



Chair's Report for AGM 2024

Duncan Locke ARPS

Committee:

I must start my Report by thanking all of the Committee for their hard work over the last year to maintain and improve the services provided to our Group Members.

There have been three Committee changes during the year. In June 2023, Julia Wainwright resigned from the Committee after four years and I must thank her for all of her work including setting up our extremely successful Facebook Group. In November 2023, Ian Wilson joined the Committee as Web Administrator and in January 2024, Bruce Kendrick joined to help with Field Meetings in the north west of England and Group Publicity.

Nature Group Membership:

I am very pleased to report that the membership of the Group as of the 1st March 2024 was 948 as compared to 899 Members on the 1st March 2023, so there has been a 5.5% increase in membership during the year. Based on figures from the RPS, at the end of 2023, the Nature Group is now the third largest of the RPS Special Interest Groups.

As of the 1st March 2024, the Group had 875 Members in the UK, Eire, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands plus 73 overseas Members. The biggest overseas Group is in the USA, with 11 Members.

The Group continues to have a high turnover of Members to keep our membership Secretary, Christine Holt, busy.

Relationship with the RPS:

As some of you may be aware the RPS is implementing a Transformation Plan to assure its long term financial viability. As Chair of the Group, I sit on the Members Committee (MemCom) and two RPS initiatives that form part of this Plan and will affect the Group, have been discussed at length by MemCom.

Firstly, the Group now has new Terms of Reference (ToR) or Regulations to govern the operation of the Group. The new ToR limit the total number of Officers and voting Committee Members to seven (at present we have ten) and the term of office of the Committee will become three years as compared to our present two years.

The change in the size of the Committee will have little effect on our operations as the Committee will remain as it is, albeit with some non-voting Members. Subject to confirmation, I am expecting the term of office change to be implemented when the present Committee, which was elected for two years, comes up for re-election at our 2025 AGM.

Secondly, the RPS is planning to charge each Special Interest Group for the services that it provides to that Group. Details of the amount and the timing of the start of this charge are still to be finalised and are dependent on the RPS providing as a minimum a working Event Booking System.

As many of you may recall, at the 2023 Group AGM, a motion was unanimously passed by the Members present expressing strong dissatisfaction with the performance of the RPS in three areas: The RPS Journal; the RPS website and RPS financial control.

I have discussed these with Dan Jones, RPS CEO and I think that it is fair to say there has been very little progress. The, now quarterly Journal, still has very little coverage of Members' interests and Dan is well aware of this. Despite promises, the website saga seems to go on and on. On a more positive note the Group is now receiving Members' Subscriptions on time.

EGM 23rd September 2023:

I am pleased to say that the 84 Members attending the EGM held on Zoom on the 23rd September 2023 approved the motion to increase the Group Annual Subscription to £18 by a clear majority. This was implemented from the 1st January 2024 and will enable us to continue to provide a good service to our Members.

When the RPS introduces charges for its services, our Treasurer, Peter Ward, and the Committee will have to consider carefully their impact on the Group's financial position.

New Group Website:

I am sure that you are all now aware that the Group now has its own website separate from the RPS. My thanks go to Ian Wilson for setting this website up and continuing to ensure that it is kept up-to-date. We already have 285 Members registered on the site.

The new website provides us with an excellent place to advertise Group events, report on past events and share Group news with our Members. In addition it has enabled us to provide new services for our Members and improve on existing ones. In particular:

- Lightbox: Greg Lovett is in the final stages of developing this as a place where Members, particularly those working towards a Distinction, can get constructive criticism on their images
- Galleries: this provides an easy to use place for Members to share images from successful Distinction Panels, Field Meetings, etc.
- Exhibition: this provides a place for Members to view the accepted images in our Annual Exhibition
- Competitions: this has enabled us to provide a Monthly Competition, something we have wanted to do for several years

Monthly Competition:

We launched the Monthly Competition in October on the basis that the competition year would run from April to March; this to fit in with our AGM in April. There would be a winner each month and based on the accumulated scores there would also be an overall winner for the year with a prize presented at the AGM.

This Competition has proved very successful with over 105 Members entering at least one image. On average 48 Members have entered each month and 54 have scored the images.

Group Activities:

Ann Miles continues to coordinate a very large programme of Field Meetings, Zoom talks and Distinction Advisory Days. Those for the last year are listed in her Programme Coordinators Report. Earlier this year I did a count up of the number of events that the Group organised in 2023 and it was well over one a week, in fact we were close to one Field Meeting a week. All thanks to Ann's and others hard work.

This summer we are planning to start running Workshops to help Members improve their photographic skills. Our aim is to keep the cost low and to gradually build up the number of Workshops on a number of topics, based on demand, across the UK.

I'd also like to thank James Foad for organising an excellent Residential Weekend in South Wales including Skomer Island in June last year and I would also like to thank Ralph Snook for continuing to organise the Group's Annual Exhibition.

International Members:

Late last year the RPS launched an initiative to better serve its International Members. As part of this, a quarterly International Journal is now being produced.

The Nature Group has produced a short video on its activities that has been put on YouTube with those from other Special Interest Groups for International (and other) RPS Members to watch.

Members' Questionnaire:

Between mid-December and mid January, we asked you to complete a Member's Questionnaire. This was put together by David O'Neill and many thanks to the over 150 of you who responded. We have analysed the results, which have provided much useful information.

Notably, and thanks to the excellent work done by Dawn Osborn the Editor, The Iris Magazine stood out as being very popular with our membership. There was also enthusiasm for Regional Sub Groups, so this is something we are looking into.

Going Forward:

As I said at last year's AGM, I believe that the aim of the Group is to inspire and educate its Members into taking better images of the natural world and so we must organise events for Members to get together and develop their nature photography. We now have an excellent and ever growing programme of Field Meetings and Workshops and it would be very helpful if you could let Ann Miles or any other Committee Member know what events you would like the Group to organise.

Duncan Locke ARPS

7th April 2024