



THE IRIS

MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS

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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 may be sent by email or on disc as .txt or .doc files, or printed using double line spacing on one side of the paper only.

Photographic images may be supplied as digital files on CD providing that they are at least 2555 x 1830 pixels in size and accompanied by a printed copy 6" x 4" or larger for colour matching purposes. Original transparencies and A4 glossy prints are also acceptable.

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by Dawn Osborn ARPS

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- IBC Detail from owl butterfly wing (*Caligo* sp).
Seed heads of Amazon Lily (*Eucharis* sp).
by Trevor Davenport
- BC Macro *lepiota procera* by Kay Reeve FRPS

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Exhibition/Archive Slides

To book the current or next Travelling Exhibition, contact:
Peter Jones ARPS, details above.

To book previous years Exhibition Slides contact:

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Field Meeting Reports

Please send these directly to the Editor (address above) by post or email.

Editorial

My - how time flies! Almost mid March already. Which brings me to my first apology - this issue is a little later than I would have liked - unfortunately I am only human and prone to the same bugs and viruses as the rest of you.

My second apology is to Barry Mead FRPS - I incorrectly accredited Barry's lovely Impala shot to John Bulpitt in the last issue - Sorry Barry.

The weather during the last week or three has been pretty awful and many parts of the country have seen heavy falls of snow. Hopefully, by the time you receive this issue all of that will be well behind us and we can all look forward to venturing out into the countryside with some fine weather and some photogenic subjects.

In this issue you will find full details of both the Spring Meeting/Exhibition Opening and the Nature Group Conference; details of Field Meetings which have been arranged (you will notice that I have repeated the form for leaders at the back - this is in the hope that we may get a few more of you interested in hosting a meeting in the summer or autumn.) There are articles concerning photography near to home and in destinations as far away as Amazon and Sri Lanka. Plus, the rare opportunity to see a selection of images from a recent successful Fellowship Panel by Kay Reeve who has kindly allowed us to reproduce her work.

There are also a couple of sad notes too - the Nature Group has lost two members - Derry Wilman ARPS whose article on Polar Bears appeared in the last issue, and Roger Pinn ARPS. Both fine photographers who dedicated much of their time to photography at local, regional and national level. Both will be sadly missed.

Even if you didn't enter the Nature Group's Exhibition this year, why not pop along to the opening on April 30th - we can promise you an enjoyable day in good company and some fine nature photography. I hope to see you there.



From the chair

“Always carry your camera with you”.

Advice that no doubt all of us have received. I know it is what I was told soon after I had been given my first camera at the age of eleven or twelve and it's good advice of course but, as we all know, largely impractical except for our colleagues in the press who make their living by it.

I was reminded of it in the run up to Christmas when the big birding news in the Nottingham area was the arrival of a Sora at my local gravel pits. This rail from North America is not unlike a Spotted Crake, but has a black face patch and white under tail coverts. From pictures on our local television it was obvious that twitchers and birders from all parts of Great Britain had arrived in Attenborough, where the pits are situated. I did not immediately rush down since I thought the crush would be too great for comfort and bird watching en-masse has never been my scene. Consequently, with other matters to occupy me close to Christmas, the rail slipped into the back of my mind, even when, on one sunny morning, I decided to take myself off for a walk.

My wife was off shopping and so I had some clear time ahead. I motored the four miles or so down to the gravel pits and wondered why there were so many cars parked on the approach road to the car park, which was itself very full. Then of course I remembered the Sora. I got myself booted up and as I was doing so noticed small groups of people with huge lenses bolted on to their cameras, telescopes at the ready, tripods erected for action and I wondered just where the Sora would be. Now bear in mind that I have been visiting Attenborough Gravel Pits for over forty years and I knew that the largest reed bed was a good walk from the car park - what I call the simple circuit of the pits is a round trip of about four miles. There were other reed beds of course, some of them much nearer at hand, but it seemed best to make for the big one. I started off down the path to the River Trent, on the way meeting groups who, to judge from their equipment, were returning from rail

watching. Obviously I was on the right path. A little way down I noticed one such group crossing the field ahead of me to the left, ah! Now I knew which reed bed it was and quite close too, good! I soon crossed the field and saw the ribbon of people grouped at the waterside. The sun made the viewing very difficult, straight into the eyes with the face of the reed bed in deepest shade. Then of course I thought, “why didn't I bring my camera?” Mind you it would have been very difficult to get a good photograph with the lighting as it was. I stood for some fifteen or twenty minutes with no view of the Sora, and then suddenly it was there. So close I didn't really need my binoculars, although the view was better with them. The rail picked its way delicately, elegantly along the edge of the bed, placing one foot in front of the other, turning its head this way and that before swinging round and heading back into the reeds. I waited perhaps twenty even fifty minutes more but it never re-appeared. I gave it best and continued on my circuit. Could I have made a photograph? With the difficult lighting I doubt if it would have been a good one, especially with the reeds angled one way and the other making both a distracting background and foreground. Those thoughts have consoled me anyway, but I still wish I'd had my camera!

It hardly seems almost two years since I became your Chairman and that this is my last “From the Chair”. I have thoroughly enjoyed the time and I would like to thank all of you for your support and encouragement. I wish you all “Good Light and Happy Snapping” and trust you all continue to gain great enjoyment from our wonderful occupation.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the bottom of the name.

Robert Hawkesworth FRPS

Nature Group Conference 2005

12th - 14th August 2005

Brooksby College, Leicestershire.

- Programme:** A & F Advisory session
Visit/s to local nature reserve/s (e.g. Cossington Meadows) Delegates' Lecturettes
- Speakers include:** John Bebbington FRPS
Andy Callow
Malcolm Hey FRPS
- Accommodation** Residents limited to 35 rooms.
Rooms will be allocated on a first come first served basis.
Daily attendance also possible
Full board includes Dinner Friday evening to Sunday lunch.
Silver Service Dinner on Saturday evening.
- Cost:** £120
- To Book:** Please complete the Booking Form below and send with your deposit to:
Martin Withers FRPS, 93 Cross Lane, Mountsorrel, Loughborough. LE12 7BY
Telephone: - 0116 229 6080
- A & F Advisory Session Enquiries:** It is important to pre-book your work for this.
Colin Smith FRPS, 3 St Hilda's Close, Chorley, Lancs. PR7 3NU
Telephone: - 0125 727 1981
- Other enquiries:** Robert Hawkesworth FRPS,
5 Ravensdale Drive, Wollaton, Nottingham. NG8 25L
Telephone: - 0115 928 1050

Royal Photographic Society Nature Group Convention Brooksby College, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, August 12th - 14th 2005

Booking Form

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

I will be accompanied by: _____

☐ Special requirements
(i.e. vegetarian meals, ground floor room etc.) _____

☐ Please tick box if you require work to be assessed for Distinctions.

I enclose a deposit of £20 per person. I understand that the balance of £100 (incl VAT) will be due one month prior to the event.

Signed _____

Date _____

Cheques should be made payable to RPS Nature Group and forwarded with this booking form to:
Martin Withers FRPS 93 Cross Lane, Mountsorrel, Lough borough, Leics. LE12 78X

The 29th Annual General Meeting and Spring Meeting

**The 29th Annual General Meeting of the RPS Nature Group
will be held at:
Smethwick Photographic Society, The Old Schoolhouse, Oldbury, West Midlands
(directions below)
Saturday 30th April 2005**

Timetable

- 10.30 a.m. Assemble for 11.00 a.m. start
- 11.00 a.m. A slide presentation 'Wild Britain' by Richard Revels FRPS.
A journey of the last two years of photography in all parts of Britain.
- 12.30 p.m. Break for lunch.
Light lunches will be available in the club-house -
ploughman's or jacket potatoes.
There is also a dining area if you wish to bring sandwiches.

2.00 p.m. Annual General Meeting

Agenda:-

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 28th AGM 2004,
printed in issue 89 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. 2005 Convention.
9. Any Other Business.
10. Date and Venue of the 30th AGM 2006.

Opening of the 2005 Annual Exhibition

- 2.45 p.m. Presentation of the awards
and projection of the accepted slides.
Exhibition Prints will be on display throughout the day.

Directions:-

Leave the M6 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. This is a dual carriageway, stay in the left hand lane. At the first traffic lights (approx 1/3 mile) turn left into Park Street. At the end of Park Street, turn right into Churchbridge (cul-de-sac). The Old Schoolhouse is last but one building on the left.

Nature Group Field Meetings 2005

Saturday 23 April 2005 10 a.m.

Banstead Woods SSSI

Meet at: Holly Lane Car park.

Grid ref: TQ 273 583.

Cost: Nil.

Subjects: Spring flora, especially bluebells.

Lunch: Bring packed..

Please call leader if attending.

Stout shoes advised.

Directions: Junc 7 M25 or Junc 8 on the M23. Head towards Croydon on the A23. Shortly after leaving the Motorway you will pass a Little Chef and an Esso Garage on your right. At the traffic lights turn left into Star Lane, then keep on this road as it goes round a bend and turns into Elmore Road. At end turn right along High Road, bear left in front of the White Hart Pub, follow Hazelmere Road to it's end, and at mini round-about turn right along Outwood Lane. Take the next left turn into Lower Park Road. The entrance to the Car park is a few metres on the left..

Leader: Sue Rogers. Tel: 01737 554728

Sue.Rogers@icr.ac.uk

Wednesday 11 May 2005 - 10.30

Cressbrook Dale and Tansley Dale

Meet at: Near the Red Lion Pub in Litton village.

Grid ref: 165752 (sheet 119).

Cost: Nil.

Subjects: Spring limestone flora and scenery.

Lunch: Bring packed.

Leader: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS.

Tel: 0115 928 1050

Saturday 14 May 2005 - 10 a.m.

English School of Falconry, nr Biggleswade

Meeting Point: Main car park

Cost: £35 - Advance booking essential. £5 deposit required.

Lunch: Plowmans lunch included

Subjects: An opportunity to photograph captive birds of prey in semi-natural surroundings.

Please contact leader for further information

Leader: Angela Batty

Tel: 01372 728770 Email

angelajbatty@onetel.com

Sunday 15 May 2005 - 11 a.m.

Regent's Park, London, NW1

Meet at: Tennis Court Cafe; entrance East side of York Bridge. (Enter park via York Gate from Marylebone Road.) Grid ref: TQ 283 823.

Cost: Nil.

Subjects: Grey Herons, Great Crested and Little Grebes, also nesting Coot and other wildfowl.

Wild flowers, trees and parkland.

Lunch: Three cafes in Park, or bring packed.

Comfortable footwear recommended.

Directions: Baker Street Station on the Bakerloo, Circle, Jubilee and Metropolitan lines. Turn left out of station into Marylebone Road and walk to York Gate a few minutes away. Buses: 18, 27 and 30 run along Marylebone Road, alight Royal Academy of Music. Car Parking: There is metered parking on both the Inner and Outer Circle.

Leader: Pat Tuson. Tel: 020 7609 5093

E-mail: pattuson@beeb.net

Leader may be contacted using mobile 0780 8638865 on the day only.

Saturday 04 June 2005 - 10.30 a.m.

Kenfig NNR, Mid Glamorgan

Meet at: Main car park.

Grid ref: 801804, map 170.

Cost: Nil.

Subjects: Flora including a number of orchids, also butterflies and damselflies. Coastal habitat with some marshy areas as well as sand dunes.

Lunch: Bring packed.

Waterproof footwear recommended..

Leader: John Hankin LRPS.

Tel: 01249 720917

E-mail: hankinwj@hotmail.co.uk

Sunday 05 June 2005 - 10 a.m.

Oxwich Bay, Gower

Meet at: Main carpark. Grid ref: 502 864.

Cost: £2.50 parking.

Subjects: Seashore marine life, insects and flowers of dunes.

Lunch: Bring packed. Bring wellies or footwear suitable for paddling, also waterproofs, suncream and hat.

Leader: Margaret Hodge FRPS.

Tel: 01792 207001

Nature Group Field Meetings 2005

Monday 27 June 2005 - 11 a.m.

Bonsall Moor, Derbyshire

Meeting Point - contact leader for details of meeting point and further information

Cost: Nil

Subjects: Typical limestone flora, including at least eight species of orchid

Lunch: Bring packed

Leader: John Jones ARPS

Tel: 01508 672125

Sunday 02 October 2005 - 10 a.m.

Risley Moss, Warrington

Meet at: Main car park. Grid ref: SJ 667919.

Cost: Nil.

Subjects: Fungi.

Lunch: Bring packed.

Directions: From junction 11 of the M62 turn onto the A574 (Birchwood Way). Turn left onto Moss Gate and straight on at the next two roundabouts. Risley Moss is immediately after the second roundabout.

Leader: Jeremy Malley-Smith LRPS.

Tel: 07940 594628

E-mail: jmall@tiscali.co.uk

Saturday 08 October 2005 - 10.00 a.m.

Ebernoe Common NNR, W.Sussex

Meet at: Car park next to Ebernoe Church

Grid Ref: SU 976 278

Cost: £2 donation

Subjects: Ancient woodland with over 600 recorded species of fungi

Directions: From A283, 3.5m north of Petworth, 1.5m south of Northchapel, turn east into minor road signposted Ebernoe. 1.5 miles along this road turn right, just past telephone & post boxes, into Church & Reserve access road signposted Ebernoe Church/schoolhouse.

Contact leader to confirm before travelling

Lunch: Bring packed

Leader: Sue Rogers

Tel: 01737 554728

E-mail: Sue.Rogers@icr.ac.uk

Sunday 09 October 2005 - 10 a.m./3.00 p.m.

Porton Down

Porton Down, about six miles North East of Salisbury, is well known as a Ministry of Defence establishment. What is not so well known is the space the Estate occupies. In the early years of the twentieth century the War Department took over around 8,000 acres of countryside of which only about 2,000 are in active use today, the remainder having been left virtually untouched, forming one of the largest and finest nature conservation areas in the south of England. Visits by organised groups are permitted but are strictly controlled. John Hankin LRPS has arranged a Field Meeting with the Conservation Officer - the intention being to explore some of the extensive woodland and photograph fungi. Clearly, the normal casual format of meetings will not apply - the group will be supervised by the Conservation team and must keep together throughout the visit. Everyone attending will be asked to supply some personal information and car registration details beforehand for security purposes. This may sound off-putting but from experience I can assure people that the Security is not at all unreasonable. The main point is that we have access to areas of land from which the public have been almost completely excluded for over a hundred years. Numbers are limited and everyone intending to take part should contact the leader, John Hankin before 1st July. The visit is subject to cancellation should it interfere with Service commitments at the last minute, in this event an alternative venue will be set up in the Salisbury area.

Leader: John Hankin LRPS.

Tel: 01249 720917

E-mail: hankinjw@hotmail.co.uk

Tuesday 18 OctOBER 2005 - 10.30 a.m.

Sherwood Pines

Meet at: Main car park.

Grid ref: 616642 (sheet 120).

Cost: £2 approx.

Subjects: Fungi and autumn colour.

Lunch: Packed or café.

Wellies may be needed if wet.

Leader: Robert Hawkesworth FRPS.

Tel: 0115 928 1050

Leaders, and indeed prospective leaders, may care to note that they may claim travelling expenses for the day of the meeting up to a maximum of 100 miles for the round trip. Further details may be obtained from our Treasurer, Trevor Hyman, for contact details please see the front of the magazine.

A Change of Scene in the Sub-Continent

by Peter Evans

In common with many other wildlife photographers, I find the Indian sub-continent frustratingly difficult. The wildlife is there - Tiger, Asian Elephant, Leopard, Wild Ass, Water Buffalo, Indian Rhino and a multitude of deer species, mongooses and other smaller beasts - but you have to travel to find it, as most of the land is needed for humans. All the national parks I have visited - Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Gir, Dudhwa, Velavadar, Wild Ass and Kaziranga required a long rail journey or flight, followed by several hours on the road. Life on the roads is an exercise in survival and travel by rail has its own excitements. Photography is difficult, partly because the animals tend to be in woodland, but also because generally you cannot drive yourself and are compelled to have a guide as well as a driver. Neither is likely to be up to African standards and both are liable to be obsessed with finding Tiger to the exclusion of all other species. For me, India has been a challenge, and not a particularly rewarding one.

In June 2004, I decided to try a new tack and to find my animals in Sri Lanka. The problems would not be greatly different, but by going to Yala, I hoped the habitat would be more open and the driving less frenetic. These notes are based on only a couple of weeks in one part of Sri Lanka, but I hope they may give a flavour of the area to those who fancy trying it.

Yala lies in the south-east of the island so, after a day flight (I used Emirates) and a night in Colombo, there is a half day drive to the park. The rules of the road are similar to those in India ie the bigger vehicle has priority in all circumstances, but they are not enforced with the vigour that you find in India. There is plenty of good accommodation within a few minutes drive of the park. The vehicles employed are mostly Land Rovers and Land Cruisers; local visitors bring their own 4x4, but I do not know how feasible it would be to hire one. You cannot avoid taking a tracker, even though the only tracking he will do will be looking for spoor at the side of the road. My guide managed to retain a driver and tracker for the

nine days I was in the park and they came to accept what I wanted, though I am sure they thought it pretty strange. There are no Tigers in Sri Lanka, but the drivers are as determined to find Leopard as their counterparts in India are to hunt for Tiger. I laid down my wants, which were Sloth Bear, Water Buffalo, Asian Elephant and Leopard in descending order of preference. Since Water Buffalo are common domestic animals this may seem odd, but wild Water Buffalo are rare and I do not know where else to find them, except in Kaziranga, where the light is generally awful and they have to be photographed from elephant back.

I spent nine days in June at Yala Safari Lodge and visited the park each early morning and late afternoon. June would not be the best time to see most of the wildlife, because the park becomes rather dry, though there are still scattered pools, some of them quite large. Earlier in the year, it would be greener and the open areas would have more grass and attract more animals. I chose June, because the bears were my priority and that is the best time to see them. They feed on the fruits of the Palu tree. The theory was that the first fruits ripen in May and, as the trees are common, the bears can feed away from the roads then, but as the stock is reduced, they have to come closer. We had four sightings of which two were impossible for photography, because the bears were deep in the bush. One male was in open view, but only giving rear views. A mother with a large cub followed the road and we were able to get ahead of them and photograph from the rear of the vehicle, which was great.

Asian Elephants were seen frequently, and we had one family party bathing. Water Buffalo were numerous, but most of them spent the day feeding in the forest, as the open areas had been grazed out. The best opportunities were when they headed for the water in the evening and immersed themselves. I had two Leopard sightings, one after the light had gone completely and the other when there was just enough light with my D70 set on 400ASA.



▲ Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*)

▼ Water Buffalo (*Bubalus amey*)





Sloth Bear Mother and Cub (*Melursus ursinus*)

Yala's reputation is based on Leopard sightings but, although research has shown a high density of the species in the part of the park open to tourists, I would not recommend Yala if Leopards are your main target. Although the Leopard is the top predator, it is very reluctant to show itself in good light, though some people are lucky. We had a good assortment of other mammals - Chital and Sambar, three mongoose species, Wild Boar, Hanuman Langur, Golden Jackal, and Indian Hare, all of which were photographed. There were plenty of birds, though serious birders head for the wet forests of the interior. I was content with Asian Openbill, Asian Darter, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Great Stone Curlew, Malabar Pied Hornbill and the endemic Sri Lankan Junglefowl. On the return to Colombo, we spent two nights at Embilipitiya, from where we spent a full day in Udawalawe. This was good for Asian Elephant, Toque Macaque (endemic to Sri Lanka) and Black Giant Squirrel.

All the accommodation was excellent and there was European-type food as well as Sri Lankan. The roads in the parks were pretty grim and the Land Rovers their usual hard-sprung selves. It

was very dusty and a few of my films had scratches. I only used the digital to test it and was fearful of the dust affecting it, but it coped very well. The tour was organised for me by Jetwing Eco Holidays, whose CEO, Gehan de Silva Wijeratne, is one of the island's leading ornithologists and a serious wildlife photographer. My guide was Wicky Wickremasekara, who did an excellent job. The country was totally peaceful when I was there, but I see on the news that there are threats of trouble again, so check before you go

Update

The recent Tsunami has completely destroyed Yala Safari Lodge and killed many of its staff. The national park has been less affected although it cannot have escaped completely as it runs down to the sea. First indications are that no animals were killed and that they may have had some sense that trouble was on the way.

Although Sri Lankans are desperate for tourists to return, it is impossible to forecast when visiting Yala will be possible again.

Out and about with a digital 'compact'

by John Ford

As a professional biologist I started to use a camera to record things for lectures and even to assist in identification. My first camera was a very basic SLR with a 50mm lens. However, to use a suitable expression for a biologist, I soon got 'bitten by the (photographic) bug' and slowly over the years my outfit expanded as I tried, but never seemed to succeed, to emulate the standards seen in so many magazines and books. My original forays into photography were longer ago than I like to recollect and I have now reached the time in life where the inverse relationship between age and weight carrying capacity is becoming all too obvious! My initial compromise was to be selective in what I took into the field, trying to second guess if the weather forecast would be accurate. My outfit could be divided into two sections, one for plants, fungi, habitat and environmental work (K25/Velvix) and the other for mammals, birds and insects (Kodachrome 200/Sensia 100 up-rated to 200 ASA). All too often I found I did not

have the ideal combination of equipment with me and eventually I packed all my equipment into a box and sent it away for commission sale. However, before taking this decision, I considered how I might continue my interests in natural history photography.

Having already adopted the scanned slide/Photo-Shop/inkjet printer route for prints, the idea of being able to take an image directly into Photo-Shop appealed to me and after a great deal of soul searching, I decided to have a look at what was available in the 'prosumer' digital market. Another influencing factor was the number of occasions on which I had borrowed my wife's Pentax Espio compact when we had been out and something of interest had popped up. What I needed was a camera for my plant, fungal, habitat and environmental work (plus possibly insects) which I could easily carry with me whenever I went out.

▼ Privet Hawk Moth (*Sphinx ligustri*) 1/15 at f8, 200mm focal length





Frog Orchid (*Dactylorhiza viridis*)
1/180 at f4, focal length 200mm set to macro

Now the search began. There were two features I decided were 'must haves'. One was a lens giving at least a 28mm equivalent for environmental work and putting plants/fungi into the context of their habitat. Secondly, having been wedded to SLRs, I decided an electronic view finder (EVF) was going to be essential to avoid the frustration of parallax problems - trying to view a screen in bright light. One surprise was to find that the widest angle equivalent was about 35mm in many of the cameras, though some manufacturers did offer supplementary lenses to bring this down to 28mm. In the end I decided to plump for the Minolta 7Hi. This has a zoom lens with range 7.2-50.8mm, equivalent to 28mm-200mm in 35mm terms and is marked as such on the lens barrel. Despite one or two unfavourable comments about its shape it felt comfortable in my hand and most of the immediately required controls were traditional knobs and buttons - of all the cameras I tried, it seemed to me most like a traditional SLR.

How have I got on with it? The main downside is the EVF. It rapidly became apparent that this would be fine for framing but not for judging critical sharpness. The second was the battery life - it does seem to 'eat' batteries. I always carry two spare sets for a days shooting. Having made these two points I must say that in all other respects I have enjoyed using the camera.

First perusal of the CD manual revealed a daunting array of facilities. However with my perhaps restricted objectives for the cameras use, I soon picked out which features I needed and the controls to operate them. I first of all tackled the EVF and limited the display mode to three options: image only, real-time histogram (incl exposure mode, aperture, shutter speed, frame number information) and grid. The options can be rapidly cycled through at the touch of a button.

When using my Nikon F100 I had invariably set the exposure mode to aperture priority with multi-segment metering. The 7Hi offers multi-segment, centre weighted and spot metering. The multi-segment uses the information from its 300 segments to measure luminance and colour and combines this with distance to determine the exposure - I decided to try this as default. Because I was wanted to squeeze the optimum quality out of the camera I made the decision to record in RAW mode with Adobe RGB colour

and an ISO setting of 100 with white balance to auto. Finally there was the question of focussing. Two options are available, a wide focus area and a one of 285 spot focussing points. I decided to give the 'flexible' focus point a try.

How did I get on with these settings and features? The real-time histogram was a revelation. It is so easy to see at least the approximate luminance distribution from light to dark and apply exposure compensation, if necessary. Exposure compensation is available in steps of $\frac{1}{3}$ of a stop (± 2 stops). I also found the grid very helpful, particularly with hand held shots. I have used aperture priority in nearly all situations and the multi-segment metering seemed to work well, though it became routine to keep an eye on the histogram, in particular to avoid burned out highlights.

I suppose I have now come to the point where I should express my opinion on the level of compromise as judged by the print output. I transfer my files to Photoshop 7 via a plug-in acquired for dealing with RAW files. How this determines what adjustments to make is beyond me but other than an occasional tweak of colour temperature I have rarely made any alterations

before importing into Photoshop. I have been quite pleased with the printed images compared with prints from transparencies scanned via my Nikon 4000 scanner. A reasonable level of sharpness seems to be maintained across the zoom range though critical examination does reveal a suggestion of 'grain'. This is noticeable in areas of near uniform colour such as sky but can be moderated with a touch of Gaussian blur. I have not found the distortion at either end of the zoom range too much of a problem, though if a wide angle shot includes a horizon I try to place this not too far from the centre. So far I have not felt the need to explore any software to correct lens distortion. I wondered if I would find the limited close focussing irksome. At 200mm the closest focus possible is 0.5m covering an area of approx 67x90mm. A macro setting is available at either end of the zoom range - I have only used this at 200mm - the focus distance available is 0.25 to 0.6m. At 0.25m the area covered is approximately 37x50mm. From the pragmatic viewpoint I have found what is on offer acceptable for most of what I do but there are occasions when I miss a true macro lens. Certainly environmental shots in bright to sunny conditions can be taken hand held without any



Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.)
1/90 at f8, focal length 185mm

danger of camera shake. However when taking plant 'portraits' in my preferred conditions (flat light - no shadows) aperture probably closed down to f8, shutter speeds will dictate that a tripod is advisable to avoid any camera shake (as well as allow accurate positioning). The EVF can be tilted upwards by 90°, and is especially useful when working close to the ground with the camera horizontal. There is also provision of a plug socket to take a remote cord release and a dioptre adjustment is also available.

So there we have it, yes, I admit there is a compromise in changing to this way of working but the sacrifice in print quality at 10"x8" is not as great as I expected. The advantage is that now I always have a camera with me.

Such is the speed of development in the digital world that since I bought the 7Hi it has been superseded by the A1 (5Mp) and the A2 (8Mp). Both these cameras resemble the 7Hi and as far as I am aware the lens is same. Three features might tempt me to upgrade. First is the replacing of AA batteries with a lithium-ion, promising significantly longer intervals between

charges. The second is an apparently improved EVF. Thirdly I am intrigued by the anti-shake feature though I cannot make up my mind whether or not I might find this useful. Whilst the 8Mp model might seem to have an advantage over the 5Mp the chip does seem to have come in for particular criticism regarding noise, so I think it is a case of 'watch this space'.

A tail piece – one logistic compromise I made when first of all using this camera was only to carry a tripod when natural history photography was the primary objective. To me this essential piece of equipment has always been an 'Achilles heel'. However recently I have purchased a Velbon Ultra Maxi SF. This comes with a small ball and socket head and I am finding it ideal for plant work etc.. It admittedly weighs more than the camera (750gm, some 100gm or so more) but it only measures (32.7 cm) when folded, and goes up to a working height of 122 cm and down to 15.7 cm (the centre column is removable and the legs spread independently. It quite readily supports the weight of the 7Hi and is now always with me!

▼ Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*)
1/350 at f8, focal length 28mm



A Fellowship in Fungi

by Kay Reeve FRPS

Just one year ago I was delighted to obtain my FRPS with a panel of slides of fungi. Becoming a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society has to be a peak of anyone's photographic career and has caused me to think back to how it all started.

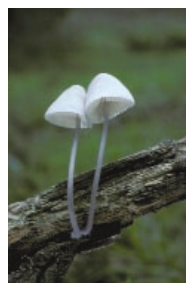
Probably the interest in fungi came before the interest in photography. When I was very small we made regular trips to the countryside in late summer and autumn to look for field mushrooms for the frying pan. This was a kind of treasure hunt, and great fun for a little girl, and taught me that they were not all the same colour underneath! Shortly afterwards my father gave me my first camera, a folding 'No. 1 Autographic Kodak Junior', elderly even then, which I still have, but haven't used for a while!

I obtained my first SLR after University and professional exams were passed, and since then photography has expanded to fill the time available.

I will tackle most subjects, but fungi are certainly a particular favourite. It is enormous fun simply to go looking for them. The most familiar site can yield something totally new, and even if the only species found are common ones, there is always the chance of finding a better specimen, in a better location for photography. Nor do you have to travel round the world to find them. Thirteen of the twenty slides in my Fellowship panel were taken within a radius of twenty miles of my home.

For fungi, I prefer a manual camera. Currently I am using a Nikon FM3a. My favourite lenses are 55mm and 105mm Micro-Nikkors together with a 28mm wide angle. For really small subjects I use Nikon 3T and 4T close-up lenses with the 105mm. A solid tripod which can be used at ground level is of course essential, as are a cable release and a few other bits and pieces, of which more later. Generally I rely on the camera's own meter, but I do like to carry a hand held spot





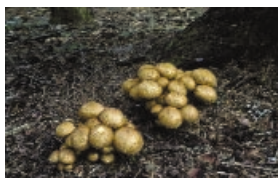
meter if I can, together with a grey card. It is necessary to bracket exposures to a considerable degree - up to a stop or two either way. Fungi easily deceive meters. The caps can reflect a lot of light from the sky, which can cause under-exposure, whereas the surroundings, such as soil, rotten wood and fallen leaves, are often very dark, even black, which tends to overexposure.

It can be really exciting to find a good specimen, so I try not to rush in, but to adopt a measured approach! I like to walk round the subject if I can, being careful not to leave any marks which might show in the picture later. The first view of a specimen is by no means always the best. I then decide if I will use wide angle or portrait format. If in doubt, I will take both. With the wide angle lens, I think it is fair to say that I

always use the smallest aperture the lens provides - after all, showing the background is the point of this technique - but when using the portrait format, opening up by a stop or so may help to eliminate unwanted distractions in the background.

It pays to be careful about the position of the tripod. Soft leaf mould can subside a little during a long exposure and lead to loss of critical sharpness. I try to find some really hard ground, even if this affects the viewpoint slightly.

Lighting is perhaps the main challenge to the fungi photographer. Fungi have much to commend them - they do not fly off when approached and many are not much affected by the wind - but they do often grow in dark and



Pictures:

First row, left to right

- 1 Polyporus squamosus
- 2 Leccinum quercinum
- 3 Hemimycena cucullata
- 4 Daedaleopsis confragosa
- 5 Cantharellula umbonata
- 6 Pholiota squarrosa
- 7 Baeospora myosura

Second row, left to right

- 8 Auricularia auricula judae
- 9 Hygrocybe coccinea
- 10 Helvella crispa
- 11 Xylaria hypoxylon
- 12 Coprinus micaceus
- 13 Mycena inclinata

Third row, left to right

- 14 Pleurotus ostreatus
- 15 Volvariella bombycina
- 16 Sarcoscypha coccinea
- 17 Inonotus dryadeus
- 18 Morchella rotunda
- 19 Sparassis crispa
- 20 Macro lepiota procera

difficult places. Bright sunlight is too contrasty and in woodland will often rule out the wide angle technique, because the background will be blotchy and unsightly, but dull light equates to dull pictures, which are equally unwelcome. The solution involves the use of flash and reflectors, sometimes separately, but often together. I carry a couple of small Lastolite type reflectors and numerous pieces of white and silver card, folded so that they stand up on their own. I also carry two tiny manual flash guns, the effect of which I control by holding them (singly of course and always off the camera) varying distances from the subject. The exact distance is a matter of experience, depending on the effect required. Sometimes I use them with diffusers, or directed onto the reflectors. I know others will feel that this is too unscientific and that they have greater control by using their regular flash guns on reduced output. Either way some experimentation (and the expenditure of some film!) is needed to obtain the required result. My Fellowship panel was all on Kodachrome 25, which was brilliant for fungi. It was superbly sharp, with the finest grain, and gave excellent colour





rendition. The lack of speed was not a problem as a tripod is always used anyway. Since its demise, my choice is for Fuji Provia 100F or Kodak Ektachrome 100G - I particularly like the way this latter film renders greens, and if any nature photographer has not yet tried it, I recommend them to do so.

Selecting the slides for my Fellowship panel was a real problem. I must be the world's worst judge of my own work - it is so difficult to leave behind the emotional baggage which particular pictures have, connected with the excitement of finding a particular specimen, and how difficult the shot was to take.

Advice from a member of the Nature Distinctions Panel is really helpful, and my thanks are due to Tony Wharton in this respect. The advice in the RPS publication "*What the Panels Require*" is helpful too. It sets out the technical criteria and contains the recommendation to "explore the subject photographically". I took this to mean to exploit the pictorial aspects of fungi, so my panel is a mixture of wide angles and portraits, with a





There were a couple of places where I had placed a low key slide after a brighter one, causing the low key slide to look a little dull when it first came up on the screen, and I understand this attracted some criticism at the Fellowship Review Panel, but fortunately it was felt not to be too serious a fault. However, I think it would be good advice to anyone submitting slides for a distinction at any level to find the opportunity to view them in a larger arena - they may look subtly different.

good variety of different types - gill fungi, brackets, boletes, cup and club fungi, together with some interesting and unusual shapes, such as White Helvella (*Helvella crispa*), Cauliflower Fungus (*Sparassis crispa*), and a Morel (*Morchella rotunda*). There are some bright colours, and some more subdued ones, which I feel harmonize with their backgrounds, and in each case I have tried to use some interesting lighting. Back lighting can often be effective - particularly where the subject is translucent.

I did make one mistake in my final selection, but fortunately not a fatal one. I had only projected the slides in sequence at home, and not in a hall where the projector has to cope with a longer distance. (I assume these are the judging conditions - for some reason all Fellowship assessments take place in private).

So what does the future hold, photographically speaking? Certainly more of the same - last Spring seems to have been an excellent one in my area for *Mitrophora semilibera* and *Verpa conica* and I have enjoyed some good sessions with those. But I hope there will be something new as well. I am not as yet tempted to a digital camera for this work, as I still think there is nothing to beat a good original slide as a way of viewing a colour photograph, although some of my slides are now reappearing as digital prints*. But oddly enough I find that alongside printing colour on the computer my interest in traditional monochrome darkroom work continues to grow. Is this the best of both worlds? It is undoubtedly one of the delights of photography that there is always something new to explore.



* On this topic - and nothing to do with this article - is there anyone else out there using GIMP? I would love to make contact with someone for the mutual exchange of information. Please e-mail me on kay.reeve@uklinux.net.

My Deer

by Russell Edwards ARPS



There is something very endearing about watching deer grazing in the English countryside especially the males, who, with antlers held high, are truly noble beasts.

There are five species of deer in England: Fallow, Roe, Red, Muntjac and Chinese Water deer. Only the small roe deer are native to England. Fallow deer were brought to England by the Normans and kept in large enclosures or parks for the king and his cohorts to hunt. During the Middle Ages it was fashionable for the aristocracy to keep deer in the parks surrounding their mansions both for meat and prestige. Many of these fallow deer escaped particularly after each of the two World wars and today these escaped deer form the increasing large herds which grace our countryside. It has been estimated that at present there are about 20,000 fallow deer living in parks and five times that number in the wild.

All deer are beautiful and photogenic but particularly the fallow, which are very variable in colour but in summer most are a chestnut colour (from which they take the name -fallow meaning reddish -brown) with white spots and a grey black coat without spots in winter. They are identified by their white rumps surrounded by a black edge together with a black stripe down their tail making the number 111. Only

male deer have antlers and those of the fallow buck are flattened or palmated. It is a magnificent beast.

Deer in parks, although they remain very timid, are relatively easy to photograph as they are semi-domesticated and accustomed to the presence of humans. Richmond park is a very popular venue for photographing deer and the best shots are taken from a car window resting a long lens on a bean bag. Photographing wild deer is a different matter. They are very wary of people and not without good reason as they so often end up as meat in the local butcher's shop.

Within a mile of my Suffolk home is a wood, home to fallow and muntjac deer, badgers, squirrels, hares, rabbits, stoats and numerous birds. In early summer the woodland floor is a mass of bluebells. It is here that I have spent many hours over many years studying and photographing the deer.

Deer are creatures of habit and will enter and leave the wood only at certain places that they have specified. I have watched them queueing up to enter the wood at a particular place, patiently waiting their turn although under threat from an intruder, rather than go into the wood at another place.



The deer also have their own paths through the wood which they use as escape routes when disturbed. Finding these is relatively easy as their footprints or slots give them away and gives the photographer a better chance of being in the right place at the right time.



Stalking deer through a wood is next to impossible as the animals have very acute hearing and marvellous eyesight. They are also adept at discriminating between sound which signifies danger and that which does not. They won't even flinch when a bird scarer goes off but will run if the photographer treads on and snaps a twig. Photographers must be in position near a deer route or entrance before the animals arrive. This takes up considerable time in waiting but it is the only way to photograph wild deer.

However I did discover that deer fear nothing which is above them. On one occasion I jammed myself in the fork of a tree and waited in the hope of seeing some deer passing-by. I was almost asleep when a noise from below alerted me that there were deer surrounding the trunk of the tree. I was able to photograph them as they moved away. Since then I have used a tower scaffolding hide with a floor about 2 metres off the ground with an open top a metre and a half (5 feet) from the floor. The hide is concealed using army camouflage material. My camera, a Nikon F90x with a 500mm F4. 5 Sigma lens, is supported on a bean bag and rests on the top edge of the hide, which has no roof. This arrangement gives me all round degree vision (unlike a normal hide) and the deer can only see my camera and my head, which is well above their eye level. The first time I visited the finished hide I nearly

bumped into the rear end of a buck which was sauntering along the path towards the hide. The next day was a similar story but on the third day I was in the hide before he came. As the buck began to walk in front of the hide he gathered pace and I wanted to stop him so I would get a sharper picture. But how do you stop a buck when he has a vision of attractive does on his mind. I shouted at him. Something like "*Do you mind standing still why I take your photograph.*" The buck turned both in astonishment and curiosity and I had my picture before he sauntered off still wondering at what he had seen and heard.

Most nature photographers (until the coming of the digital age) use slow speed slide film for their photography ;Fuji 100 ISO Provia or Sensia and Velvia being very popular. This has two major drawbacks. The restricted woodland light needs a long exposure which has to be accurate and the opportunities for deer photography in the wild, even in the most favourable circumstances , are rare and there is very little chance, if any, of bracketing exposures.

So against convention I use print film, which has greater exposure latitude - Fuji Superia 800 ISO. It is an absolutely fabulous film; no grain, fine resolution etc. and it can be uprated to 3200 ISO ! (Increase the developing time from 3mins 15 seconds to 5 minutes.)The only drawback is the price. A single film costs about £4 but if purchased in bulk it is much cheaper (Jessops £29 for 10). Digital cameras, even the best cannot compete with the quality of this fast film. I do my own processing and I am now changing from the wet RA4 process to using the computer, scanner and printer to make my prints. This is more convenient than working in the darkroom but the prohibitive cost of inks makes it too expensive for larger prints (12 x16 inches).

Photographing wildlife in restricted circumstances, parks, zoos, falconries etc. will produce higher quality pictures than photographing the animals in the wild but nothing beats the excitement and the privilege of watching our wild animals going about their daily business and sometimes having the opportunity to photograph them in their natural environment.





Left:

Aerial root formation on Jungle Palm. Unsurprisingly, called the 'Penis Tree' by local tribes.

Below left:

Irruption of moth larva. Species unknown.

Below right:

Unknown fungus. the jungle fungi were of many strange shapes and formations.



Amazon

by Trevor Davenport

Amazon. If there is one word in the English language that has the power to evoke the emotions of fear, wonder, mystery, danger and, above all, a profoundly awesome and intangible immensity, then the single word 'Amazon' contains all these - and more - in the simplicity of its six small letters. This single word gives name to the ultimate river - a gigantic moving mass of living water that carves across the broad shoulder of South America from the Andes to the Atlantic. Fuelled by the waters of a myriad streams the Amazon drains the vastness of the giant sponge that is the Amazonian rain forest.

From Quito, in Ecuador, our small plane bumped and juddered across the hurdle of the Andes to land in Coca, a town on the confluence of the rivers Coca and Napo. Coca, of historic importance as the departure point of Francisco de Orellana in 1540 to seek the fabled El Dorado, still looks and feels very much like a frontier town. Its from here that the rainforest is being probed and searched for oil deposits in the downstream jungle; and its from here that any further travel east has to be taken by boat. The brave conquistador Orellana left Coca on a large raft only to discover his party could not return against the power of the river. Against all the odds of starvation, malaria, snakes and hostile natives, his bedraggled party finally sailed into the open sea some two years later after having made the first traverse of South America.

At the airstrip our small party was taken by our newly met guide straight to the Napo where we boarded a long and narrow boat for our journey downstream. From the low position of the seats in the boat two things became immediately obvious; the Napo, even though it was a 'tributary', was a very big and powerful river. Wide and fast it was the colour of creamy coffee and it slapped worryingly at the gunwales of our longboat as we chivvied our way out into open water. It was also obvious that our fellow passengers, using the boat as a bus, did not have too much concern about personal hygiene - a smell of musty dampness, sweat, insect repellent and old galoshes hung

heavy under the rattan roof as we settled in the for trip. Strangely, they didn't smell at all on the way back - but I daresay we did!

Our journey was to take us about 100km down-stream to the Jungle lodge 'La Selva'. Immediately we were moved out into the mainstream by the strong current of the Napo and we drifted for a short while until the huge outboard motors kicked in and suddenly the prow of the ship rose and we hurtled down river carving a huge bow wave that made a curtain of water for half the length of the boat. In moments we were travelling at about 35-40km/hr and the warm humid air was replaced by a howling, spray filled gale. Coca fell away quickly and we steered into mid river as we quickly covered up with ponchos and rain guards.

The Napo is a big river. At times we could hardly see the river banks as our boatman steered his own mysterious course down the murky water. We meandered from side to side across up to a mile of river width and slowed to a near stop many times as the boatman read the speed of the river and the sandbanks that lay below the shallow water.

The Napo carries huge quantities of silt as erosion grinds away at the Andean hills. This mass of sediment is deposited in islands, shallows and sandbanks all littered with dead trees and branches. Just the tiniest worry niggled constantly in my mind as we powered ahead at high speed - any one of these snags could tip us all into the drink in an instant. I hoped the boatman was well qualified. As I worried the boat slowed quickly and, half way across the mighty Napo, we heard a loud and dreadful 'shushhhh' as we ground into a sandbank. The boat was stuck firm in the middle of the swirling waters with the nearest bank a couple of hundred metres away. Interesting!

And now it started to rain. Big, fat, heavy, pounding rain. Noisy rain. Now we couldn't see the banks at all. Very interesting!

In slow and easy motion and without ado, several men amongst our fellow native passengers climbed onto the gunwales on either side of the boat and began to gently rock from side to side. As their efforts gained momentum the boat slowly moved to one side and, aided by the river itself, in a couple of minutes we floated free. Seconds later we were hurtling downstream again and full throttle except now we were rain drenched as well. We could see nothing, so I simply hoped the boatman had better vision than me and I tucked my head into my poncho and thought about – well, anything except hidden logs under six inches of water.

After about four seriously interesting hours of high speed dodgems with the sandbanks, intermittent rain storms, and a few narrow rapids, we pulled into the bank at what looked like any other section of the wall of jungle. A small plank was all that represented the dock from which we took our cases and camera gear and, windswept, stiff and shaken but still in one piece, we took our first steps into Amazonia. We had travelled about 100 km but the mighty Napo, just one of the many tributaries of the Amazon, had a further 1000km to go before it joined the major river!

La Selva is a small eco-lodge that stands on the far bank of a large ox-bow lake that the Napo left behind many years ago. To reach the lake we had to walk through about a mile of dense rain forest on a bamboo walkway that had been laid over the partly flooded forest floor. I can say now - without any doubt or personal debate - that this was the most fascinating mile I have ever, ever walked.

From the landing stage we were met by porters to carry our cases and by our native guide. We were advised that if we dropped anything to the forest floor we should not pick it up until Enrico, our native guide, had first checked the leaf litter for snakes and other nasties. From the rainy sterility of the boat we were suddenly in the midst of the most fecund and productive plot on the planet. I have been fascinated by Natural History for almost all my life but I have never seen, nor had I ever dreamed of, such an overwhelming number and variety of life forms in rude and vibrant health. From the giant trees that soared away to the canopy above to the

infinite variations of plant and fungal life in every dim glade below there were indescribable numbers of plant and insect life. Every step was slowed by seeing something different, something new, something unusual. It was as though we were in some giant experiment that had taken Noah's Ark and tipped it all in the mile between the river and the lake. Our scientific guide, Fernando, who spoke good English and was part of the University of Quito, had a standard answer to many of my questions on plant, fungal and insect life - "It is probably not yet classified!" Of course, it may have meant that Fernando couldn't classify it, but the sheer diversity of life would have taken many, many scientists to have identified much of what we found.

One mile later, with my eyes much wider, my mind completely overwhelmed and not a picture taken, we arrived at the lake and the dugout canoes.

Dugout canoes are a bit like bicycles; if you can ride one it's easy - but 'til you've learnt it's awkward and very scary. The water of the lake was but a mere inch or so from the lip of the canoe and balance was of critical importance; any wobble or sudden movement had us clinging for dear life to the sides and to our precious cameras. But, just like riding a bike, once you've mastered the balance and the motion it just becomes fun.

Finally, at the far end of the lake, we reached the lodge - perched in a clearing on a small hill at the lakeside and surrounded by the little huts that were to be home for the next few days. All the buildings were made of jungle material, mostly bamboo, with walls and roof made from split cane and thatch, and they all stood on stilts well clear of the ground beneath. All around, encroaching in verdant, crowding vigour, was the rain forest.

When superlatives fail - then facts must try to succeed; and the facts about this wonderful part of our world are often more startling than any fiction. La Selva (The Jungle) Lodge lies in the middle of the most bio diverse region in the world. This section of Amazonia, in Ecuador, contains the highest levels of biodiversity so far recorded by science. In just two hectares of the Yasuni National Park a count has been recorded

of 825 species of trees and lianas (Romoleroux et al). In England we would expect no more than a dozen species in a similar area of woodland. Counts have recorded over 80 species of frog, 80 species of bat, 580 species of bird, 12 species of monkey and some 3000 species of plant. There are many more to be recorded and classified. No significant estimate has been made of the number of insect species per hectare but scientific research has shown that it is of the order of more than 60,000. Yes, 60,000 species in a single hectare. Staggering isn't it? And most of them tried to bite me!

Because we were there in the rainy season we were issued with wellingtons for our jungle walks. These proved essential for reasons other than just mud and puddles. One of our group had large feet and they had no wellingtons in his size. On our first walk in the forest we came across a wide line of army ants moving quickly through the leaf litter. They were intriguing to watch until our large footed colleague started to jump up and down in pain and obvious distress; with only trainers on his feet the soldiers had climbed up his socks and were inflicting serious bites with their enormous mandibles. Thereafter he stayed close to the lodge and away from the dark forest.

Enrico was a genius at spotting things in the murk of the forest. Hidden amongst the leaf litter he found toads and frogs and insects in enormous variety. He pointed out with a warning a very large ant called a 'conga' ant, about 1" long and armed with a sting said to paralyse a limb for up to 48 hours. We found large and fearsome wolf spiders and, on one tree, an irruption of caterpillars that completely covered the entire trunk of the tree. They numbered in many, many thousands, packed together like sardines in a tin, and reaching as high as we could see into the canopy. On the ground beneath them their droppings, known as 'frass' were several inches deep. (The tripod had a real good wash afterwards!)

Beneath leaves we found butterflies sheltering from the frequent rain and watched leaf-cutter ants as they tracked back to their composting nest with ludicrously large pieces of leaf balanced beautifully above their heads. Everywhere, it seemed, there were crickets,

grasshoppers, mantids, wasps, bees and other insects in bewildering variety. But, sadly, they were very difficult to photograph; beneath the canopy the light was dim and even with ISO 200 film shutter speeds were very slow indeed. Rain and the after drip from the canopy added to our photographic problems and tested us technically and practically. I would have loved to have a flash bracket for better insect pictures but had to make do with what was on hand.

We made several excursions into different parts of the forest and slithered on gnarled tree roots through the wet, boot-sucking mud. The forest floor was an untidy mess of leaf litter, fallen fruits and rotting branches; here in the dim light it is an eternal autumn with a constant steady drip of plant and animal detritus from above. A veritable feast for the lichens, fungi and animal species that thrive in these conditions.

Our guides entertained us by painting our faces with the red dye of Achiota seeds; they stamped tattoos on our clothing with the fallen fruits of *Clusia* (it never washes out); and they dabbed 'Dragon's Blood', a red latex tapped easily from the Laniqui tree, on our insect bites. This Dragon's Blood was incredibly effective and eased mosquito bites in a very short time. We were told it is now being farmed and sold in Quito as a medicine.

The owners of the lodge have built a spiral staircase around a large Kapok tree that took us up some 120 feet into the canopy. Here the birds and monkeys are much easier to see and up high in the canopy is yet another world of life, life and yet more life. In the early morning, perched high amongst bromeliads and other epiphytes on the small viewing platform at the top of the stairs, we watched as Red-howler monkeys and Squirrel monkeys leapt from tree to tree and strange birds in gaudy colours called to each other.

At a clay lick on the other side of the Napo we watched as countless parrots and parakeets clung to the clay cliffs and ate the medicinal clay. Returning to the lake we watched as one of the local children fished with a lump of meat on rather large hook. Within minutes he had several Red-bellied Piranha fish strung on a small line. These were to be cooked and cleaned

of meat so that the jaws, with pointed, scalpel sharp teeth, could be sold to visitors for a few coppers. In the trees around the lodge we found plenty of the strange Hoatzin birds that look like some form of tree-chicken from pre-history as they clamber awkwardly around the branches.

Late one evening after dinner we all got into a large dugout and spent two fabulous hours on the ink dark lake with a powerful flashlight. Paddling around the lake perimeter on the edge of the jungle the light picked out roosting birds, monkeys and the eye shine of who knows what. Fernando reached up into one of the over-hanging branches and bought out a small tree-boa which he then dropped into the bottom of the dugout. I lost a bit of concentration after this as I imagined the now quite large tree-boa going up my trouser leg. Nice!

At night time the jungle takes on a different demeanour. The dark comes quickly and the stage changes from one set of insects and noises to another. The noises are ceaseless and earnestly delivered by their owners and it is almost impossible to know what has made most of them. An owl for this, a frog for that or a bat or a cricket for those squeaks and whistles? As the night progresses the noises melt into the background and almost soften to a melody with a rhythm of primeval energy.

Wherever you are in the world the dark and silent stillness of a sleepless night can open up deep wells of solitude and loneliness that melt like mist in slumber; but here, deep in the bosom of the jungle night, there is neither silence nor solitude, and slumber flits in restive intervals between the noises and sensations of the night. Beneath the security of mosquito netting in a warm and dark cocoon I lay for hours tuning in to the spirit of this remote and isolated place yet never once felt either lonely or isolated. At intervals the rain came down like an express train as it crashed through the forest and moved across us to the lake. The rain could last for hours and often did but, when it stopped, the sudden quietness was enough to waken me.

On our final morning the rain stopped whilst it was still very dark. We had an early start that day to travel back up river so I walked to the

viewing platform that looked out over the lake. Wisps of mist hung to the water surface and countless insects danced their last dance polkas in the rain free air. Across the softly steaming lake, the dawn, still yawning and yet scarce awake, slipped through silent trees. And from the mist, as ethereal as any ghost, our guide Enrico gently paddled his small canoe toward the lodge as he made his way to work. The prow of the dugout carved beautiful ripples into the surface of the lake as he silently dipped his oar into the silky water. As I stood and watched I envied him his non-polluting commute and couldn't help but compare it mine and the madness of the motorways. With this and thoughts of homeward journeys our Ecuadorian Odyssey was coming to a close. Now we had to face the boat trip back to Coca, against the current this time, and, hopefully, the heavy rains of the past few days may have deepened the river over those blessed sandbanks.

(Statistical excerpts from the *Useful Plants of Sacha Lodge* by Barry Thompson)

More pictures:

Inside back cover:

Top Detail from owl butterfly wing (*Caligo* sp).
These insects are regarded as pests of banana and plantain crops in forest clearings.

Bottom Seed heads of Amazon Lily (*Eucharis* sp).
The boiled bulb of this lily is reputed to have been widely used by jungle tribesmen as an emetic to produce powerful vomiting and thus strengthen the diaphragm in order to increase the lung power when expelling blow darts from blow guns.

Obituaries

Roger Pinn ARPS

It is with sadness that I have to report the death of Roger Pinn ARPS MPAGB BPE4* at the age of only 50 years. Roger died suddenly on Thursday 2nd of December following a presentation of one of his popular lectures at the Shirley P.S.

An active member of the RPS Nature Group, Roger had led field trips for the last few years to photograph fungi at his favourite location near Earlswood.

Roger's passion for photography developed with the Solihull Photographic Society. He was largely responsible for the club's standing within the MCPF and PAGB inter-club competitions and without his leadership as chairman of the Solihull Exhibition of British Photography the event would not be enjoying its current level of success in the BPE calendar. In recognition for Roger's dedication to the club, he was elected president.

Roger was an excellent photographer and had a wide range of photographic interests from nature to landscapes to sporting action. These led to worldwide travels in search of winning images - America, Greece, the Falkland Islands and Africa. A trip to Botswana was being planned for 2006.

Having qualified as a judge, Roger's forthright opinions were much in demand and many clubs have written expressing their sadness at his passing.

Not surprisingly Roger had other interests, including golf, cricket and snooker, which he played, leaving football, rugby and the like to be enjoyed as a spectator.

Roger spent his working life as a biomedical scientist and was 2nd in command of the haematology unit at the Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham.

His sudden death came as great shock not least to his family, mother, father, two brothers and their families - the heartfelt condolences of all members of the Solihull P.S. go out to them.

Roger was a big man with a big presence and will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him. The Midlands' photographic scene will not be the same without him.

Lawrence Bland ARPS MPAGB BPE3*

Dr Derry Wilman PhD ARPS

It is with much sadness that I have to advise members of the death, at the age of 58, of Derry Wilman, after a courageous fight against cancer.

Derry spent the majority of his working life in the quest to find cures for cancer. Since attaining his degree in 1968, he worked for the Institute of Cancer Research. In 1974, he gained a PhD, a major achievement as he did it part time whilst working at the Institute. He was highly regarded for the work his work in this area of medicine.

Derry's interest in photography began whilst at school, but the interest was to lie dormant for some years. During his early married life he bought a camera but used it only to record family events and holidays. Then in 1986 he visited Canada on a collaborative research project and met Keith Vaughan, one of Canada's leading photographers, who revitalised Derry's interest in photography - a passion which was to remain with him until his death.

Derry became a keen exhibition photographer, and regularly supported the British Photographic Exhibition (BPE) circuit, as well as many other exhibitions. Only weeks before he died, Derry received two acceptances in the RPS Print International and was also awarded the Five Crown Award by the BPE - something he had worked toward for 10 years.

A committee member of Epsom Camera Club for many years and a member of Surrey Photographic Association (SPA) Committee for over 12 years, Derry represented the SPA on the Executive of the Photographic Alliance of Great Britain. He was a committed member of the RPS and was Treasurer of the Creative Group for a number of years and a member of the both the Travel and Digital groups as well as the Nature Group.

Our sympathy goes out to his wife Rosemary, his son Paul and daughter Clare.

Roger Reynolds HonFRPS, President

Regions

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

CE - Central	52	Distinctions	
CU - Cumbria	1	Honourary FRPS	4
EA - East Anglia	46	FRPS	82
EM - East Midlands	31	ARPS	202
IN - Ireland (North)		LRPS	169
combined	3	Non Distinction holders	146
IS - Ireland (South)		Total	603
LN - London	19		
NE - North Eastern	12		
NW - North Western	61		
SC - Scotland	15		
SE - South Eastern	79		
SW - South Western	14		
SO - Southern	69		
SV - Severn Valley	17		
TH - Thames Valley	52		
WE - Western	38		
WN - North Wales	10		
WS - South Wales	13		
YO - Yorkshire	27		
Total UK	599		
Overseas	44		
Total Membership	603		

The statistics are as at 31st December 2004 and based on information provided by the RPS Membership dept.

Map courtesy of the RPS Journal January/February 2001.

Nature Group Residential Field Weekend

Friday 26th to Monday 29th August 2005

Kingcombe Centre, Toller Porcorum, Dorchester DT2 0EQ

Its not too late to book your place on this popular field weekend. A few places are still available. If you would like to join the group, obtain further information or request a booking form, please contact:

Kath Bull ARPS,
Segsbury, St John's Road, Crowborough,
East Sussex TN6 1RT.
Tel: 01892 663751.
E-mail: kath.bull@virgin.net.

Full details about the weekend can be found in 'The Iris', Issue No 90, page 27

Birdwatchers Summer Fair

**Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve, Brandon Lane, Coventry.
Saturday 4th June to Sunday 5th June 2005, 9.30am to 5.00 pm
Admission £5.00 plus concessions Free Car Parking**

- Binoculars
- Bird Art
- Bird Ringing
- Bird Clubs
- Bird Books
- Camera Equipment
- Clothing
- Digital Photography
- Digiscoping
- Dragonfly ID Walks
- Guided Walks
- Illustrated talks
- Refreshments
- RSPB Groups

Helping to conserve Warwickshire's wildlife

NG Annual Exhibition Digital Section

Despite the fact that committee were asked by members to include a section for digitally captured images in our annual exhibition, not one member has stepped forward and volunteered their assistance with this. Therefore, as there is no one on the committee with both the necessary skills, resources and amounts of free time, we have been unable to organise a section for digitally captured images for the 2005 exhibition.

If any member feels that they have the resources, computer skills and (most importantly) sufficient amounts of time to take on the responsibility of managing such a section of the exhibition for 2006, please get in touch with Peter Jones or myself. Contact numbers are printed on page2.

RPS Nature Group - Field Meetings 2005

Location _____

Meeting Place _____

Grid Reference _____

Leader(s) _____

Day & date _____

Cost (eg car parking) _____

Main subjects of interest :- _____

Items to bring (tick as applicable and add any other necessary items below).

Stout Shoes ☐ Wellingtons ☐

Waterproofs ☐ Packed Lunch ☐

Additional information:- _____

Name _____

Address _____

Tel No: _____

E mail: _____

For publication in the Summer issue please post to arrive not later than 31st May 2005

Nick Jarvis,
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Irthlingborough,
Northants, NN9 5RS

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or E-mail details to: Nickjarvis@aol.com

Book Review

Ocean Flowers. Impressions from Nature.

Carol Armstrong & Catherine de Zegher (eds).
2004. Pp. 336. Princeton University Press &
The Drawing Center, NY. \$49.95/£32.50 (hbk).

Contact: USA debra_liese@pupress.princeton.edu
UK lcorless@pupress.co.uk)

Plants have always attracted artists, especially since the Renaissance expansion of botanical illustration. The mid-19th century saw the arrival of photography - a technical and artistic development with far-reaching creative consequences, mirroring those unleashed by 21st century electronic media.

Ocean Flowers looks at an astonishingly creative period, exploring the explosion of drawing, photography, nature printing and other illustration, even mounted dried plants, linking art and natural history.

The book accompanied an exhibition in June-August 2004 at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies of British Art at Yale University. The material is drawn from several sources but concentrates on the work of Anna Atkins (1799-1871), who produced the first book to be illustrated by photographs - William Harvey's Manual of British Algae (1841).

As an artist and photographer, I was struck by the remarkable quality and variety of the 300+ colour illustrations in Ocean Flowers, which touch the subject's core and go far beyond the usual aesthetic experience to capture the imagination.

By taking an unusual perspective, Anna Atkins's shells, seaweeds, ferns and cyanotypes (plant forms reproduced directly on-to blue photographic plates) are an inspiration - lost beauty brought to life again through the medium of this stunning artwork.

The essays of the text and plethora of footnotes are maybe a little over-scholarly for a wider readership and suffer from a rather cramped layout. Nevertheless, here is a book to enjoy, one that is a rich source of images for those teaching art, design or natural history.

Diana-Elena Antonescu



▲ Detail from owl butterfly wing (*Caligo* sp.).

▼ Seed heads of Amazon Lily (*Eucharis* sp.).



