field meetings have been diminishing slightly. Why is this? Is it because of conflicting commitments, the venue itself or the fact that as petrol costs and general living costs increase we are all having to tighten our belts? If you have an opinion on this, please feel free to contact the Nature Group Secretary, Margaret Johnson, myself or any member of the committee. We would be only too pleased to have your thoughts on this matter which will come up for discussion again at the next committee meeting in September.

All that remains for me to do now is thank my team once again for their excellence, guidance and help and to wish my successor John Bebbington FRPS two happy years as our new Chairman.



Editorial

Its early February at the time of writing, and here in Norfolk the Arum Lilies which grow at the bottom of my garden are in full leaf, daffodils and tulip leaves are already three inches above the ground; yesterday I heard Greenfinches chirring, a Song Thrush was singing and I received news from Pensthorpe that a Green Sandpiper had arrived and that at the end of January a Mute Swan had laid an egg. We experienced snow and extremely low temperatures in December but we do seem to have escaped much of the very severe weather endured by other parts of the country at various times. The weather in this country however, pales into insignificance when compared to some other parts of the world, notably the floods and winds in Queensland and the enormous snow falls recently in the United States. I'm reliably informed that the Falklands experienced bad storms this spring which caused the loss of nests and young birds, particularly Cormorants and Gentoo Penguins.

I hope that you have entered the Nature Group's own Annual Exhibition - by the time you read this you may already have received your results. Whether you entered or not, I hope you will attend the combined Spring Meeting/AGM/Annual Exhibition Opening on Saturday 30th April. The venue as usual is The Old Schoolhouse, home to Smethwick Photographic Society, close to Junction 2 of the M5, so an easy commute from almost every part of the country (unless you live in East Anglia!) Those of you who have attended the event in previous years will already know that we have a first class speaker in the morning, and conduct the AGM in as short a time as possible following lunch. The opening of the Exhibition and the presentation of awards followed by a showing of the accepted projected images concludes the day. Accepted prints are on display on the walls. I can promise you an excellent day out and an opportunity to meet fellow nature photographers.

Thank you to all the members who contributed articles and images for this issue of The Iris. Without you all where would we be. People regularly give me compliments about The Iris, but my input would be worthless without your articles and pictures. Thank you again.

Nature Group members are a well travelled bunch of photographers and I am always delighted to receive interesting accounts of your photo travel adventures whether near or far. Also, if you have recently acquired some new piece of kit or books that you feel would be of interest to your fellow Nature Group members please write a review. As always, if you have recently been awarded an Associateship or Fellowship in nature, please contact me. We would like to reproduce your panel and an account of how you worked towards it - it is very helpful for others working towards a distinction to see the work of those who have been successful. Successful panels are also reproduced on the Nature Group website.

This issue contains some excellent and interesting articles - accounts from all around the world including Britain, the far north of Europe, Central America and Australia. More articles are required for future issues, so keep them coming.

Elsewhere in this issue you will read about the disappointing response from members regarding Field Meetings - not just volunteering to lead such an event, but also in attending events organised by other members. When I first joined the Nature Group almost twenty years ago we could have boasted 4 pages of meetings, from April right through to October and in most counties around the country. It has been suggested that rising fuel costs are one reason why people are less willing to travel far but please let us have your views on this subject. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank all those members who organise and attend field meetings.

Finally, I am sure a great many of you will be saddened, as I was, to hear that Andy Callow FRPS has passed away. A full Obituary, is given on page 32 of this issue.



The 35th Annual General Meeting, Spring Meeting and Annual Exhibition Opening of the RPS Nature Group

to be held at:-

**Smethwick Photographic Society
The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 2AS (for directions see below)
Saturday 30th April 2011**

Timetable

10.30hrs Assemble for 11.00hrs start

11.00hrs A presentation 'Flowers and insect photography – A Lifetime passion'
by Ann Miles FRPS

12.30hrs Break for lunch. Light lunches will be available* in the clubhouse (ploughman's or jacket potatoes with cheese, beans, chilli or any combination). To facilitate catering arrangements, please advise the Secretary at least 10 days before the AGM if you would like to order a lunch. There is a dining area available if you wish to bring sandwiches.

14.00hrs 33rd Annual General Meeting

- Agenda**
1. Apologies for absence.
 2. Minutes of the 34th AGM 2010, printed in issue 107 of 'The Iris'.
 3. Matters arising
 4. Chairman's Report
 5. Treasurer's Report.
 6. Secretary's Report
 7. Election of Officers and Committee
 8. Any Other Business
 9. Date and Venue of the 36th AGM 2012

14.45hrs Opening of the 2011 Exhibition.

Presentation of the Awards
followed by a showing of the accepted projected images.
Accepted Prints will be on display for the duration of the day.

Directions:-

Leave the M5 at Junction 2 and get into right hand lane. At roundabout (with traffic lights) approximately 200 yards from motorway take A4034 right towards West Bromwich and immediately get into left hand lane of dual carriageway. At first traffic lights (approx 1/3 mile) turn left into Park Street. After a hundred yards or so turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac). The Old Schoolhouse is last but one building on left.

The Lammermuir Hills – my year so far

by **Ron McCombe ARPS**

The Lammermuir Hills are in southeast Scotland situated between Edinburgh and Berwick upon Tweed. It's an area of glorious heather moorland grazed by sheep and cared for expertly by dedicated land managers, and I am delighted to say that this is my home patch. The highest point on the Lammermuirs is Meikle Say Law at 535 metres.

The Lammermuir Hills, usually simply called the Lammermuirs, from the Gaelic (An Lomair Mòr) meaning Lambs Moor.

The Lammermuirs are an area of upland of great beauty and ruggedness and when the heather is in full bloom, it is breathtaking.

The area I concentrate on is the area surrounding the unclassified road, which runs between Duns and Gifford and passes through Longformacus; it crosses the boundary between the Borders Region and East Lothian.

The area is great for wildlife with Roe Deer; Brown Hare, Rabbit, and most people are surprised to hear that there is a colony of Mountain Hares. There is also an abundance of birdlife; mainly

common species with the specialty being the Red Grouse, but with this abundance comes great opportunities for photography.

We had a very bad winter with snow from November through to April this year with deep snow typically four feet, and very low temperatures in the area descending to -17°C. This had a profound effect on the feeding habits of the wildlife and of the Red Grouse in particular. They were driven from the upper moorland where the snow reached depths of ten to twelve feet, down to the lower slopes of the Lammermuirs and even descending into the Tweed Valley below, something which was virtually unheard of before. This however gives great opportunities to get images of the wildlife in the snow. Mountain Hares came down to the lower slopes to find food, and using the car as a hide I was able to get some reasonable images. Quite often I would find Mountain Hare and Roe Deer sharing the same habitat feeding in a clear fell area, which used to be Henlaw Wood. The conditions were difficult to deal with for exposure but then this is part of the challenge of wildlife photography in winter conditions ensuring correct exposure on the images.



Roe Deer



Hare



Red Grouse in display flight



Red Grouse



Meadow Pipit

As April approached and the snow subsided spring finally came in and the local wildlife paired up, - male Red Grouse set up their territories and began calling to attract mates. This is a great time of year to get Red Grouse displaying with their big red eyebrows and distinctive flight patterns.

Other species prevalent at this time are the Brown Hare. There are good numbers around the Lammermuirs, which give good opportunities for photography. I think the Brown Hare is one of my favourite species to photograph. I've read articles in national newspapers saying that these are easy animals to get close to and photograph, but that's not my experience. A great deal of time and patience is required, coupled with a lot of luck to get good images of these beautiful animals.

The year moves on and the nesting season is on us. It's a time of year when you can find specific species of birds in a specific habitat and with good field craft it is possible to get close to them on their favourite perches as they forage for food to feed their young. I have no interest in photographing birds on the nest. I personally believe this should be out of bounds to photographers. The nest is their private space and I feel this should be respected.

I like the commoner species on the Lammermuir Hills, such as the Meadow Pipit, a much-maligned little brown bird that most people would ignore as they pass by. By studying the bird's behaviour it is quite possible to get very close to them and get very



Juvenile Wheatear

good close ups of the birds showing their beautiful plumage. The Meadow Pipit has a friend in the Wheatear. I seemed to see the two species together almost every time I was out looking for the pipits and focused on a group of siblings, which came into view regularly. My favoured area for this species is Crow Clough, which is the boundary between the Borders Region and East Lothian. There seems to be Meadow Pipits there every time I visit and of course the Wheatear family seem to interact with them.

As high summer arrives the heather changes to the beautiful purple colour only heather can produce. The Grouse are now in little groups or “coveys” feeding on the heather flowers. The Meadow Pipits also feed on the heather. The heather makes for a great backdrop to the birds feeding within it. My favourite area for viewing the heather is Horseupcleugh as it slopes away giving excellent opportunity to see the feeding birds.

Other birds in evidence are the Curlew with its beautiful song, the sound of summer I feel as it sings in the late evening sunlight, the Red-legged Partridge scurrying around the field margins looking for food and the Golden Plover with its haunting call.

By the time August is upon us there are lots of birds around, all the young are now fledged and flying around the area, there is plenty to see. I returned to Hardens Hill to a young conifer plantation, I had seen small flocks of birds flying through the young conifers on a number of occasions and stopped to discover their identity.

There were Willow Warblers, and Lesser Redpolls, I was delighted to find the adult Lesser Redpolls were still in their breeding plumage. I counted 5-6 young present and at the time of writing they continue to frequent the plantation. I visit regularly to see them and take more pictures. I think this little bird is probably my favourite of the summer and the picture of it sitting on the rusty barbed wire also my favourite picture of the summer. It won't be long now before they disappear south for the winter, but I am equally sure they will be replaced by other migrating birds of spectacular colouring.

Summer is passing quite quickly now and the autumn will soon be on us and migrating birds will be passing through the area giving great opportunities for photography... and then the winter is back on us again. I for one can't wait.



Curlew in Flight



Golden Plover



Meadow Pipit in heather



Lesser Redpoll

A Bonzer Banksia Farm

by Krystyna Szulecka BA (Hon) ARPS LBIPP

I arrived at Banksia Farm at Mt Barker, in the south of Western Australia, with a three-month-old Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*). I found her still alive in the pouch of her mother who had been killed by a car in the Fitzgerald River National Park. Sadly, such incidents are very frequent on Australian roads. Kevin and Kathy Collins, the owners of Banksia Farm, arranged for a suitable formulation of marsupial milk with a bottle and a teat and accepted the role of surrogate parents. I had come here to see their collection of Banksias (family: *Proteaceae*), the largest in the world.

In 1984 the Collins' left Perth and bought a five-hectare paddock set against the backdrop of the 1.1-billion-year-old Porongurup Range, overlooking the much younger Stirling Range. Over the years, they raised all the known species of Banksias from seeds and cuttings, ranging from prostrate shrubs to the towering 30m-high River Banksia (*Banksia*

seminuda). Of the 78 species of Banksia 63 are endemic to Western Australia. Only one, the Tropical Banksia (*Banksia dentata*), is not endemic to Australia. Its range extends from northern Australia to New Guinea and the Aru Islands in the Maluku province of Indonesia.

After completing their collection of banksias the Collins' turned their attention to the 136 known species of *Dryandra*. Their plants played a part in the controversial change in its taxonomic status. Until 2007 a total of 78 species and 25 subspecies of Banksia had been recognised. On the basis of cladistics and DNA analysis two botanists, Kevin Thiele from the Western Australian Herbarium and Austin Mast from the University of Florida, concluded that *Dryandra* form a subgroup of Banksia rather than a genus of its own. As a consequence, the Western Australian Herbarium changed the names of all species of *Dryandra* to



Banksia epicura bud and flower spike



Scarlet Waratah Albany (*Banksia coccinea*)

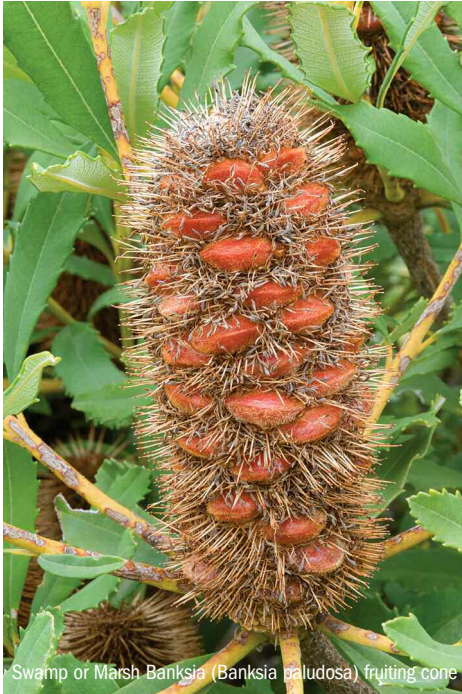
Banksia, merging the two previously separate genera into one.

In 1997 the Collins' opened their garden to the public, followed four years later by the Joseph Banks Fine Art Gallery and Café, constructed from the local Jarrah (*Eucalyptus marginata*) wood. During the season daily tours of the farm include an exhibition of banksia photographs, artifacts and fruiting pods as well as local wild flowers. There is also a speciality plant nursery and seeds from the banksias grown on the farm are distributed throughout the world.

The banksias planted on the farm have created a thriving ecosystem. They are an important food source for nectariferous animals, including birds (eg. honeyeaters), bats, rats, marsupials, stingless bees and a host of invertebrates. The seeds and flowers also provide food for small parrots and cockatoos. Cotton bags are placed over some of the developing seedpods before the harvest to protect them from these unwelcome, destructive, visitors. The attraction of the banksias lie not only in their flowers but also in the diversity of their foliage and the different stages of their developing seed pods



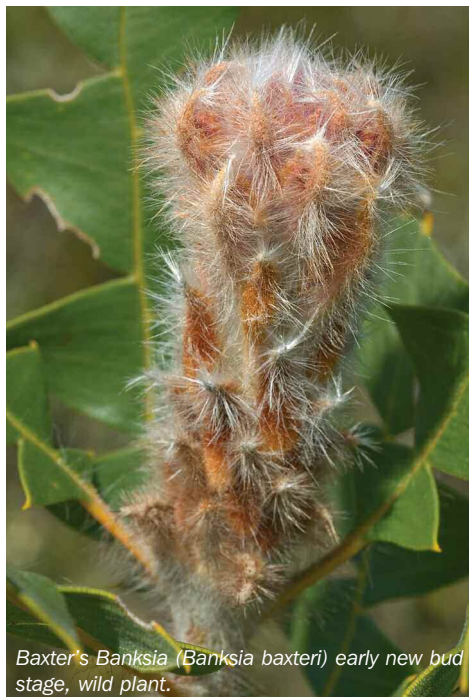
Banksia plagiocarpa flower spike



Swamp or Marsh Banksia (*Banksia paludosa*) fruiting cone



Scarlet Banksia (*Banksia coccinea*) bud



Baxter's Banksia (Banksia baxteri) early new bud stage, wild plant.

as well as the patterns and colours of their wood and bark. Most visitors head for Mt Barker and Banksia Farm in the austral spring and summer but it is in the autumn that one can see those species flowering that are sufficiently hardy to grow in Britain.

Banksias use bushfires to regroup and spread their seeds. About half of the banksia species are killed by fire and therefore rely on seed for their renewal ('seeders'). In seed production it is not always sufficient to simulate such conditions by burning the fruiting pod to force it open for seed extraction. Some species have velvet-like fire protective covers and only release their seeds after repeated exposure to rain and sun. The other banksia species are either protected from fire by their thick bark or sprout from lignotubers ('sprouters').

In 2008 the Collins' with Alex George published *Banksias*, an illustrated volume describing the original 78 species. *Banksia rosserae*, an endangered species with a very restricted distribution range, was first described in 2001 and named in honour of the Australian botanical illustrator, Celia Rosser. Her illustration adorns the



Banksia coccinea flower spike damaged by Red-cap or Western Rosella Parrot



Short-billed black-cockatoo (Calyptorhynchus latirostris) male, makes a light work of shredding fruiting cones of Scarlet Banksia (Banksia coccinea)



Kevin and Kathy Collins with Cutleaf Banksia (*Banksia praemorsa*) yellow form

front cover. The book explains how to find, identify and grow banksias and provides information on pests and diseases, e.g. dieback fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*). It also covers the history of their discovery with portraits of all the principal contributors. Tables list the particular characteristics of individual species for horticultural purposes and name collections from around the world.

Western Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus fuliginosus*) dead mother (road accident) with 3 months old female baby



Burned fruiting cones for seed collection



New Holland Honey-eater (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*) perched on flowering Grevillea 'Poorinda Rondeau' (*G. lavandulacea* x *G. baueri*)

Damselfs at dawn.

by John Bulpitt FRPS

Dragonflies and damselflies are my favourite insects. There is something distinctly primeval about them. Fossil evidence shows that they were around 300 million years ago albeit about 5 times the size of the largest dragonfly living today. However, these beautiful creatures pose a special challenge for photographers. In flight they are technically the most difficult subject that I have tackled. Even at rest they are easily disturbed and the background is often unsuitable for good photography. However, photographing them at dawn gets around some of these problems and close-ups of them covered in dew can be very attractive.

In the UK the first species emerge at the end of April and the late-emerging varieties can still be on the wing at the end of October. However for dawn photography I find the period mid-May to mid-July the best. The weather is all important. Ideally you need a warm day followed by a clear night (so that the temperature drop is significant) and a still morning. I find the Met Office forecast on the

internet, which gives a forecast for each three hour period for the next 24 hours, very reliable, especially if you plug in the appropriate post code.

As for equipment, good waterproofs and a tripod with cable release are a must. I have Canon gear and use a 50D body for this type of work, because of the 1.6 crop factor. Normally I attach a macro lens though occasionally I switch to a 300 IS f4 usually with an extension tube to reduce the minimum focusing distance. Until last year I had a Tamron 90 macro but when this bit the dust I bought a Sigma 180, encouraged by an article in the Spring 2008 *Iris* "Size does matter" by Tony Wharton FRPS. If I want to get in really close, I couple my 1.4 converter to the Sigma by using an extension tube.

When you find a suitable subject at dawn it is easy to garden around the subject to eliminate background distractions. As insects are comatose at this time of the morning it is possible to move them, but



Newly emerged Common Darter



Immature Blue Damselfly



Azure Damselflies



Azure Damselfly

in practice one ends up shaking off a lot of dew. For this reason be careful about gardening and placing the tripod, particularly if you are as clumsy as me.

Even on a very still morning there is some periodic movement in the vegetation which is why you should use a cable release rather than rely on the 2 second timer. Shutter speeds can be very low at dawn. I work on aperture priority at between f8 and f16 depending on how close I want to get to the subject, and prefer to avoid anything higher than ISO 400. This can result in a shutter speed as slow as 0.5 seconds.

You need to work quickly at dawn. Within an hour or so the insects are drying out and the effect is lost. Of course one can get up early every morning but in the interests of marital harmony my excursions are limited to about once a fortnight. But of course there are plenty of other subjects to photograph after sunrise such as newly emerged dragons and damsels, and on my last trip mating Cinnabar moths which I had never seen before.



Immature Azure Damselfly on Water Peppermint



Red-eyed Damselfly

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Wild about Essex

by Charles L Joseph



Essex woodland

As an Essex boy, I couldn't miss watching the BBC's "Wild places of Essex." The programme, presented by award-winning author Robert Macfarlane, featured a yearlong quest to seek out the unexpected and discover the natural history of Essex, revealing that there's far more to the county than meets the eye.

Yet people can be so dismissive at times. For many, Essex conjures up stereotype images of dizzy blondes in white stilettos, estuary English, tacky amusement arcades and boy racers in souped-up Fords. Thanks to this legacy, no other place in Britain has so many jokes about it as does Essex. Yes, part of the county does have an irritant blot on the landscape in the shape of industrial and derelict sites. And few places along the urban sprawl have been spared the grotesque fast foot outlets and other US-style retail parks, but all is not what it seems. The stereotype images do not reflect the county's true diversity, beauty and natural heritage. Sooner or later you will begin to realise that Essex manages to defy this unglamorous side in the name of the untold riches that are to be found within its borders.



Little Grebe



Oystercatchers in flight



Bluebells

One of my passions is photography. It is a creative outlet, which enables me to capture the moods, expressions and colours of our dynamic planet. And although I have marvelled at scenes set against spectacular backdrops in many far-away

places, I never truly appreciated the world on my own doorstep. I therefore decided it was time for me to stop, take a few paces back and ask myself what I should be doing to discover more of the natural places closer to home. Driven by engaging curiosity, I set off on my own adventure around the Essex countryside.

I recall my very first outing to ancient woodland near my home. The warm glow of the early spring sunshine, the magnificent oak trees, the clear sweet scent and the technicolour explosion of iconic bluebells - their wonderful hues changing with each dappled ray of light penetrating the canopy above - were a pleasure to behold. I now like to return there each year and every visit begins with a sense of euphoria. Besides from being very photogenic, for me, the shimmering blue haze that comes alive in a burst of beauty seems to accompany each movement of Vivaldi's concerto for Oboe in A minor.

Wild animals are everywhere too, but in the mad rush to meet the challenging demands and pressures of life, I failed to recognise the sights and sounds of their presence. I soon discovered that it wasn't necessary to be as mad as a March hare to stand in the middle of grassland and witness the celebrated spectacle of a female brown hare giving her male suitor a piece of her mind with a pretty impressive left hook to the jaw. Even Essex girls are relatively docile by comparison.



Hares



Seeing a Kestrel hunting in the wild and watching Knots perform their undulating flight were memorable experiences too. Even my very first close encounter with a Red Fox was another pleasure to behold. His russet coloured coat shone beautifully under the wintry morning sun. Luckily for me, he didn't seem too disturbed by my presence and allowed me to watch him for a while before he continued on his way. Perhaps he had a cunning plan. I shall name him Baldrick.

Even my own corner of Essex, a modest garden by any standard, now provides a fascinating nature show as different species of birds and a grey squirrel regularly drop in for breakfast, lunch and dinner. If the programme reaffirmed one thing for me, it is that that you don't have to travel very far to enjoy the natural world.

In the grand scheme of things, the natural history of Essex goes back many millennia. As the ice receded some 14,000 years ago, the rising waters created the rich coastline and diverse landscapes that make Essex what it is today. Even one of the most distinguished British naturalists of his time was an Essex boy. John Ray, known as the father of British natural history, was the first natural historian to make a systematic classification of British plants.

Nature permeates the universe. And in this age of discontentment, economic uncertainty and delusive expectations, the natural world enlightens, inspires, enriches and uplifts the spirit. To paraphrase John Ray, there's nothing more delightful than discovering and contemplating the beautiful works of nature. And if truth be told, despite the pejorative images that epitomise all that is brash and distasteful, Essex is really a pretty good place to discover, experience, enjoy and contemplate the natural world in all its glory.





The Martens and Me

by Russell Turner LRPS

In 2008 I acquired a wife. The deal also included joint ownership of a cat and a rustic cottage on the Black Isle, a rural peninsula just north of Inverness. Life was good.

In 2009, a few days after we began our honeymoon in Namibia, an email from my cat-sitting sister informed me that she'd spotted a Pine Marten exploring our apple tree, and attached to prove it were some grainy snaps. We'd seen elephants, giraffes, big cats and other exotic animals in the wild (some of which would later help me gain my LRPS) and superb bush and desert scenery, but I was jealous. One of the UK's rarest animals had sauntered through our garden and I'd missed it.

Back home, on a dull May day after three weeks of African sun, I quizzed my neighbours and learned that they often glimpsed Martens. "Try Nutella," I was told. "They can't get enough of it."

That afternoon I pulled the five-bar gate (I told you it was rural) into a position where it could be seen from the living room window, smeared the top bar liberally with Nutella, and kept watch. I expected nothing, but as dusk fell a stealthy form climbed up the gate and began to feast. My Pentax was soon in action, but even with the ISO pushed to its 3200 maximum all I gathered were a few brown blurs.

Next evening I was more methodical. The tripod was placed in the window and the Pentax focussed on the gate. Would I be lucky two nights running? Yes! The images were grainy but I was delighted – I had halfway decent pictures of an animal that few people have seen, captured in my own garden. He was a male, one of this year's newborns, a local expert told me.

During the next few months I continued to keep watch. As the days grew longer the ISO became smaller and I was able to lure him into our lilac tree to take portraits with no man-made presence in them. The resultant snaps would never appear on the cover of National Geographic but I was proud.



At last, the day came when good light, an early visit and front cover poses coincided, so it was a pity that I was away photographing puffins in Shetland. The beneficiary was the latest cat-sitter, who'd seen my Martens on Flickr and become a friend. His photos were the best of the year. Despite that, we remained friends.

Two weeks later, almost as if our visitor knew that August had begun, we stopped seeing him. The days were getting shorter. I continued to feed him Nutella, plus a more healthy side dish of nuts, raisins and a daily egg, plus the occasional mouse left behind by our cat; most nights the food disappeared. My reward came one April evening when the first sighting of 2010 was made.

But it wasn't last year's visitor – this was another youngster. And after a few weeks of observation I realised we had two visitors (the shape of their bib identifies them) – one male and one female, neither of them last year's diner. There may have been a third but I'm not certain.

Much snapping was carried out during the summer. Visitors were also seen early in the morning and, on one startling occasion, at three in the afternoon. My photos were still not of National Geographic standard (shooting through window glass doesn't help) but they improved and one was a runner-up in a Scottish Natural Heritage competition.

Now the days are short but I still sometimes see a shadowy figure tucking into free food and find paw prints in the snow. Maybe this year I'll take the award-winning photos that will become the centrepiece of an ARPS submission.

One thing's for certain – the visitors have ruined me as a serious wildlife photographer. Snapping Pine Martens from the warmth and comfort of your own home makes it even more difficult to spend time in a cold, damp draughty hide with no guarantee there will be anything to see.

But I'll persevere. The Black Isle also has, amongst others, Badgers, Foxes, Stoats and Red Squirrels, and there's rumours of wildcats not far away. That would definitely be worth a night in a wet hide...

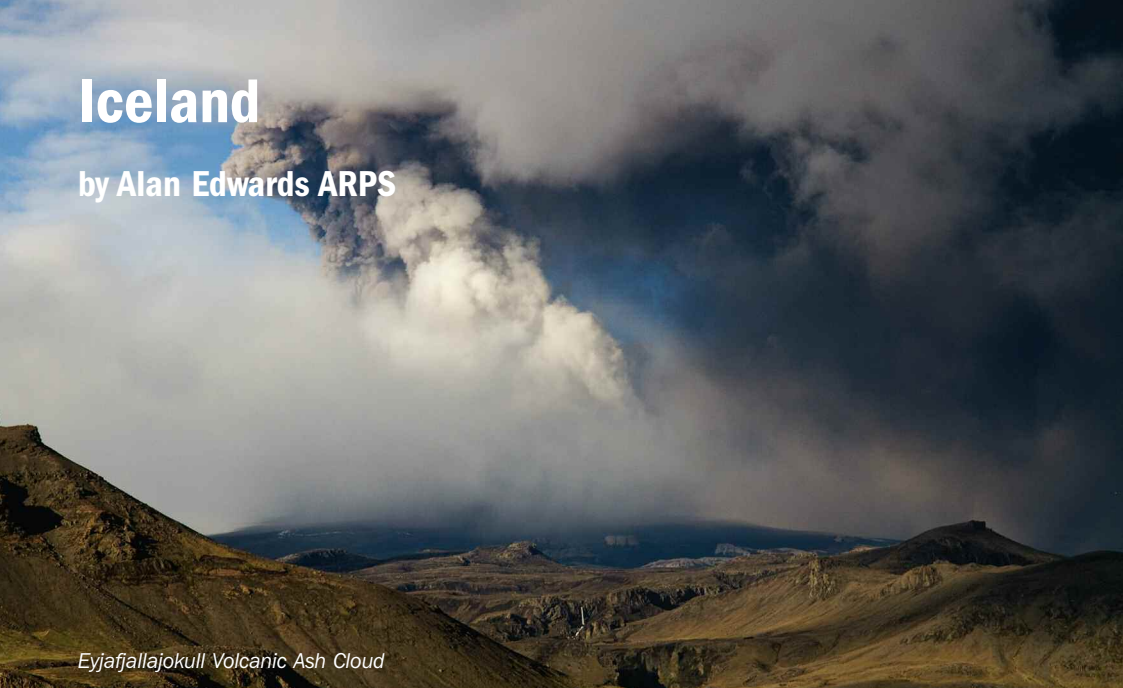
www.russellturner.org

www.rpsnaturegroup.com



Iceland

by Alan Edwards ARPS



Eyjafjallajökull Volcanic Ash Cloud



Common Seal pup



Oystercatcher

Many years ago at my local camera club, a visiting lecturer brought along a slideshow on Iceland. It was probably one of the best travel slideshows that I have seen, and created a lifelong desire to visit there myself. Nearly 40 years later, I got my chance and off I went.

A short while before I was due to travel, the volcano at Eyjafjallajökul erupted, causing immense problems for air travel and leaving my travel plans in doubt until the last minute. However, departure day duly arrived bringing a wind direction change, and after a four hour delay I was on my way.

Flying from Manchester to Keflavik I had a good view of the eruption from the aircraft on the way. On arrival at Keflavik I met up with the rest of the party for the tour. We travelled by minibus in an anticlockwise direction spending our first night at Geysir, staying just across the road from the thermal activity and allowing me to get out for some early morning shots before breakfast. All too soon we were off on the road and later that day, experienced our first sighting at ground level of the volcanic ash cloud being blown across the road and out to sea. After stopping to photograph the scene, we donned our facemasks and drove through the ash cloud which turned day into night. At the end of the tour we returned to find the area covered in volcanic ash, but with new vegetation pushing its way through the black ash.

After a night's rest we carried on with our tour, visiting an ash covered glacier at Myrdals Jokull, before moving well away from the volcanic activity.

The tour was primarily a landscape photography tour although I did manage some nature work when possible. Due to weight restrictions and the nature of the tour, my longest focal length was just 200mm, which equates to 320mm when the multiplying factor is taken into account. This proved to be a big mistake as the wildlife was skittish, rarely allowing me to get close enough. A 100-400mm lens would have been a far better choice.

Occasionally though, luck was on my side. At one point I came across a solitary seal pup on the shoreline. Was it abandoned? Would its mother return? I took a few shots and retreated, leaving it to its fate. Some way further down the coast we came across a more harrowing encounter involving seals. While photographing at a harbour we discovered a skip filled with fresh seal carcasses. We got the impression that the locals didn't like the attention being shown to the dead seals, as a few vehicles suddenly started patrolling the area, but didn't intervene.

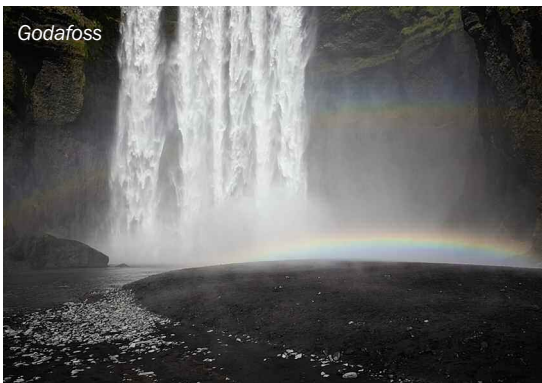
Hverarönd quickly became a favourite location for me, with its steam vents, mud pools and beautiful colours and snow-capped extinct volcanoes for a background. Walking the ridge of Krafla extinct volcano was a fascinating experience which allowed me to take some wide angle shots of the ice covered crater below. Not far away is Hverfel which is completely different, being made up of loose volcanic rubble called tephra, and accessed by a steep path leading up to the rim where panoramic views of Myvatn area can be seen. The dry interior has a dome in the centre.

Jokulsarlon was another impressive location with its lagoon full of ice which had broken away from the glacier and was trapped until it melted sufficiently to enable the river to transport it out to sea. The prevailing wind blew the icebergs onto the beach where they were pounded to destruction by the rough sea.

For me, Iceland has it all. Icebergs, rainbows, waterfalls, geysers, mud pools, volcanoes, wildlife, ruined buildings, the list goes on. One question remains – why did I leave it so long before visiting?



Eyjafjallajökull Volcano



Godafoss



Icebergs at Jokulsarlon



Steam vent at Hverarönd

Scenes from a Courtship

by Dr Geoffrey Einon LRPS

For any visit to Trinidad, the diminutive Tufted Coquette is THE trophy hummingbird to spot. The female - about 2.5 inches overall - has a distinctive appearance with her salmon coloured throat, white band around the rump and subtle green and brown plumage. In contrast, the male is a gaudy fellow - with a tuft of red feathers on his head, an iridescent green throat and the unmistakable 'scarf' of long orangy feathers streaming from his neck.

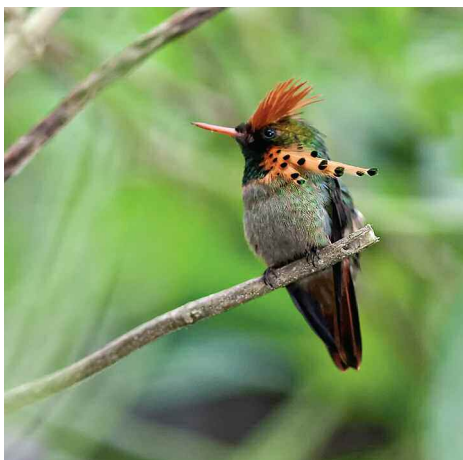
The hummingbirds that are easy to spot are those that visit sugar-water feeders to supplement their diets of nectar and small insects. Unfortunately Tufted Coquettes do not visit feeders, but like other hummingbirds, have to feed every 10 minutes or so to fuel the extremely high rate of wing beating that allows them to hover and fly backwards as well as forwards.

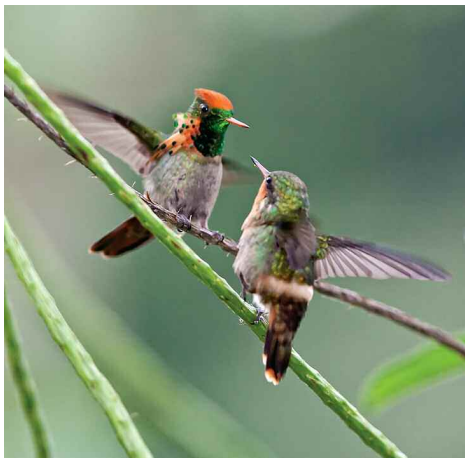
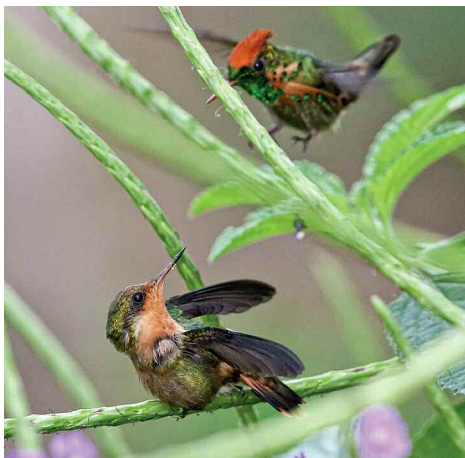
Tufted Coquettes are usually found in Trinidad's northern hills. There, deep in the rainforest, the Asa Wright Nature Centre gives the best chances to spot individuals feeding on nectar from flowers on the Verbena bushes that surround the Lodge's viewing terrace. At least, that was true last year - but with a lack of rainfall this year, Coquettes were very low in numbers.

Towards the end of a stay with only little success in photographing the occasional individual Coquettes, anxious interrogation of the centre's bird guides identified a site a few miles away where coquettes had been seen regularly. Like other hummingbirds, coquettes set up foraging routes that return them to individual bushes about every hour - a strategy that allows flowers to regenerate their nectar stores. So, once you have spotted a Coquette, with patience you are very likely to see it again.

The first session at the new site produced a few sightings of individual male and female coquettes. Fortuitously, on the second afternoon, a female who was busily feeding within a Verbena bush was joined by a male who immediately began vigorously to court her.

The male's courtship display uses his ability to hover and also to fly backwards as well as forwards. As he circles around the female, he zooms in towards and away from her with his feet extended - all the time twittering noisily. Staying on her perch, the female follows the male around and around with her gaze by twisting her body - while also twittering. Several times, she extended her body towards the male and also jumped up from her perch - sometimes returning





to the perch and on others shifting her location within the bush - quickly followed by the male.

As the courtship proceeded she signalled her 'engagement' with submissive displays - these were unusual and distinctive body postures in which she appeared to 'flop' backwards on her perch. The entire courtship sequence lasted about four minutes - at the end of which the normally solitary individuals flew off together as a 'happy couple' into the proverbial sunset.

Dramatis personae: the male and female Tufted Coquettes (*Lorphonis ornatus*). Images selected from three sequences of images, in shot order, from successive locations within the same *Verbena* bush.



The Wonder of Waxcaps

by Tony Bond FRPS

Waxcaps, or to give them their proper name Hygrocybes, are fungi of unimproved grassland. Their common name recognises that most have waxy to greasy caps. In this context unimproved means land which has never been ploughed, drained or fertilised. Removal of the grass by mowing or grazing minimises soil fertility to the advantage of waxcaps. Actual habitats which fit these requirements are as varied as upland sheep pasture and ancient churchyards. All the illustrations accompanying this article were taken in an area of rough grazing and moorland near Littleborough. For those of you who live south of the Mersey, this lies in the bandit country close to the Yorkshire border. It is a rather grim and forbidding area and few casual visitors would guess that it is a mycological hot spot supporting several Red Data List species.

The principal attraction of waxcaps for the photographer is that many are very brightly coloured. This, together with their small size, gives them a jewel-like quality. Photography can present slightly different problems to the more familiar woodland species. If the sun is shining contrast is very high in the open situations where they grow. In these situations I use a Lastolite diffuser to cast a light shadow over the subject as a reflector is usually insufficient to tame the contrast. A bigger problem is gardening. Many waxcaps only just poke through the top of the grass. Some gardening is essential but there is a temptation to do too much. The end result should look natural, even if it is not. It is always better to do too little rather than too much. To help me in this delicate task I use a small pair of snips – a free gift with a gardening order. If all else fails there is probably a more promised specimen not far away.

There are over thirty Hygrocybes on the British list and while some are readily identified using one of the popular field guides, others are not. Identification is best done in the field as some characteristics can change rapidly on collection. I have a quick key which has proved valuable and leads to an identification in which I feel confident.

Properties to note are size, colour of the cap and gills, surface of the cap and stipe (the kiss test!), gill attachment, spacing of gills and smell. The more adventurous can also taste the flesh!

If you are fortunate enough to find a good area for waxcaps it is highly likely that there will also be other grassland fungi. On my patch I can normally find Beige Coral *Clavulinopsis umbrinella*, a Red Data List species, and Scarlet Caterpillarclub *Cordyceps militaris*. The latter has a particularly unpleasant lifestyle as it fruits on the larvae and pupae of butterflies and moths buried in the soil, resulting in the internals of the unfortunate insect being replaced by the mycelium.

Unimproved grassland is a distinctive habitat which supports a range of plants and insects as well as fungi. It has been whittled away for many years and if we are serious about biodiversity it is essential that we know where the best grasslands are located. This is where the Hygrocybes and their allies are invaluable as indicators. There is a project in North Wales to do this and I am sure that there are similar ventures elsewhere.

So there we have something of the wonder of waxcaps – not just pretty faces to delight the photographer but tools in the fight to preserve the best of our countryside.

Captions

- 1 Butter waxcap, *Hygrocybe ceracea*
- 2 Pink waxcap, *Hygrocybe calyptroides*
- 3 Scarlet waxcap, *Hygrocybe coccinea*
- 4 Meadow waxcap, *H. pratensis*
- 5 Snowy waxcap, *H. virginea*
- 6 Heath waxcap, *H. laeta*
- 7 Beige coral, *Clavulinopsis militaris*
- 8 Waxcap habitat near Littleborough



Field Meeting Reports

**Beacon Hill Woodlands, Charnwood Forest.
Wednesday 6th October 2010
Leader: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS**

What a difference a week can make! On the 1st of October my wife, Barbara, and I made a recce of the woodlands and other than a few rather soggy Fly Agarics well past their sell by date there was little to interest anyone. A number of members rang up over the weekend and other than telling them the situation and leaving the decision to them, there was little that I could do.

However on the day itself 15 optimistic souls gathered in the car park and amongst them I was very pleased to see my very good chum John Jones ARPS - his presence enabled us to form two parties, one travelling clockwise the other anti-clockwise led by John. My party were soon into some quite promising groups of fungi including The Blusher (*Amanita rubescens*), Razor-strop Fungus or Birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*) and a most attractively situated group of Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*). These together with small groups of unidentifiable toadstools, even to Genera level, occupied us until lunch called.

The other group arrived to say that they had found lots to do, consequently we were able to change direction after lunch if we so wished. From a photographic point of view an attractively placed specimen will tend to win over a very small fungal "little brown job" consequently some quite beautiful examples of Turkey-tails (*Trametes versicolor*) occupied many of us in the afternoon. It took more time to arrange tripods and to bend yourself into impossible shapes than to take the pictures! The Genus *Mycena*, is fraught with identification problems and apart from the Common Bonnet (*Mycena galericulata*), the Clustered Bonnet (*M. inclinata*) and perhaps *M. galopus*, which oozes white juice when cut and *M. haematopus*, which oozes red juice when cut, the remainder are best left to the experts.

So against all the odds it worked out quite well; welcome to the mysterious world of Fungi!



Sulphur Tuft by Robert Hawkesworth FRPS



Sulphur Tuft by Tony Bond FRPS

Field Meeting Reports

Fungi & Outer Space at Jodrell Bank Arboretum, 16th October, 2010.

Leader: Tony Bond FRPS

The car park at Jodrell Bank was a very busy place as we assembled for our field meeting in the shadow of the giant radio telescope. The Manchester Field Club were holding a fungal foray and the local group of the MG Owners Club had brought their splendid cars and a cake to celebrate their 80th birthday.

Sir Bernard Lovell has a worldwide reputation as a pioneer of radio astronomy. Less well known is his love of trees. When the observatory was set up in the 1960's he saw an opportunity to establish an arboretum in a corner where no development was planned. He also planted another arboretum, the Quinta, on land he bought in the nearby village of Swettenham.

We set off for the far side of the arboretum to put as much distance between ourselves and the fungus hunters before everything disappeared into baskets. My reconnaissance had shown that an area of largely birch woodland was the best anyway. As always, Fly Agaric proved irresistible. Every pile of logs harboured Sulphur Tuft. One pile offered Glistening Ink Cap also – a two for the price of one offer. A very attractive group of fresh Stump Puffball, (*Lycoperdon pyriforme*), was an excellent find. By lunchtime we were well dispersed and there was no need for the dreaded queueing. The finds after lunch included Pleated Inkcap, (*Coprinus plicatilis*), Razor Strop fungus on an ivy-covered birch, Common Puffball and a very splendid Turkeytail (*Trametes versicolor*) set in moss.

We did not find any rarities but we did have opportunities to photograph some very photogenic fungi in pictorial settings. The Manchester Field Club also had an excellent day, although we would have liked to have photographed some of the fungi which ended up in their baskets. Jodrell Bank proved to be an excellent venue for a field meeting and we had enjoyed superb weather too. So hats off to Sir Bernard for making it possible.

Editor's comment:

And hat's off to Tony Bond for organising the event.

Pennington Flash Country Park, Lancashire 23rd January, 2011

Leader: Tony Bond FRPS

I am going to claim two firsts for this field meeting – earliest in the year and first to be held on a former landfill site. The reason for holding a fungal foray in midwinter was to photograph the most attractive Velvet Shank, *Flammulina velutipes*, which fruits at this time of year. The site is unusual in being completely man made. The flash, as we call a large expanse of water in Lancashire, began to form as a result of mining subsidence about 100 years ago and is now large enough to support two sailing clubs. It has long been known as a prime birdwatching site. The area we forayed was, until 1984, the local landfill site before the whole area was designated a country park.

Just out of the car park there were last year's Earth Stars, *Geastrum triplex*, under a small group of trees. A little further along we saw a flash of orangy yellow in a fenced off area, but decided to leave it until our return. A little further still along the path there were lots of fruit bodies of our target species, unfortunately turning brown as a result of some warmer weather experienced two weeks earlier. However, continuing along the path we came across two excellent groups, one at the base of a mossy stump and one on a moss-covered cut end. We were too early for Scarlet Elf Cup, which was showing but small. We also came across lots of Jelly Ear on decaying Elder and more examples of Velvet Shank but unfortunately past their best.

And so, back to our first group of Velvet Shank. We were well rewarded for the effort involved in getting ourselves, Lowepro bags and tripods over the fence because it proved to be a magnificent specimen in prime condition. Oh for a light dusting of snow!

Field Meetings - 2011

Please check the website for Field Meetings which may have been arranged after this issue had gone to press.

Date & Time: Sunday May 22nd 2011 also
Sunday May 29th 2011

Location: Kenwood House Grounds
Hampstead Heath

Meeting Place: West Heath Lodge car park
Leader: Diane Elena Antonescu

Main subjects of interest: Kenwood House grounds, lake and woodlands, ancient trees, plants, birds including Green Woodpeckers and butterflies.

Other Information: Bring stout shoes, waterproofs, wellingtons and a packed lunch. Access for disabled members

Contact: Diana Elena Antonescu
Tel. 07910 170308
E-mail: imagesdiana@gmail.com

Date & Time: Sunday July 10th

Location: Acorn Farm

Meeting Place: The Lodge, 43 Main Street, Sutton on Trent, Newark, Notts. NG23 6PF
Sutton on Trent is one mile from the A1 between Newark and Retford.

Leader: Andrew Parsons ARPS

Main subjects of interest: Summer flowers, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

Other Information: Bring strong footwear, waterproofs and a packed lunch.

For more details: www.acornfarmvisits.co.uk

Contact: Andrew Parsons
Tel: 01636 821768 or
e-mail: andrewparsonsarps@aol.com

IMPORTANT

It is most important that you contact the leader to advise that you will be attending the meeting.

It is equally important to notify the leader if you later find that you are unable to attend.

Date & Time: Thursday 14th July 2011,
10 am for 10-15 am start.

Location: Yorkshire Dales National Park -
Ingleborough NNR

Meeting place: Ingleborough NNR Colt Park Barn - private access. Directions provided after booking. 4 miles north of Horton in Ribblesdale, 1 mile south of Ribbleshead viaduct, off B6479.
Grid ref. SD772778

Leaders: Len Shepherd and a NNR warden

Cost: Free

Main subjects of interest: Limestone meadow, heather and peat flowers, insects, landscapes.

Additional information: Mountainous terrain with possibly 800 feet in gradual climbing.

Morning and afternoon field trips - based on Colt Park Barn facilities.

Free 10minute comfort break parking at YDNP car park in Horton-in-Ribblesdale.

Tea van at Ribbleshead viaduct often opens at 7-30 am for those wanting a full day out.

Other requirements: Walking boots, waterproofs, packed lunch, landscape and close up lenses, tripod for ground level work.

Pre-booking required - Limited to 15 participants.

Contact: Leonard Shepherd
Tel: 01969 622043
e-mail: shepherdlen@btinternet.com

Editor's note:

It is not too late to organise a Field Meeting. We understand that in November and December many members may feel unable to commit themselves to a date 6 months or more away which may later conflict with other plans (vacations/etc). However, information can be posted at quite short notice to the Events page of the Nature Group website. Members can email iris_editor@btinternet.com to have their field meeting added to the list.

10 Top Tips for the Nature Photographer

by Mark Monckton ARPS

Part 1: Avoiding dust on your sensor

If you do a lot of macro photography you might find that you sometimes get dark specks on your images. This is usually caused by dust on your sensor. You can remove these dust spots using Photoshop, but this can take time. The best solution to this problem is to avoid dust in the first place.

- Always remember to turn your camera off before changing lenses. When the camera is on the sensor will be charged with static which means it will attract even more dust.
- Always change lenses with the camera body facing downwards, and swap the lenses quickly to avoid dust.
- Avoiding frequent lens changes will reduce the chances of dust getting into your camera.
- Avoid using a large blower bulb to clean the sensor. I have found that using one of these can blow more dust onto the sensor than it removes. Also by using a blower bulb you risk blowing dust into parts of your camera from where it is impossible to remove.
- Never use compressed air/gas to clean the sensor. Compressed air will blow small droplets of moisture onto your sensor. Also the rapid cooling of the gas could damage delicate parts in your camera.
- Always use a specialist sensor cleaning brush to clean the sensor, and not a regular blower brush. The bristles of a regular blower brush will contain dust which could be transferred onto the sensor, and could scratch its delicate sensor.
- Stick a piece of double sided adhesive tape to the inside your lens caps. Any dust in the lens cap will safely get stuck to the sticky tape which will prevent it from getting transferred into your camera.
- Keep your lenses clean. Clean your lens from dust and dirt after every trip in the field. Any dirt/dust could get transferred from the lens body into your camera. Use lens cleaning solution with a lint free cloth to remove dust and dirt before storing your lens.
- Store your lenses in re-sealable bags to keep dust away. I use re-sealable food freezer bags available from most supermarkets. Keep lenses in the bags all the time, even in your camera bag. Periodically replace with a new clean bag.
- Don't change lenses in dusty, windy rainy conditions. I know it's obvious, but try to remember this one. If you absolutely have to change lenses do so inside a large clear bag.

If you do notice dust on your sensor and are not confident in cleaning it yourself, you should get it cleaned by an authorised repair centre.

I hope these tips will help you in your photography. Look out for the next installment of '10 Top Tips for the Nature Photographer' in the next issue of The Iris.

Mark Monckton ARPS
www.markmonckton.co.uk

Regions

Shown Below are Nature Group members per RPS region as at 31.12.2010
together with regional codes and other statistics

CE - Central	62	Distinctions	
EA - East Anglia	61	Honorary FRPS	5
EM - East Midlands	50	FRPS	90
IRL - Ireland	5	ARPS	226
LN - London	20	LRPS	166
NO - Northern	16	Non-Distinction Holders	182
NW - North Western	54		
SC - Scotland	31	Total	669
SE - South Eastern	78		
SW - South Western	21		
SO - Southern	59		
TH - Thames Valley	59		
WE - Western	54		
WN - North Wales	10		
WS - South Wales	14		
YO - Yorkshire	31		
Total UK	625		
Overseas	44		
Total Membership	669		

These statistics are prepared from data supplied by the RPS Membership Department
11th January 2011

Map courtesy of the RPS Journal
January/February 2001 revised 2006

RPS Nature Group

Residential Weekend

The Kingcombe Centre, Dorset.

Friday 27th – Monday 30th May 2011

Cost £225 incl VAT

- Reservations:** To reserve your place please send a deposit (cheque or postal order made payable to the Kingcombe Trust) of £80 per person, together with the completed booking form as soon as possible. Please note, the deposit is non-refundable.
- Balance:** The balance of £145 per person should be paid by 2nd April 2011. Cheques/postal orders made payable to the Kingcombe Trust.
- Payments:** All payments should be sent to the coordinator, James Foad (see below). You are advised to take out cancellation insurance for the weekend as the Kingcombe Centre cannot refund in case of your cancelling your booking.
- Group size:** There are other leisure learning courses in the Centre's programme over the weekend and our group is limited to 16 people. It will be necessary to use members' own vehicles for transport as the Centre does not currently have a minibus.
- Accommodation:** Will be in 'Beech Cottage' and 'The Cowshed'. In the event of other courses being fully booked, any overflow will be as B&B in Higher Kingcombe Lodge, with evening meals and packed lunches supplied by the Centre.
- Special requests:** If you have any special dietary or medical requirements please advise at the time of booking (attach a note giving details). This will be treated in confidence.
- Coordinator:** James Foad, 9 Granville Farm Mews, Thanet Road, RAMSGATE, Kent. CT11 8EU
email: james_foad@hotmail.com
- Brief outline:** James will give a short presentation on the Friday evening looking at local sites of interest.
Weather permitting, we will visit sites which are rich in spring flowers and insects on Saturday and Sunday as well as Monday morning.
There will be time for group members to show prints, slides or digital images on Saturday and Sunday evenings.

Full details of the weekend will be sent out around one month before the event.

Obituary

Andy Callow FRPS

Andy (N A) Callow was an outstanding nature and travel photographer, who inspired many others for over 40 years. Born in Surrey in 1932 he spent all of his life, apart from National Service, living in Surrey and Sussex. However in the last 23 years he had a second home with me, in the Chew Valley near Bath, and he wanted to stay in this beautiful part of the country when he died..

During the war Andy's parents lived in Brighton, where his father was stationed, and Andy attended Xaverian College and later Brighton Technical College where he gained a degree in geography and mathematics when he was only 19. Andy was then required to complete his National Service and spent, as he put it, 18 months, "occupying Austria". Whilst there he developed a love of mountain walking, which lasted throughout the rest of his life.

Next came the Civil Service, and Andy worked in the world - wide map library at Tolworth until he retired. In his earlier years Andy regularly watched London club football, taking photographs from the sidelines, and he attended the 1966 World Cup final. Until he was in his forties he played both cricket and football, the latter for the Tolworth Dynamos.

Photography was Andy's passion in life. He bought his first single lens reflex Pentax camera in 1959. This SLR allowed him to indulge in close-up work on natural history subjects. He evolved a system of lenses, extension tubes and flash guns, which enabled him to take up to five times life size pictures of spiders, flies and other invertebrates. He led many workshops on close-up techniques, willingly sharing his knowledge with others.

John Bebbington remembers first meeting Andy in 1965, while studying butterflies and moths as an independent student at Slapton Ley Field Centre in Devon. Wandering through a field dominated by Ragwort, he met Andy, wielding camera and flashgun, stalking a Small Copper butterfly. Later in the week Andy gave a slideshow to a Wild Flower study group at the Centre, which completely "knocked me over" to quote John. A kind gift of some of Andy's reject slides was the trigger for John

to take up insect photography (having been interested in insects from a very early age) and for 45 years he has worked at emulating the quality of close-up shots for which Andy is renowned.

Andy's other speciality was travel photography; the stunning images of mountains, flowers and people from his sixteen trips to the Himalayas, from K2 in Kashmir in the West to Kangchenjunga in Nepal in the East, formed the basis of a very popular talk to clubs and societies.

Andy was a long time member of the Royal Photographic Society, becoming the chairman of both the Colour and the Nature Group, the latter in 1978. He both entered and judged national & international competitions; before he died I catalogued the 89 awards he had retained from many more gained between 1960 and 2008. I was privileged to attend the RPS awards ceremony in 2004 at the Royal Institution when Andy was awarded life membership and a Fenton medal for services to photography. I will never forget seeing some of his best images projected on their giant screen and hearing the citation which accompanied the presentation.

Andy was finally persuaded to apply for an RPS distinction by Roger Reynolds FRPS in 2005. He was awarded Associateships in Visual Arts and Natural History followed by his Fellowship for a panel of close-up invertebrate photographs in 2006 which are reproduced in the RPS Portfolio 1. Andy then joined and remained on the nature distinctions panel until he became too ill to attend.

In order to help identify the subjects of his pictures Andy joined a number of specialist natural history societies, in particular those devoted to the study of invertebrates. He was an active member of, amongst others, the British Entomological and Natural History Society, the British Arachnological Society and the Somerset Invertebrate Group. Andy had a talent for quietly sharing his fascination with invertebrates with anyone he met. Tony Wharton recalls how, while they were together in Guernsey as fellow judges of the Spectrum International

Exhibition, Andy beguiled those present at a drinks reception to hunt for spiders in the old farmhouse where it was held. "The farmhouse was a veritable arachnoidal seventh heaven and drinks took a very poor second place that evening!"

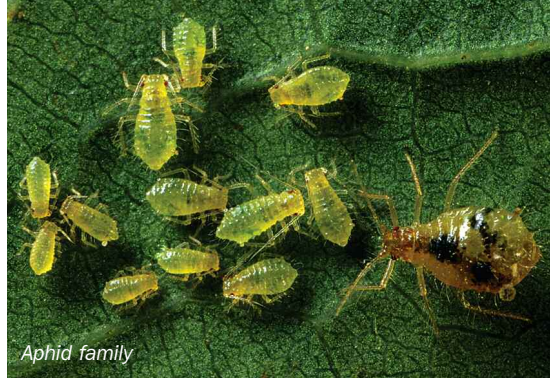
Many of Andy's invertebrate pictures were published, and I was delighted to see several of them in "Bugs Britannica", published in 2010.

Andy had a life-long passion for nature conservation, joining Kent, Sussex and Surrey wildlife trusts soon after they started. When he retired he joined me as volunteer reserve manager for the Somerset Wildlife Trust's Longwood nature reserve on Mendip and he spent many happy hours working on the part of the reserve known as the Orchid slope.

Andy was 55 when I first met him on a walking weekend; together we visited 23 countries and walked thousands of miles. He was still walking the Monarch's Way with me in February last year, albeit more slowly because of his illness. We also shared a love of classical music and of both eating and growing food; my apple trees flourished with his expert pruning. He enjoyed visiting art galleries and looked forward to cinema visits in London.

Andy was a quiet, kind man, always happy to share his knowledge of photography and natural history with others. His quick sense of humour never left him and he was stoical and accepting of his illness, completing crosswords and reading classics to keep his mind active until just before he died of cancer in December 2010.

Chris Billingham (partner)



Aphid family



*Egg and 1st Instar
of Shield Bug*



Aphid on Rose thorn



Centipede

Additional Images
by Ron McCombe ARPS
Article on page 5



Above: Lesser Redpoll



Left: Meadow Pipit .



Below: Willow Warbler.