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THE **RPS**  
ROYAL  
PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SOCIETY



MAGAZINE OF THE NATURE GROUP OF THE RPS  
Issue No. 132 / Winter 2018

# THE IRIS



More Pictures from RPS Nature Group Summer Residential  
See page 4



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Copy should be sent as .txt or .doc files by email or wetransfer.com. Please do not send hand written copy.  
Digitally captured photographic images are preferred but scanned transparencies are also acceptable. Images (whether vertical or horizontal) should be supplied on CD or via WeTransfer.com as flattened 8bit sRGB Tiff files, 6" x 4" at 300 pixels per inch (1800 x 1200 pixels, file size approx 6.17MB). Please do not send larger images. Larger files may be needed for the cover.

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Cover image  
Blue-footed Booby by Dawn Osborn FRPS,  
taken in The Galapagos.

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Chairman of the Nature A & F Distinctions Panel

## Nature Group Exhibitions

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

# Editorial

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On this, my second edition of The Iris, I feel I am getting my feet under the table. I was pleased with Iris 131 and all the support I received during its production. There were a few errors in titling pictures from the Annual Exhibition, which I apologise for. I am sure readers will understand that The Iris is essentially an amateur production and that there will be, inevitably, the occasional mistake.

Anyway, apologies to the following whose name did not appear correctly alongside their photographs: Rosamund Macfarlane ARPS, the author of the print Bronze Medal photograph of the Snow Hare on page 23; Nigel Atkins LRPS, the author of the Highly Commended digital image of the Hoopoe on pages 29 and 34; and Richard Revels FRPS, the author of the Highly Commended digital image of Ice Shapes on the inside cover. I shall try and do better next time!

Thank you to the contributors to this edition. I do need more articles from members please. To set a good example I have written one for this edition! I shall be contacting some of you who have recently gained Natural History distinctions from the Royal Photographic Society with a view to include your story and panels in future issues.

There was an interesting debate at the last committee meeting about the inclusion of landscape pictures in Natural History panels and exhibitions. I think only four pictures which would loosely be placed in this category got a mention in dispatches in last year's Annual Exhibition. We concluded that Nature does embrace the physical as well as the living. If you have some interesting photographs of geysers, sand dunes, fiords, glaciers, or anything else that fits into this in this genre please send them to me so that The Iris can reflect this broad brush approach.

I am off on holiday to Malta soon. I think my photography there will be more akin to Travel than to Nature!

Enjoy your photography.



# From the chair

---

Welcome to the latest issue of the Iris. As I write this in Norfolk in mid October, the temperature outside is 25 degrees Celsius. 2018 is going to go on record as one of the hottest years we have experienced, possibly surpassing that last great heatwave year I can remember of 1976. In that year, a minister of drought was appointed (Dennis Howell), only for the UK to be deluged with floods shortly afterwards!

There is no doubt plenty of evidence of global warming and much, undoubtedly, is man made. This has major potential consequences, not least for the wildlife we all enjoy photographing. Flowers are appearing earlier each year (Orchids are a good example), and insects are emerging earlier year on year (Swallowtail is a typical example). The lives of birds too are being affected with summer migrants arriving earlier and leaving later each year. As for mammals, I am personally going to make a trip to the Thames tomorrow to see if I can see the Beluga whale which has found a home there for the last three weeks.

In September, I was proud to have held my Chairman's Day at the Smethwick Photographic Society. I am delighted at how successful the event was. I had invited three speakers to give talks. Steve Cham, one of the UK's foremost experts on Dragonflies gave a fascinating talk on the life histories of this wonderful and ancient group of insects. He illustrated his talk with some beautiful images, including short videos, which helped us understand several aspects of their behaviour.

Koshy Johnson FRPS then gave a talk which included a look at the seabirds of Bempton cliffs, together with a wide-ranging pot pourri of other wildlife images from around the world. His efforts to photograph the Gannets at Bempton extended to chartering a small boat early in the morning to catch the best light, whilst he was wearing a device which enabled him to keep as steady as possible while hand-holding a 500mm lens in a bobbing sea. He also mentioned the nausea associated with trying to put the camera on his target under these difficult circumstances. His other images included several shots from India, illustrating a variety of wildlife to be found there.

I had invited three successful ARPS candidates to talk on the day, and to show their successful images. This also proved very entertaining and indeed stimulating for the members in the audience who were contemplating submitting for ARPS or FRPS. David Bird ARPS gave a talk about his successful panel featuring wildlife of the Island of Youth in Cuba. Julia Wainwright ARPS inspired us with her panel of birds of the Western

Paleartic. Finally, Graeme Clark ARPS entertained us with his panel of fungi. All three spoke with passion in abundance about the trials and tribulations of the process of a successful panel, from thinking of an idea, to getting the images, to advisory day / advice on these images, to the assessment day itself, and, most importantly in my opinion, on the drive needed to continue and ultimately succeed with the process when you fall at the final hurdle.

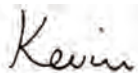
After lunch, it was Austin Thomas' turn to regale us with some stunning images of wildlife he has photographed close to his home (including his iconic Little Owl images) and Africa (including the big cats to be found there). It was another excellent talk. Austin is an electronic engineer by trade and he included some images in his talk of the technical equipment he uses on some of his shoots – including large flash units and very large and heavy-looking batteries to power them!

The day ended with a talk by me on Costa Rican wildlife and I was delighted to show some of the wonderful nature to be found in this relatively tiny central American country.

It may seem a long way off now, but our next exhibition will be held in April 2019 at Smethwick. However, in order to be in the exhibition, you must submit your images well before then – see the entry in this Iris. It would be very good to see entries from members who have not entered before. Don't be shy! After all, this is your organisation and we love to see other people's work. We have tried to make things as simple as possible. So, get looking again at the images you have already or go out and shoot some new ones which we look forward to seeing in April!

Finally, the Nature Group committee has a regular turnover of membership and in April we will be looking to appoint some new people on the committee. At present, the committee meetings are held at Smethwick. The committee is researching the feasibility of holding these meetings using Skype. I hope that the use of Skype for 'teleconferencing' will encourage members, who may have been put off by the drive to Smethwick, to put themselves forward for the committee.

Well, that's all for now so I wish you a happy winter's photography.





# RPS Nature Group Summer Residential

## Julia Andrew LRPS, Group Lead

June 2018, Juniper Hall Field Studies Council, Dorking, Surrey

Juniper Hall Field Studies Centre was the location for this year's Nature Group residential. It is set in the heart of Surrey Hills which is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The northern ridge of the hills is mainly formed by chalk and is separated by the Vale of Holmesdale which is formed predominantly of greensand. The geology provides a varied habitat and is a haven for rare plants and insects. Despite the extended winter, the weather was kind with warm temperatures and a gentle breeze; just about perfect for nature photography.

On the first morning the group, from locations across the country, met at Wisley and Ockham Commons. The surrounding heathland is protected and is home to sand lizards, snakes, and many wildflowers and insects.

Once at Juniper Hall, the group was able to take advantage of the centre's facilities including the use of moth traps. Each evening, John Bebbington helped set them up. A variety of moth species were waiting each morning. As a consequence, each day began with an (optional) early start, but most chose to take part and



*Lime Hawkmoth by Alan Wood*



*Mute Swan by Maggie Bullock*



*Crab Spider by Chuck Eccleston*



*Banded demoiselle female by Julia Andrew*

had already taken their first shots just after dawn.

At around eight-thirty each morning, the group set off to the first location. The mini-bus was driven by willing chauffeurs Jeremy Malley-Smith and James Foad.

After a picnic lunch, the group would set off for the afternoon shoot at a different and contrasting location. The afternoon shoot was always followed by lashings of hot tea and delicious home-made cake on return to the Field Study Centre.

With just an hour or so left to download, shower and recharge before dinner and evening entertainment there was no time to waste.

On Friday evening James Foad gave a tongue-in-cheek presentation called 'Don't Shoot The Birds' and on Saturday night John Bebbington gave an extraordinary talk on pollinators. Sunday evening's presentation was given by Jeremy Malley-Smith who fascinated the group with his talk on 'Scottish Wildlife'. All speakers shared much about photographic techniques, specialist equipment and interesting locations.

The first location visited on Saturday the group visited a chalk-face at a local lime-works providing a habitat for the Common Lizard, Slow Worms and several species of orchid.

During the afternoon and in contrast to the chalk-face, Newdigate Brickworks was the destination. This location comprises of disused clay pits that form two lakes and are home to Great Crested Newts, Broad Bodied Chasers and Emperor Dragonflies.

Chuck tracked our movements using his handy OS mobile app. You can follow Chuck's afternoon route at the brickworks.

For those who had a lengthy journey to Dorking, there was an option to meet a day early, giving them time to recover before the busy weekend. This group met at the Riverside Nature Reserve in Guildford and were blessed by clouds of Banded Demoiselles fluttering around the water's edge. Brilliant blue males danced, to catch the attention of glimmering green females.

On Sunday the group spent the entire day at Thursley Common National Nature Reserve. Here, there is an extensive boardwalk giving access to otherwise inaccessible parts of the reserve. There are magnificent views as well as access to bog habitats and their rare wildlife. Thursley is known to be one of the best sites in the country to see dragonflies. Many bird watchers go there just to see the Hobby, a bird of prey that is actually quick enough to catch dragonflies in flight.

Several members of the group spent a substantial amount of time observing a nesting Treecreeper



*Slow Worms by Chuck Eccleston*



*Common Blue by Maggie Bullock*



*Treecreeper at nest by Paul Stillman*



*Lunch at Thursley Common by Chuck Eccleston*





*Butterfly Orchid by Julia Andrew*



*Fragrant Orchid by Czech Conroy*



*Lady Orchid by Len Shepherd*



*Sharing techniques by Chuck Eccleston*



*White Bryony by Chuck Eccleston*

feeding its hatchlings. The nest had been built in a gap in the bark of a tree. Fortunately, Treecreepers are usually indifferent to humans and they didn't seem to mind the gathering audience.

The final day of the weekend was spent with a walk to Juniper Top and Juniper Bottom, led by John Bebbington. John shared his knowledge of the area and photographic techniques so very generously. Here we located the Broad-leaved Helleborine and a

variety of other orchids

The weekend provided an opportunity for people to share their knowledge of the natural world and their photographic wisdom and enjoy the company of like-minded friends.

Next year's residential weekend takes place 2nd – 5th August at Slapton Ley FSC in Devon. Details to be published in *The Iris*.





*Arrival by Chuck Eccleston*



*Banded Demoiselle on Cow Parsley  
by Margaret Beardsmore*



*Broad-leaved Helleborine  
by John Bebbington*



*Banded demoiselle male by Len Shepherd*



*Copper Underwing larvae by Mark Perkins*



*Juvenile Dark Bush Cricket  
by Maggie Bullock*

# SRI LANKA

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## Gerald Griffin ARPS

My wife, Sally, and I visited Sri Lanka for three weeks last winter. It was a 'tailor-made' visit to see the countryside, culture and to meet the people of this Indian Ocean island. Visits to wildlife areas were also high on the agenda and we asked specifically for a guide with a knowledge of natural history.

We saw plenty of wildlife both in the national parks and outside, by the road or on short walks through the countryside with our guide. We recorded 135 species of birds and many mammals including the rarely seen Mouse Deer, which is the size of a large rat. We did not see the Sloth Bear in spite of lots of searching. We found several herds of Indian Elephants. The males rarely have tusks and those that do are definitely in charge! The young playing and interacting with their parents made for some interesting shots. Guides are always on the lookout for Leopards and found several. We could probably have seen more if we were prepared to wait with the many other tourists at places they were known to be at. The parks are pretty crowded, although it is possible to get away from the crowds with a long drive. We had to change vehicle on entering the wildlife parks. The park vehicles were not designed for photography with a big lens and monopod. One of the best ways to see wildlife is from a boat on one

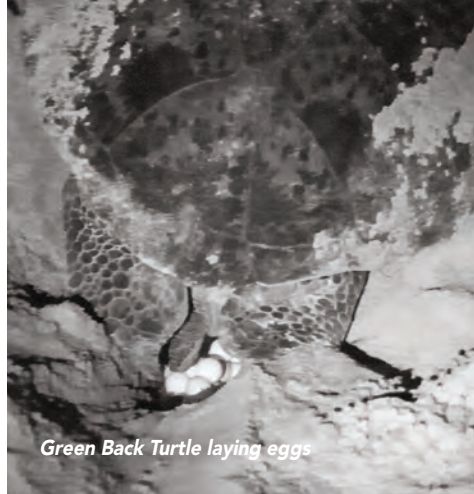
of the reservoirs or sea inlets. I got some good shots of Fish Eagles, Cormorants and Elephants from a boat on Sri Lanka's largest reservoir.

There were several wildlife highlights. Firstly seeing Blue Whales. This involved a long dawn boat trip from the southern coast. Our boat got quite near several and the size of them was awe inspiring. I got some sharp shots of the Whalesucker fish on their skin. Second was the Fruit Bat roosts. I have seen these animals before in India and Nepal but I have never been able to photograph them close to. Although the bats posed helpfully, controlling the background distractions was a major problem. The third highlight was seeing a Green Back Turtle laying eggs in a nest at night. The beach was well policed and getting shots was difficult as, of course, I could not use flash. Nevertheless I got some!

Many of the wildlife reserves are wooded and this makes photography difficult because of low light conditions and distracting backgrounds. I took full advantage of any extended grassy areas, ponds and lakes when they came into view!

There is a lot of to see in Sri Lanka and some of the hotels we stayed in were wonderful. However I think there are better places in the world to visit to take natural history photographs.





*Green Back Turtle laying eggs*



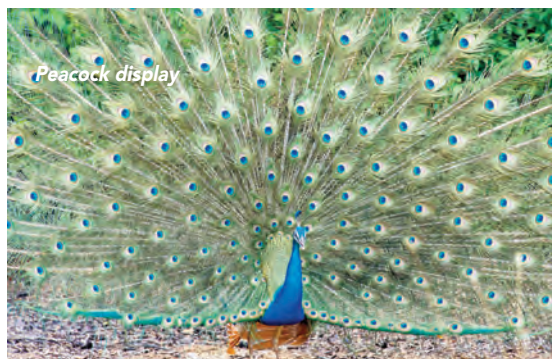
*Indian Nightjar*



*Garden Lizard*



*Sucker Fish on a Blue Whale*



*Peacock display*

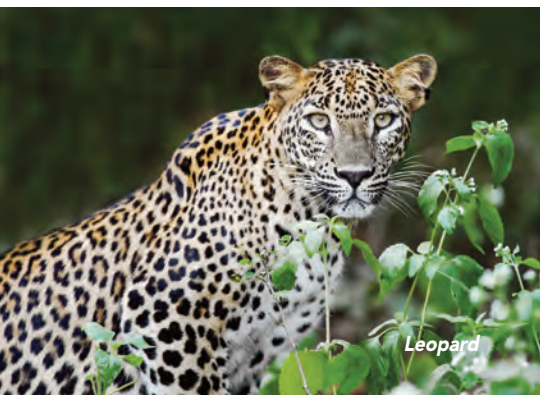


*Blue Whale*





*Indian Flying Fox*



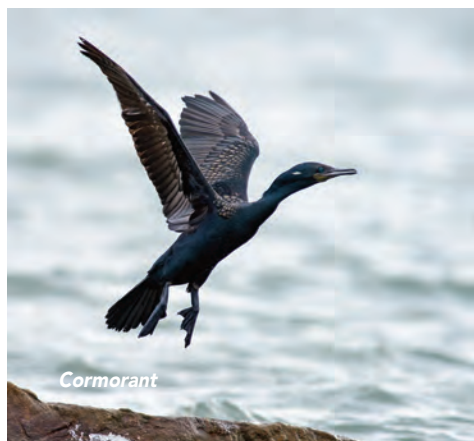
*Leopard*



*Endemic Jungle Fowl*



*Openbill*



*Cormorant*

## 2019 Members Exhibition of Prints and Digital Images

### Exhibition Selectors:

Roger Hance FRPS, Thomas Hanahoe FRPS, Kevin Elsby FRPS

### Exhibition Calendar:

Closing date for entries	31st January 2019
Selection Day	20th February 2019
Report cards	by mid-March 2019
Exhibition Opening	6th April 2019
Returned <b>unaccepted</b> entries	Late April 2019

The preferred method of entry is via the online entry system. All Nature Group members will be sent an invitation email. The email will contain a link to the entry system. Any members that cannot, or do not wish to use the online entry system can post a completed entry form along with a payment cheque to the address shown on the form.

The Members Exhibition page of the Nature Group section of the RPS Website will contain a link to the entry system, and a copy of the entry form can also be downloaded from there.

Gold Medals will be awarded to the best print and best digital image of the exhibition. In each category a Bronze Medal, plus Selector, and Highly Commended certificates will be awarded. The **'Tony Wharton'** award will be presented to the most successful entrant in the exhibition.

The acceptance list, plus a selection of award winning images, will be published in the Summer issue of 'The Iris'. The awarded images will also appear on the RPS website.

A DVD with all accepted images will be issued to each entrant

### Digital Entries

Please note the maximum size for images has been increased from 1400x1050 to 1600x1200

### Print Entries

We are continuing with the 'travelling' initiative run successfully for the last 2 years. All accepted prints will be displayed at the Exhibition Opening in Smethwick. They will also be displayed at Edinburgh PS and Wingfield Barns in East Anglia, and we will be looking for other locations in the coming months. The 2019 accepted prints will therefore be retained until the 2020 AGM. Unaccepted 2019 prints will be returned at or immediately after the 2019 AGM along with any accepted prints from the 2018 exhibition. For the prints to be displayed at the additional locations the mount size **MUST** be 40cmx50cm.

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



## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2019

### ENTRY FORM (Manual Entry Only) 1 of 2

#### ENTRANT DETAILS (Please complete legibly in **BLOCK CAPITALS**)

Name: ..... Honours: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Post Code: ..... Tel No: .....

Email: .....

I accept the Conditions of Entry and confirm I am a member of the RPS Nature Group

Signed: .....

#### Entry Fee

**The entry fee this year remains at £8 for the complete entry.**

The committee has decided to continue the standard fee for the complete entry, and that it should remain at last years value of £8. In view of the increasing costs of postage the fee for returning print entries has been increased from £7 to £8.

**Entry Fee      £ 8.00**

Prints will be returned by

Royal Mail 2<sup>nd</sup> Class or MyHermes

A signature may be required on delivery.

**Return postage £8.00      £.....**

**Total Amount Due      £.....**

**Please send your entry to:**

RPS Nature Group Exhibition

c/o Ralph Snook ARPS

8 Knole Close

Almondsbury

Bristol

BS32 4EJ

Email: [rpsngexsec@btinternet.com](mailto:rpsngexsec@btinternet.com)

**Please make cheques payable to:**

**RPS Nature Group**



## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2019

### ENTRY FORM (Manual Entry Only) 2 of 2

#### IMAGE ENTRY DETAILS (Please complete legibly in Block Capitals)

##### Prints – Category A

All creatures – birds, mammals, reptiles, marine life, insects, etc.

Cat Id	Image Title
PA1	
PA2	
PA3	
PA4	

##### Prints – Category B

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

Cat Id	Image Title
PB1	
PB2	
PB3	
PB4	

##### Digital Images – Category A

All creatures – birds, mammals, reptiles, marine life, insects, etc.

Cat Id	Image Title
DA1	
DA2	
DA3	
DA4	

##### Digital Images – Category B

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

Cat Id	Image Title
DB1	
DB2	
DB3	
DB4	

## RPS Nature Group Members Exhibition 2019

### CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

Entry is restricted to members of the Nature Group of the Royal Photographic Society.

#### General Conditions

- All entries must be titled with the correct English name. **Only use the scientific name** where there is no English name. **Trivial and/or cute titles are not acceptable, and will result in disqualification.**
- All images must convey the truth of what the author saw at the time of taking. **Any manipulation must be confined to exposure adjustments and the removal of minor blemishes or distractions.** The final image must have been produced from a single negative, transparency or digital recording and must not be a combination of images. The only exception is focus stacking.
- Work accepted in previous Nature Group Exhibitions will not be eligible regardless of which section it was entered into, ie. prints should not have been submitted as slides or digital images; nor digital images as slides or prints. **This also applies to near duplicates of previous acceptances.**
- Entering this Exhibition assumes that entrants have agreed to their entries being used to promote the Nature Group by inclusion in for example, the Exhibition DVD, the 'Iris', the RPS Journal and the Nature Group's section of the RPS website. Copyright of all images remains with the author.
- Acceptance of entries will be notified by a report card which will be emailed or posted to all entrants.
- Whilst every care will be taken of all entries submitted, the Nature Group cannot accept any responsibility for loss or damage, however caused.
- Submission of work implies acceptance of the above conditions.
- **Failure to comply with the Conditions of Entry will result in your entry being rejected.**

#### PRINT conditions

- Mount size for prints **MUST BE 50cm x 40cm**. Please keep the thickness of the mount to a maximum of 2.8mm. **Mounts too thick may not be hung at the Exhibition.** Please also note that any print mounts that are not the above size, or have on the back, Velcro pads, peeling tape, or any sticky substance, will be disqualified, as they could damage other prints.  
Overseas entries can be sent unmounted and packages should be clearly marked on the outside - 'Photographs for Exhibition only - to be returned to sender. No commercial value'.
- The back of each print must bear the title and name and address of the author. If using the manual entry system the number of each entry, corresponding with the entry form should also be included. The author's name must not appear on the front.
- If NOT entering via the on-line entry system then a CD/DVD containing digital files of your prints, must be included with the entry. See the notes below relating to digital files on the CD/DVD.
- All unaccepted prints will be returned as soon as possible after the opening of the Exhibition, but only if the correct return postage has been paid in advance. The prints will be returned in their original packaging – please ensure that this is adequate, and take into account that parcels have to be opened by the exhibition secretary. **Accepted prints will be retained for display during 2019. These prints will be returned after the 2020 exhibition opens in April 2020**

#### Production of DIGITAL files.

- **Maximum size is 1600 pixels horizontally x 1200 pixels vertically.** Files to be in jpg format, in the sRGB colour space, and 300dpi. **Please do not add a background fill as the projection software will do this automatically.**
- For manual entries the CD/DVD, with your name/s and distinctions written clearly on it, should contain a folder for each entrant with up to 16 image files in each folder.  
Folder naming protocol: - Name and RPS Distinction. (e.g. **Joe Blogs ARPS**)  
File naming protocol: - Category and number corresponding to the details on the entry form, space, and Title. (e.g. **PA1 Common Seal DB1 Oxeye Daisies**). Please use both upper and lower case, as in these examples.  
**Burn as a Data CD/DVD and close it.** Do not use options to write 'Session' or 'Multi Session'.
- All CDs/DVDs will be destroyed after the close of the Exhibition.



# Committee Elections 2019

## The Nature Group Committee Needs YOU!

The Nature Group Committee is elected to serve for two years. The next election will be at the AGM on the 6th April 2019 for the 2019 – 2021 Committee.

We are keen to hear from Group Members who want to join the Committee and help to run the Group. Perhaps there are things that you would like to see the Group doing, so why not join the Committee and put your ideas forward? At present we have two Committee Meetings a year at Smethwick, but we are planning to use more video based meetings to enable Committee Members from all parts of the UK and beyond to take part without travelling.

The Committee roles to be elected are:

Chairman

Vice Chairman

Secretary

Treasurer

Special Interest Group Representative    Four Committee Members

With changes to the Committee we particularly keen to find a new Vice Chairman, a new Treasurer and a new Special Interest Group Representative.

Please feel free to contact any of the present Committee members listed in The Iris and on the Group section of the RPS website if you want to know more about what is involved.

If you like to get involved in helping to run your Group or if you wish to nominate another Group Member then please complete the Nomination Form below and return it to the Honorary Secretary by Thursday 6th December 2018. We would like to hear from you!

## Nomination Form for RPS Nature Group Committee Elections 2019

I wish to nominate: ..... RPS Membership No. ....

For the Post of: .....

Name of Proposer: .....

RPS Membership No. .... Signature: .....

Name of Seconder: .....

RPS Membership No. .... Signature: .....

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

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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

Duncan Locke LRPS, RPS Nature Group Honorary Secretary, Park Cottage,  
6 Old Road North, Kempsey, Worcester, WR5 3JZ  
E-mail: [duncan.locke@btinternet.com](mailto:duncan.locke@btinternet.com)

Photocopies and scans of this Form are acceptable and may be returned by post or e-mail

**The closing date for nominations is Thursday 6th December 2018**



# The Pyrenees in close-up

Robert Thompson FRPS

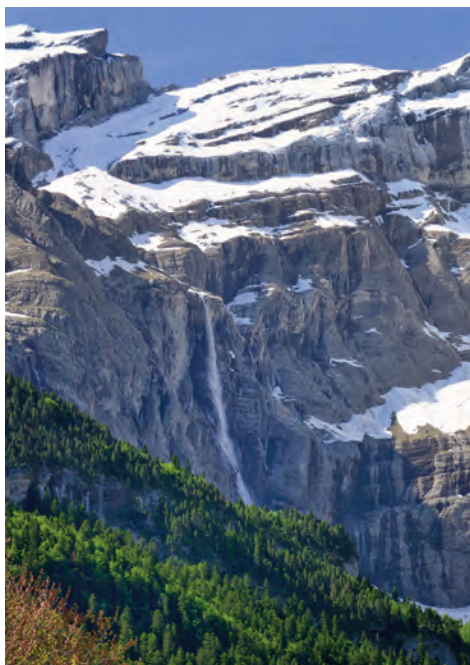


The Pyrenees are an impressive range of mountains stretching some 270 miles (430km) in length. They extend from the Bay of Biscay in the Atlantic Ocean to the western end of the Mediterranean Sea forming a natural boundary between France and the Iberian Peninsula. Their name apparently originates from a princess in Greek Mythology called Pyrene, daughter of Bebryx who was the lover of Hercules but fled to the mountains and died. Although the Pyrenees are a relatively young range formed during the Tertiary period some 100 and 150 million years ago, the region has some of the most remarkable scenery in Europe in addition to its exceptional flora and fauna. The alpine meadows bring colour to the landscape, and the roadside verges are overflowing with flowers and insects making it a real paradise for the macro photographer.

These majestic mountains differ in many ways from the Alps, in that they still retain much of their wilderness and isolation. The region encompasses many massifs, which divide the range into distinct areas. Some peaks exceed 3,000m and retain snow on their highest summits all year round. Deciduous forests carpet many of the mountain slopes, and fast-flowing rivers with impressive waterfalls are a familiar sight across the whole landscape.

I need little in the way of an excuse to visit this remarkable landscape, having run several workshops in the region and explored much of the south-west and central areas on a number of occasions. The

Cirque de Gavarnie is perhaps one of the best-known locations within the chain and situated approximately 3km from the small village from which it takes its name. The valley encompasses some amazing scenery and has a rich diversity of invertebrates and flowers



making it a magnet for walkers, photographers and those who appreciate nature at its best.

The Cirque itself is a remarkable vista; once described by the French Writer Victor Hugo as the 'Coliseum of Nature'. It is a vast, glaciated Amphitheatre of staggered, almost vertical igneous rock rising some 1,400m (5,000ft) into the sky and is perhaps the most widely-known landmark within the western Pyrenees belt. Plunging from the vertical rock face at the head of the Gave de Pau is a 462m (1,515ft) waterfall known as 'Grande Cascade de Gavarnie' (apparently the highest in Europe), which can be seen from the adjoining meadows almost 3km away. It has also been recognised by UNESCO and designated as a world heritage site.

The climate of the Pyrenees varies between regions so expect to get baked one minute and drenched the next. It's often warm and sunny in the morning followed by rain and the occasional thunderstorm in the afternoon. The combination of the Mediterranean and alpine climates produces a wide variation in plant and insect life throughout the range. The flora is rich and varied, with over 3,000 species recorded; more than enough to swell the digital cards of any photographer. A number of these are endemic and restricted to specific areas within the mountains. The main flowering period peaks in late June and early July, but an early visit in the spring will see the foothills carpeted with irises, yellow rattle,

gentians and narcissus followed later in the season with a range of orchids.

The insect life is numerous and diverse. Beetles, grasshoppers and countless crickets are abundant among the lush vegetation. The butterfly fauna is especially rich, with over 200 species recorded throughout the region. Apollos, Swallowtails, various Skippers and many Ringlets and Blues thrive in the lower pristine hay meadows, and roadside verges. Numerous day-flying moths, including, burnets, foresters and Hummingbird Hawk-moths can be seen hovering among the flowers. With so much subject material it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. When you experience a place such as this for the first time, it brings home the sad reality of what we as a country have lost especially since the middle of the last century. The advance and expansion of urban infrastructure, the loss of natural habitats and



*Opposite page, Cirque de Gavarnie & Grande Cascade de Gavarnie.*

*This page, left, Pyrenean Columbine *Aquilegia pyrenaica*, above top, Conopid Fly *Myopa buccata* and below Apollo *Parnassius apollo*.*

the change in population demographics have been mainly at the expense of our own natural heritage. Where to stay? The small village of Gavarnie itself has only a couple of hotels and limited accommodation. If you're not looking four-star accommodation, then some of the smaller places will be adequate for your needs. There are a few restaurants in the village; however most of them are closed even in late June. The nearby town of Luz-Saint-Sauveur to the north of Gavarnie village is a more sensible choice for a base; there is more selection in terms of accommodation and places to eat. The journey time from Luz-Saint-Sauveur to Gavarnie is about 25 minutes if driving direct and without distractions. However, the meandering road and flowery roadside verges on the way to the Cirque with nectaring butterflies, and other insects will have you stopping at every layby.

The flower-rich meadows and the general area around the Cirque is a utopia for butterflies and day-flying moths; many are set against chocolate box scenery. The river here is also vibrant, fast-flowing, with meltwater coming from the snow-capped rock faces. Alpine Marsh Orchids are common along the track and roadside verges. Several other species, including Greater Butterfly, Fragrant, Vanilla and Burnt-tip Orchids were a frequent sight along the roadside and around the waterfalls. Flower photography can be challenging especially when the light is strong and directional. On a previous workshop a couple of years ago we awoke every



Left, Alpine Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza alpestris*.  
Above Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and  
River d' Estaubee Lac de Gloriettes.  
Below, Alpine Marmot *Marmota marmota*.





morning to clear blue skies for 12 out of 14 days which made photography somewhat challenging. When sunlight is intense diffusion is a sensible approach, and although it can slow things down a bit, the results, however, are more acceptable and better than the alternative of harsh light and deep shadows.

There are many locations within the Gavarnie region including, the Ossoue Valley, the Cirque de Troumouse and the Barrage des Gloriettes; a local nature reserve and another well-known haunt for some endemics including pyrenean eryngium and pyrenean saxifrage; many of them are found on the road up to the dam. It is also a reliable location to see lammergeiers, alpine choughs and griffon vultures among the frequent whistles of the alpine marmots. The scenery in this region is impressive with the Gave d'Estaubé flowing through the valley and providing an attractive foreground against the snow-capped massif of the Cirque d'Estaubé in the distance. The area is particularly good for a wide range of insects, including black-veined whites, various fritillaries, ringlets, skippers, apollo, and turquoise blues.

Another excellent location is the Lutor Valley near the small town of Cauterets. Driving up through spectacular pine woodland provides unique opportunities to photograph the numerous waterfalls en route to Pont d'Espagne. From there you can trek up to Lac de Gaube; an area of spectacular scenery that has many other species of butterfly including clouded apollo, pearly heath, mountain ringlet, sooty copper and mountain clouded yellow, not to mention the variety of



grasshoppers and crickets that jump away as you walk.

It is easy to be overwhelmed when you encounter a place such as this, and one could easily spend all of your time working the side roads to the exclusion of everything else. Some of the best locations are on the many small flowery bye roads where there was a lot more shelter from the wind and suitable shade later on in the evening. Most of the region is under protection and is perhaps the last area of genuinely unspoiled wilderness left in Western Europe.

*Left, Black-veined White Aporia crataegi.*

*Above, Wart biter Decticus verrucivorus.*

*Below, Pearly Heath Coenonympha arcania*



# Galapagos - The Enchanted Isles

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A photograph of two sea lions on a sandy beach. The sea lions are dark brown and appear to be interacting, with one raising its head towards the other. The background shows the ocean with gentle waves and a clear sky.

by Dawn Osborn FRPS

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returning to the airport for our flight to the islands. On arrival our immigration formalities were completed, our luggage collected and an hour later we were on board our home for the next two weeks.

Our routine for the next two weeks followed a pattern of breakfast at 05.00hrs, then departure by Panga for our morning shoot, usually putting us on shore around 06.00hrs. Back on board by 10.00hrs, refreshments, snorkeling or kayaking for those who wanted, followed by lunch on board, usually while sailing to our next destination and our afternoon shore excursion which ended at sunset. Our shore excursions were normally 3 - 4 hours. Dinner and bed rounded off the day. The weather always allowed our meals to be enjoyed on deck. The cabins, compact rather than spacious, all had en-suite bathrooms.

Galapagos National Park has strict regulations regarding the timing and duration of shore time for each vessel. Our time under sail was controlled by the need to be at every landing point at a precise time. Sail gave way to the engines when we needed speed. Nevertheless we were always first on the beach in the morning and our afternoon excursions ended when the sun set. We never felt hurried and there was always time to get the shots you wanted.

For this trip I travelled with 3 camera bodies and three lenses - EOS 1DX, 7DMkII and 5DMkIV, 300mm f2.8 + X2 converter, 100-400 MkII and 24-70 f2.8 MkII, a tripod & gimbal head for the 1DX + 300mm combination. Before each shore excursion I would decide which 2 camera/lens combinations I would carry based on what we expected to photograph. A Think Tank Airport Ultralight back-pack, 11" MacBook Air, card reader and portable SSD storage device completed the kit list.

When going ashore there are two types of landing - the 'dry' and the 'wet'. A wet landing is when the pangas pull in as close as they can to the beach; you roll up your trousers, carry your shoes and slip over the side into the shallow water. Dry landings are made where a jetty has been built, usually where the water is too deep and/or the shoreline is rocky.

Our first ports of call were Prince Phillip's Steps and Darwin Bay, both on Genovesa Island, north of the Equator. Genovesa was our first 'wet landing'. Sea Lions, Frigate Birds, Red-footed and Nazca Boobies were among the first species to greet us and be photographed. It was challenging to keep up with the aerial acrobatics of the frigates as they chased the boobies. Images of courting Swallow-tailed Gull, Marine Iguana and Mockingbird were captured in the light of a setting sun set before we had to leave.

We awoke the next morning at James Bay on



*Galapagos Shearwater*



*Frigatebird chasing a Red-footed Booby*



*Great Blue Heron with young Marine Iguana*



*Lava Heron*

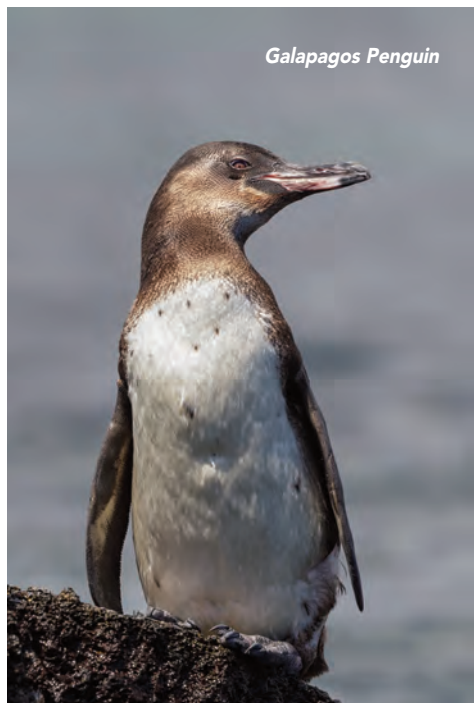




*Marine Iguana*



*Giant Tortoise*



*Galapagos Penguin*

Santiago Island. The beach was deserted except for Sea Lions and Marine Iguanas. We saw geological features such as rope lava and took our first shots of Sally Lightfoot Crab, Lava Heron, Great Blue Heron, American Oystercatcher, Mockingbird and Fur Seals. Back on board, we had chance to download and view images as we sailed to Isabela Island - our destination and evening mooring, Punta Vicente Roca.

We boarded the pangs at dawn; the ocean was a flat calm and we cruised around below the cliffs - curious Sea Lion, Galapagos Penguin and Green Turtle swam past and we could see shoals of fish below the water. Our attention was attracted by the fin of a huge Sunfish as it broke the surface of the water and then swam in lazy circles around our dinghy. Back on board, after breakfast, while others went off snorkelling, I sat on deck with my camera and photographed Elliot's Storm Petrel as they hovered around the boat, their feet in the water.

We enjoyed an afternoon sail to Tagus Cove where we went out in pangas and found Galapagos Penguins and Flightless Cormorants both in the water and on the cliffs, then went ashore and climbed up above Darwin Lake to take in the view before returning to our ship as the sun was setting.

The next day, having sailed the short distance to Fernandina Island, we boarded the pangas and went ashore at Punta Espinoza. We spent our time photographing Sea Lion, Pelicans, Lava Heron busy catching crabs and a Great Blue Heron who caught a small Marine Iguana and obligingly flew off with its catch right in front of my camera. There were interesting lava formations dotted with Lava Cactus to photograph until a Galapagos Hawk was spotted in a tree - while we were getting off a few shots it suddenly swooped down and grasped a newly hatched marine iguana. Pretty exciting and all before breakfast.

After lunch we arrived at Urbina Bay - Isabela Island. It was a wet landing followed by a walk across the beach and into a forest. It was here we got our first sighting of wild Giant Tortoises and Land Iguanas plus another opportunity to photograph Galápagos Hawks, warblers and a variety of the numerous finches.

Isabella Island is the largest in the archipelago and in all we spent three days at six different sites. We explored Elizabeth Bay by panga. This shallow estuary, abundant with mangroves contained Golden Ray, White-tipped Reef Sharks, turtles, penguins and pelicans - we photographed them all. Huge numbers of birds were spotted offshore. Curious, we motored over and found a feeding frenzy in progress. Huge

numbers of Galapagos Shearwater and Petrel, Brown Pelican, Boobies and Frigates busy feeding on an eruption of small fishes. At Punta Moreno, again we went out in pangas and found good opportunities to photograph Penguins, Flightless Cormorants and Marine Iguanas as well as Blue-footed Boobies and Lava Heron on the offshore lava stacks. At Puerto Villamil we travelled up into the highlands to see Sierra Negra, one of the world's largest active shield volcanoes, but unfortunately heavy low hanging clouds prevented any views of the caldera. Returning to Puerto Villamil we enjoyed a walk around lagoons, photographed Greater Flamingo, Black-necked Stilt, Smooth-billed Ani and a host of small birds before lunch ashore and a stroll along a coral beach before setting sail for Santa Cruz island.

After breakfast we went ashore at Puerto Ayoro and set off into the hills of Santa Cruz. We enjoyed a walk through cloudforest at Los Gemelos, a collapsed crater. We photographed numerous finches and other small birds. Our morning shore excursion ended with a visit to the El Chato Giant Tortoise Reserve and a very nice lunch. The tortoises were numerous and free to roam so it was possible to photograph them feeding on the vegetation and the fallen fruit below the Guava trees. After lunch we paid a visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station.

Our next port of call was Puerto Velasco Ibarra, Floreana Island. Before we set off I spotted a Yellow-crowned Night Heron picking up twigs and managed to get some good shots before we set off into the hills of Floreana for opportunities to photograph the rare Medium Ground Finch and other forest birds. In the afternoon a short walk at Punta Cormoran gave us another chance to photograph Greater Flamingo, Lava Heron and Blue-footed Boobies.

Española Island offered our only opportunity to visit a colony of Waved Albatross, as they are unique to this island. We photographed them soaring along the cliff edge and and coming in to land. There were several pairs displaying and even the occasional altercation. The cliffs also held nesting Swallow-tailed Gull and Nazca Booby. Then in the afternoon we went ashore at Gardner Bay further east. Against a backdrop of blue sky and azure sea was a beautiful coralline beach, and many, many Sea Lions. What a wonderful place and a wonderful experience to be there! Adult Sea Lions playing, fighting and courting and pups cavorting in the lagoon behind the beach. For me, Española was the highlight of the Galapagos.

At Punta Pitt, San Cristóbal Island we hiked around an eroded tuff cone stopping many times along the trail to photograph Blue-footed Boobies -



*Galapagos Hawk with Marine Iguana hatchling*



*Elliot's Storm Petrel*



*Waved Albatross*



*Nazca Boobies*





*Sally Lightfoot Crab*



*Giant Tortoise*

some displaying, others with white fluffy chicks. Later that day we arrived at Isla Lobos, a small islet separated from San Cristobal by a narrow channel. A colony of Blue-footed Boobies gave us opportunities to photograph them in flight, landing and displaying to their mates. Colonies of Great Frigatebird were also discovered and photographed.

We also visited Santa Fe Island, North Seymour, Bartolomé, Sombrero Chino and Cerro Dragon. Among the subjects photographed were Cactus Finch on Giant Cacti, Red-billed Tropicbird, Audubon's Shearwater, Great and Magnificent Frigatebird, Land Iguanas, penguins, Lava Gull, corals and some very impressive rock formations.

All good things eventually come to an end. Our last night on board was enjoyed with a sunset cocktail party and dinner followed by projection of a selection of the group's images.

After breakfast next morning we said goodbye to our crew and Ecuadorian Naturalist Guide, disembarked and headed to the airport for our flight back to Quito, where, all having different flights home, we said adieu to our tour leader and fellow group members. It had been a very memorable trip.

The challenges for the Ecuadorian Government increase yearly with the growth of visitor numbers and the increasing size of cruise ships wanting to visit. Keeping the correct balance between the needs of the islands fauna & flora, it's human residents and tourism will need a firm hand. Our best wishes go to the Galapagos Conservationists who are working to maintain this iconic natural environment to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the same wonderful experience we had.



*Blue-footed Boobies displaying*



*Yellow-crowned Night Heron*



**More Pictures from Sri Lanka  
see page 8**



***Female Purple Sunbird***



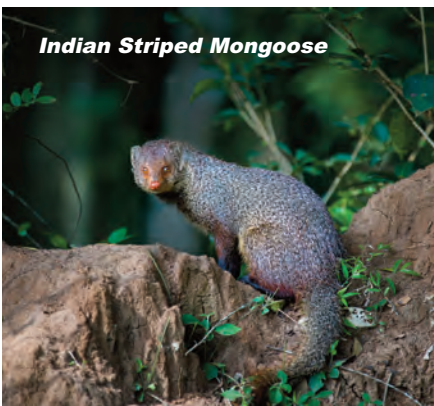
***Indian Elephants***



***Barn Swallow***



***Black Headed Munia***



***Indian Striped Mongoose***



***White Bellied Fish Eagle***

**RPS Nature Group Residential Field Meeting**  
**Slapton Ley Field Centre**

**Slapton, Kingsbridge, Devon. TQ7 2QP**

**2nd – 5th August 2019**

**Leader: James Foad LRPS**



***This highly successful Residential Field Weekend will run again in 2019.***

The cost is £210 per person single / £200 per person shared occupancy for three nights.

Prices include full board, packed lunch, accommodation and VAT at 20%.

Deposit will be required upon booking to secure your place.

All rooms are en-suite.

We will have the use of the centre's 16 seat Mini bus for which there will be a small extra charge per mile.

Main subjects of interest: Late summer flowers, insects and birds.

Moth Trap may run some nights.

I will take bookings when this appears in the Winter edition of The Iris

**For further detail and to book please contact: James Foad LRPS**  
**Email: [jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com](mailto:jamesfoadlrps@inbox.com) Phone: 07834 810430**