



# THE IRIS

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IFC Oystercatcher, Isle of May, and  
Rabbit, Isle of May both by John Bulpitt FRPS,  
see article on page 25

BC *Heracleum sibiricum* by Andrew N Gagg FRPS

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The Chairman of the A&F Nature Distinctions Panel, the President, Director General, Hon. Treasurer and Finance Officer of the Royal Photographic Society are also ex-officio members.

## Nature Group Exhibitions

Copies of Nature Group Exhibitions dating back to 2000, are available to book for camera clubs/photographic societies. If you would like to book one of these or the current or next years' Travelling Exhibition, please contact: Peter Jones ARPS, details above.

## Field Meeting Reports

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

# Editorial

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Firstly, a huge thank you to all who responded so quickly to my plea for articles. If yours isn't included in this issue it will be used either in the Spring or Summer 2006 issues.

In this issue Andrew Gagg FRPS tells us how he went about putting together his successful 'F' panel and shares with us some of the stunning floral studies which made up his submission. Congratulations Andrew! In addition to the conclusion of Ludi Lochner's advice on visiting the Kruger, there are also interesting accounts of photographing birds in Texas, fungi in spring, flora on limestone pavements and the Isle of May. In addition we have reports on the Nature Group Convention and the NG Field Weekend at the Kingcombe Centre near Dorchester.

In this issue you will also find the annual plea to members to host a Field Meeting. Please don't put off filling in the form - Nick Jarvis desperately needs new leaders and new venues to be able to put together a programme of events for next season. Don't be shy - give him a call. Field Meetings are a great way to get to know other members, meet new friends and enjoy a day out with like minded people.

The centre pages of this issue of The Iris, comprise your Entry Form for the 2006 Nature Group Exhibition. Please read the instructions carefully. Every year Peter Jones' job is made more difficult because members fail to correctly complete the entry form. The 2006 exhibition includes a section for digitally captured images. Please read the instructions carefully and follow them precisely - we don't want to scare off our new Digital Section Secretary by creating too many difficulties in his first year. I appreciate that you may not want to remove pages from The Iris, so you may also download the Entry Form from the website. Speaking of which - have you logged on to our new website yet?

Planning of the next issue of The Iris is already underway and will contain items of interest from around the world and closer to home. So, watch this space.



# From the chair

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Sitting here on the shores of Lake Minnewanka watching the early morning mists gently rise and drift above the surface of the waters, I feel the chill of autumn in the air as I soak in the atmosphere of another beautiful Canadian morning, the only sounds to break the silence of this tranquil setting being the waters lapping at my feet and the eerie almost haunting calls of the Loons breaking the chill silence. Wendy and I are on our travels again and thousands of miles from home in this wonderfully evocative setting in the Rockies, I can't help but pause for a moment and wonder at life's strange twists and turns - how just when you think you are settled and secure, events beyond your control impact and create major life style changes when you weren't looking for any. Even stranger, both Dawn and I, hundreds of miles apart find ourselves in exactly the same situation!

The upshot of that statement is that since I last wrote 'From the Chair' I now find myself in the position of calling myself a professional wildlife photographer and tour leader, which I'd always dreamed of doing, but hadn't planned on doing quite yet. That's my life changing news! I'm sure Liz will tell me its something I should have done years ago - thanks Liz!

So I wonder, if I've travelled half way across the world and managed a fairly major career change, what on earth have you all had to contend with and been up to over the past few months? Nothing too drastic I hope.

Back home and once again I find myself sitting at the PC on a wet, grey and rainy morning. Summer a distant memory. Here in Norfolk it actually wasn't so good, warm yes, but with too few bright sunny days until mid-August. August has never been my favourite month; there never seems to be much around to photograph and the light is always too harsh with bland hazy skies.

Anyway we're into Autumn now - perhaps my favourite season although I don't really know why - it just feels right and there's certainly lots going for the NH photographer. Hopefully this year the fungi season will be productive - due to long dry periods at the end of the summer, the past few haven't quite met my high expectations!! I confess to thoroughly enjoying the challenges of fungi photography

and, as always, I'm looking forward to a good autumn crop and with winter knocking on the door I wish you all likewise.

News from the committee is that we've all been very busy during the past few months. I'm very pleased to announce that our efforts have paid off and we are introducing a digital section in the 2006 annual exhibition. I'm highly delighted about this and see it as another milestone achieved by the group. However, because we can't even begin to guess the entry level, the closing date for DI entries is one month earlier to allow adequate time for processing and entries are to be sent to a different address from the prints and slides. Therefore please do not send CDs with print or slide entries (or vice-versa).

Can I ask you all to actively support the annual exhibition, very few of you do, it's certainly one of the best NH exhibitions around, it's your exhibition and if it's the only way in which you're able to support the group, then please enter.

May I also remind you all about our other milestone achievement - the group web-site which continues to go from strength to strength. If you haven't yet signed up and joined in its activities then please do so, it can only be as good as you all allow it to be.

The subject of encouraging new and younger members was raised at the last AGM and on that subject I'd like to welcome Cathryn Nurse our newest and youngest member to join the group. I hope that your studies allow you to join in our activities and I look forward to meeting up with you during the years to come. If you feel that you need any help or advice Cathryn, please do not hesitate to give any of us a call, send an e-mail or post a message via the group's web-site.

On a final note and on behalf of my fellow committee members I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a very happy and prosperous New Year. Make 2006 the year you get more involved with Nature Group activities.

*David*

# A Fellowship with Botanical Prints

Andrew N. Gagg FRPS

I have always specialised in photographing wild botanical subjects, ever since I hijacked my Mum's hobby when I was at college.

I gained an Associateship in 1989, partly I believe on the strength of a small book I was asked to illustrate for Macmillan, by no less than Dr. Max Walters and the late Dr. Franklyn Perring, prime movers in the Atlas of the British Flora, and major contributors to the Flora Europaea. On the suggestion of our photographer at the BBC, I had gone straight for an 'A' without attempting Licenciateship. This piece of arrogance paid off, and I accepted my award, very pleased but not feeling as if I'd made that much effort.

Too many years elapsed, until I decided that time was no longer on my side, and that if I wanted to achieve the ultimate distinction from the RPS I had better get on and do it!

I attended a workshop in Swansea, taking a selection of what I thought was the right kind of image, and from it gained an idea of what was required, principally from Harold Grenfell FRPS. I had thought of showing all parasitic plants – Orobanche, Cistanche and the like, but my selection was unnecessarily narrow it seemed. My wife Christine came with me, returning home with a phrase which was later to haunt me – the now badly over-used expression “the wow factor”. (Blame the TV lifestyle programmes for wearing this one out!)

Subsequently, a submission of twenty slides failed, with comment to the effect that members of the panel were familiar with my published pictures, and it didn't seem to represent the best of my work. Oh dear! “Could try harder!” Now what...?

Realising that I needed advice, I contacted Tony Wharton FRPS. My only correspondence with Tony had hitherto been a somewhat fractious exchange in print in these very pages over inaccurate spelling of Latin names. Putting all that behind me, I phoned and paid an initial visit, in slight trepidation, but coming away with (a) the significant notion that I should create and submit prints next time and

(b) the fact that Tony is a really nice guy, with a lot of knowledge and a desire to help aspiring applicants succeed, and that he does not bite!

As the digital tide was rising rapidly around me, the prospect of creating twenty digital prints of good enough quality was daunting, but not nearly as daunting as the idea of doing the same thing by darkroom methods! I whittled down the collection of ‘possibles’ I had shown to Tony to twenty-five or so, taking heed of his parting remark that the final selection must be mine, as that was an essential part of the test.

It is now almost traditional to refer in these cases to ones spouse as ‘my sternest critic’ - believe me she really was (and still is). Christine continued to scrutinise my selection minutely, regularly belabouring me with the now-hated “wow factor”. I had tended to include ‘scientific’ pictures of rather dull plants, but I was prodded towards those images which had most visual impact, in terms of colour, composition and striking subject. Rarity was never a consideration – I knew a poor picture of an excitingly obscure species would get me nowhere.

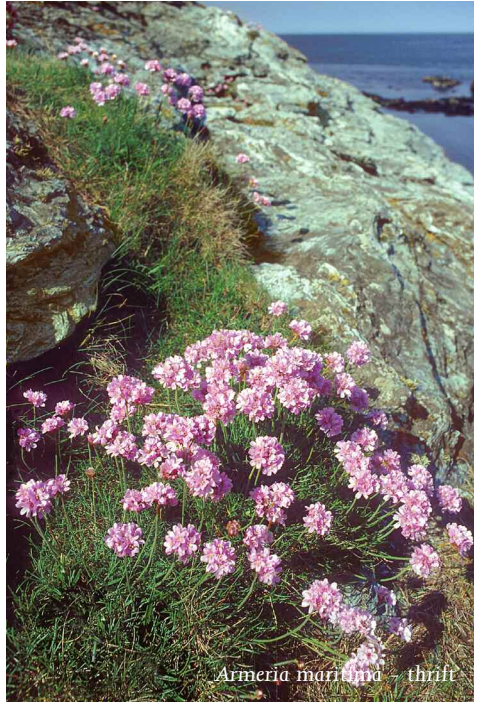
There was now a fair mix of digitally originated images from my ‘new toy’ – an Olympus E-1, and from scanned slides, some going back a good few years – one or two had been part of my ‘A’ submission. The transparencies were all taken with one of my Olympus 35mm cameras – mostly the OM4Ti, using a favourite 24mm lens for ‘habitats’, and a 50mm macro for ‘portraits’. They were all from my library, built up over many years, as my attempt to record, at least in part, the flora of Europe. The final title therefore was to be ‘Flora Europaea’.

My methods are mostly conventional, but my big bugbear has always been tripods – I hate them. In the context of close-ups, depth of field is so limited, and camera shake so likely that it is essential, but it is no use battling with all that ironmongery if the plant isn't still! If there's the least bit of breeze when you make the exposure it becomes pointless. Finding a support low enough





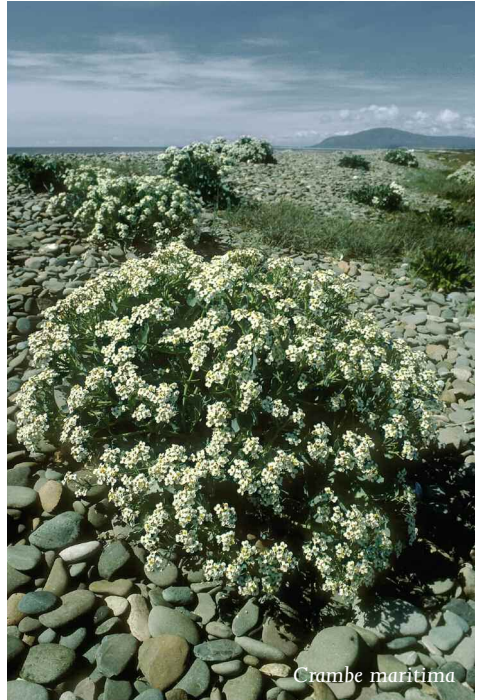
*Ranunculus glacialis*



*Armeria maritima* - thrift



*Lysichiton americanus*



*Crambe maritima*

to get down 'eye to eye' with the subject can be difficult. The legs don't spread far enough on most 'miniature' tripods, so that a big camera is unstable and topples. 'Benbos' will get you down low or into awkward positions (and your camera!) - I remember describing them in print once as 'demented bagpipes'! Ground spikes are possible if there is ground to spike, but the most interesting plants often seem to grow on solid rock!

I suppose the missing ingredient was patience. Patience to carry a tripod, and patience to adjust it with care, and the patience to wait for a lull in the breeze - I've now learned that an opportunity usually does offer itself, eventually.

Part of the reason for using a tripod is of course to enable the use of a small aperture to gain depth of field (and a concomitant long exposure). When a composition is just a single flower, its centre should be sharp, like the eyes in a portrait, but the nearest parts need be acceptable as well. So while in very close work, it is a battle to have sufficient depth of field, it can be a two-edged sword - a nicely defocused background is frequently what's needed to isolate the plant and avoid distractions.

Biscuit-brown stems, all at different angles, are one of the worst offenders. So depth of field needs to be checked using the 'stop-down' button.

A sensitive issue is 'gardening'. A bit is inevitable to obtain an image that is free from foreground vegetation and un-marred by distractions. My guidelines have always been:

(a) Put the plant and its habitat (including other nearby plants of the subject species, or any other) first. Ensure that young plants are not crushed in the effort to make the best picture.

(b) Whatever you move (especially that which is living) should eventually be replaced where it came from, uninjured. It can almost always be pressed gently to one side rather than cutting or uprooting. My old white sun hat has often been a gentle weight for stems and such, and sometimes doubles as a white reflector!

(c) Do nothing which affects the scientific truth of the resulting image. My purpose in this kind of image-making is to make an honest statement about what a particular species looks like in context.

(d) Cast around to select the most suitable specimen first, and the results will probably be superior, with less effort needed.



*Serapias cordigera*



*Cistanche phelypaea*



*Trifolium montanum*



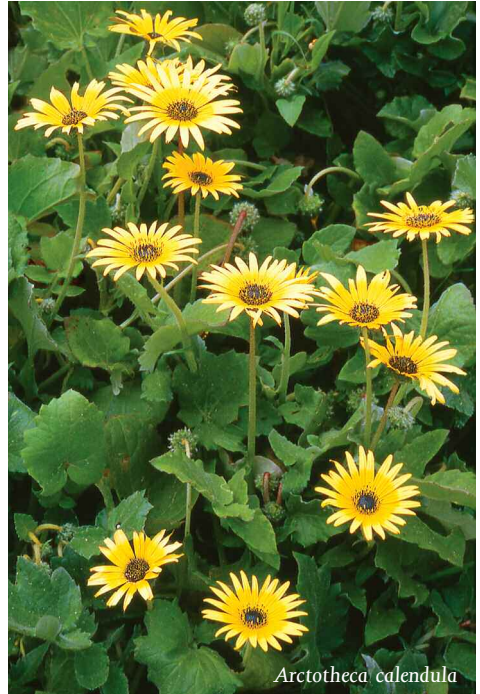
One technique seen in some of the images is the use of wide-angle. My favourite lens was my 24mm Zuiko, and now the wider zoom on my E-1 does the job. A plant can be shown whole, and in context ecologically. Such an image is packed with information, and can be pictorially striking. For small subjects I use dioptic supplementaries. Because of the short focal length, I can often work hand-held without detriment. This allows me free rein to sort out composition unhindered by all that metalwork!

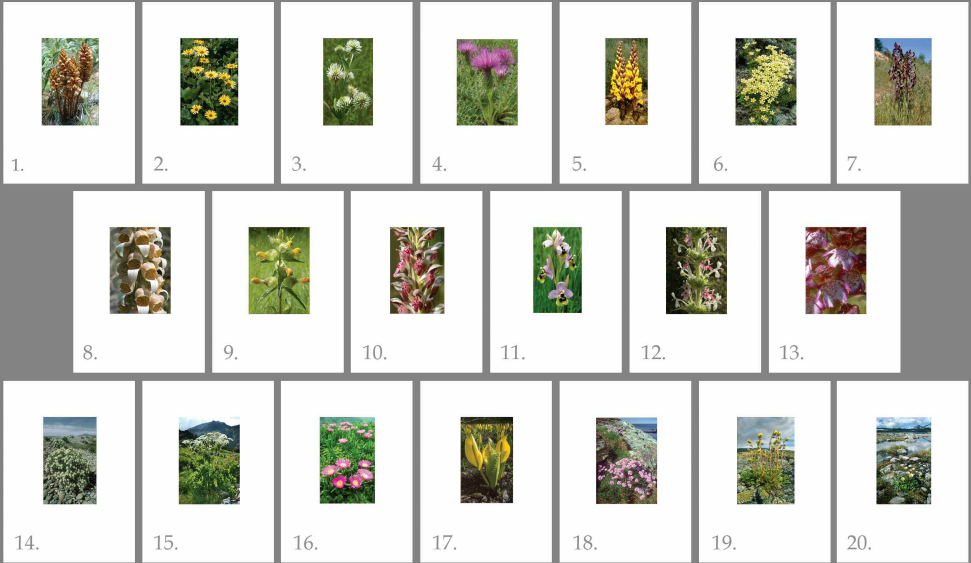
I spent the winter of 2004 getting through stacks of printer paper - nothing special, just Epson Premium Glossy. Early on I had abandoned the idea of satin-surfaced papers which seemed to diminish the sharpness and colour of the finished prints. After much thought I decided to submit A4 prints, the advice being that a good A4 was better than a less good A3. I experimented with margins and borders, and decided on a black pin-line (not more than 1mm) around the image to define its edge. Outside that I put about 15mm of white. I worried about this reduction in the area of the printed image too, but the effect was what I wanted.



I got through gallons of ink - an odd combination of Jessops Epson-compatible colour ink and Jet-Tec black - it was what I knew and I saw no reason to fiddle with the recipe. What I needed of course was to keep fullest control of nuances of colour balance, plus printing up or down to get the maximum information into the print. I made a chart for each image, noting as systematically as possible what I had done to each version, keeping it together with all the numbered prints until I achieved what I thought was 'the one' in each case. I revelled in the control. I'd never had the ability to achieve the same results in a darkroom.

Having produced a fairly finished batch of prints, I considered mounts. Dark boards were discarded - I was advised that they were not in fashion, and I was not going to contradict. Next I thought to match the board to the colour of the print paper, but found nothing that was an exact match in any manufacturer's range, so I sought a very pale cream just far enough away to avoid the impression of a 'bad match' with the white print margin. After much searching I found Britannia 'Astral White' an extremely thick (3400





microns/4mm) board that produced a beautiful wide bevel round the window. My chosen mount size was 22" x 16", a pleasing proportion when accommodating a caption window and within the size given for the assessment display stands. Such heavyweight board was beyond my ability to cut cleanly, so I sent the whole lot off to a local framer, with a full-size measured design for each mount with a window for the print, and another for a caption. To preserve the uniformity of the presentation the windows were both the same width. I set a fixed margin at top and a deeper one at the bottom, the difference in the varying height of my prints being taken up by the variable distance between the upper and lower windows. The captions were all quite long, with the scientific name of the taxon, authority, English name, and locale. After experimenting with the colour, I printed them in a mid grey, on the same Epson glossy paper.

I gave a great deal of thought to the overall look of the completed panel - considerable significance is placed on the display being balanced. My final line up consisted of twenty portrait format images, in a 'seven, six, seven' arrangement. Considerations such as strength and quality of colour in each image, and those which were obviously more appropriate to

the right or to the left of the display were accommodated to the best of my ability. To resolve this I used a set of 3" x 2" prints each mounted on white paper of the correct scale size to simulate its mount. This gave an impression of the separation between the displayed prints – an advantage of putting A4 prints in fair-sized mounts, reducing the interaction between neighbouring images.

All decisions made, paperwork and labelling double-checked, it was all boxed up and personally delivered to Bath. It weighed a ton, and I remember saying to the lady on reception that I was 'glad to see the back of them' thinking that I'd be happy never to set eyes on them again!

The rest, as they say, is history. I gather that the panel were fairly whole-hearted in their decision, and it can be imagined what I felt when that special letter of acceptance arrived!

It remains only to thank the RPS members who so willingly gave their advice to such good effect, in particular Tony Wharton.

Finally my affectionate thanks to Christine, "who mostly made it possible, if occasionally totally impossible!"

# Salud, dinero y amor – y tiempo para gozarlos!

by Terry Wall ARPS

'Do you want the good news or the bad news?' asked my partner Wendy scampering downstairs from her latest trawl on the internet. Just before Christmas she had hatched a plan that she knew I would be unable to resist; I had to merely find my airfare and to celebrate my forthcoming birthday we would be off to Texas for a week's photoshoot.

The bad news was that my birthday was going to start early at 0400 hours so that we would reach our destination in time!! However, I digress! For some time now we have been enjoying the images, via an email bulletin, from an American bird photographer and one of his favorite destinations is the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. Ninety-eight per cent of Texas is privately owned and after some research we discovered that many landowners, some of whom are actually photographers in their own right, are opening up their private property to other photographers. This entails a daily fee, per person, for photographic access, but well worth it!

So, on 4th May we flew Gatwick to Dallas with American Airlines, our airline of choice, stopped

overnight and then flew down to McAllen the nearest airport. We had arranged the whole week via email with Audrey Martin of Lens and Land, just one small group of landowners who share the same philosophy. John and Audrey Martin are the brains behind the Valley Land Fund whose prime mission is to save habitat and as time has gone on, have inaugurated Lens and Land and established a biennial Land Valley Photo Contest with handsome prizes for photographers and landowners alike.

From the word go, the level of hospitality was outstanding. Audrey had booked our motel for us arranging a 'photographer's discount' and gave us a personal warm welcome at their home, not far from Edinburg. Chachalaccas squawked as we drove into their gate. Four dogs rushed out followed by Audrey who ushered us into their conservatory where we sat down to chat with an ice-cold drink meanwhile keeping a keen eye on the feeders! We then walked around the property with Audrey showing us all the purpose-built hides with ponds and feeding stations, some designated for morning use and some for evening.



Northern Cardinal



John arrived home shortly afterwards and then we all set off for 'The Javelina' their second property some 30 minutes drive away where again we had a guided tour of all the hides so that we could choose which properties and hides we would like to try during our four days with them. Nothing is left to chance! There are diamond-backed rattlesnakes in this part of the world and the pack that they give you has advice on what to do in case of a related emergency - each photographer is also given a radio to keep in touch throughout the day. Each hide has birdfood, towels, handwash and both sites have restrooms with privacy screens. The fact that Wendy demolished one as she sat down shall not be mentioned!!!

So, for the first two days we shot at 'The Homestead,' the third at 'The Javelina' where we hoped to see and photograph Bobcat! and then as the early-morning birthday surprise was nigh, returned to 'The Homestead' for the final day. John and Audrey were the most engaging hosts - they took us to supper, cooked us meals and could not do enough to ensure the success of our visit.

Audrey's favourite treat for the birds is banana!! This was a surprise for us but not for the Great Kiskadee waiting impatiently every morning at hide number one!! Beautiful Northern Cardinals posed obligingly whilst waiting for a snack and many small migratory songbirds flew in to drink and bathe. There simply isn't room enough to list the possibilities so I advise you to browse on the website: [www.lensandland.com](http://www.lensandland.com) for further information. Last but not least after our final shoot at John and Audrey's we all went out for a Botana Platter, a delicious Mexican dish, at a local restaurant, accompanied by Mariachi musicians - a superb evening.

Wednesday 10th May. My birthday! I will not repeat what I said at 0400 hours but at 0500 we were off to meet our guide for the day, local wildlife photographer Larry Ditto who had been the winner of the first ever Valley Land Fund Wildlife Photo Contest. Meeting at a local garage we stocked up on the traditional American breakfast of doughnuts and coffee and squeezed into the back of his battered old pick-up truck.



Black-crested Titmouse



Painted Bunting



Green Jay

We eventually arrived at Roel Ramirez' Ranch near Roma; it was enormous! Now we understood the need for a guide. Setting up in a large concrete hide we were surprised to have a visitor; Roel himself arrived bringing a delicious second breakfast of hot bacon & egg tacos.

Finally we sat down to shoot. Green Jays came in tempted by oranges and the pond proved to be the essential magnet for birds and mammals alike. By 1000 hours it was too hot and too harsh but we stayed put until Roel arrived again this time bearing lunch and an enormous cardboard box containing a large sticky Birthday cake!! We repaired to the ranch for lunch where we met his wife Frances who had arranged all the culinary surprises. Time for a nap...

Exhausted but undaunted we set off out again for a different afternoon raptor hide. After a few hours we declared a truce and returned to Edinburg - we had another 0530 start the next day!

The next two days of our trip, we both agree, were the highlight of the week. We journeyed to Los Colmenas de los Cerritos, a ranch managed

by Lowry and Jessica McAllen on behalf of his parents. Here the hospitality and photography were simply outstanding, several morning and afternoon hides being available, built and prepared with great care by Lowry himself. Safely ensconced in a low level hide, Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, Northern Bobwhites and Black-crested Titmouse zoomed in and out and we hardly knew where to look. After a very fruitful morning we had lunch with Jessica and Lowry, followed by a short siesta. Revived, we set off again for our afternoon shoot. We spent both afternoons working from a hide set next to a huge pond. The light was gorgeous - Scissored-tailed Flycatchers swooped in to bathe, Cardinals galore perched for our entertainment, but for us, the highlight of the afternoons were the Painted Buntings. These beautiful birds, which we nicknamed 'paintbox buntings', came in to bathe just in front of us, perfect size, perfect light!

However, la piece de resistance was our final morning at Los Colmenas. Pleading old age and exhaustion we asked for a slightly later start of 0730. Lowry was anxious that it would be too late for his star performers but we arrived at the



Harris Hawk



Great Kiskadee

ranch in good time and followed Lowry off to a different morning hide. We settled ourselves in and as he potted about putting food out a Harris Hawk flew into the tree behind him to watch. Breakfast was late!!

Lowry drove off and the hawk flew in. Half an hour later he exited left and to our amazement two Crested Caracara adults entered stage right followed by a large pink-headed youngster! We had heard some undefined screeching and whistling noises – now we could see the culprit.... They trotted across to a thoughtfully placed roadkill rattler and proceeded to tear it to pieces and feed it to the chick. Half an hour later we had scarcely had time to breathe again and as this family exited left, in trotted a second adult pair accompanied by two large youngsters! An outstanding wildlife experience!

So, if you are wondering where to go for your next trip or need an idea for a birthday treat, this is it!!

If you are still wondering about the title of this article, it's a local toast that Audrey introduced us to: 'Health, Money and Love – and the time to enjoy them!!'



# The Fungi of Spring and Summer

by Kay Reeve FRPS

I am writing this on a wet day in September. The rain is streaming down the windows and dripping off the trees in the garden. Not a day for outdoor photography, then. But rain at this time of year is really quite welcome to the fungi photographer. Provided the weather stays reasonably warm, a good autumn season is in prospect. All fungi depend to a certain degree on moisture, so, with a bit of luck, my local woods and pastures should offer plenty of interesting subjects over the next few months.

But autumn is not the only time to go looking for fungi to photograph. The spring and summer can be very rewarding too providing there is a fair amount of rainfall, and the photographer has the right information about when and where to look.

In fact the year begins by offering the fungi photographer one of the most exciting subjects of all. These are Scarlet Elf-Cups, belonging to the genus *Sarcoscypha*. They vary in size from one to

five centimetres or so, are cup-shaped, obviously, and are usually brilliant red inside and pinky-white outside. They help the photographer by growing on logs covered with green moss, thus providing a perfect background! I have seen white ones, which from the natural history point of view are very rare and interesting, but the red ones are extraordinarily photogenic. They are perhaps more common in the western half of Britain, and the way to find them is to look for the habitat - fallen logs well covered in moss. In my area they can be found from the second half of January until March, but in most years the first week or two of February are the best. In a wood where they are prolific, they are quite spectacular - as though someone had scattered the forest floor with rubies.

The Morel season begins in March. They offer the photographer some of the most unusual shapes in nature, but in my experience are not particularly easy to find, as they do not seem to fruit, or at least to fruit prolifically, in their known sites every year.



This spring was good for *Disciotis venosa*, a disc-shaped fungus which grows at ground level, whereas spring 2004 was quite exceptional for *Verpa conica* and *Mitrophora semilibera*. I wonder - was this because the previous autumn had been exceptionally dry? This year I visited the same sites and found very few compared to the remarkable display of previous years .

The Morel season continues into May, with species such as *Morchella esculenta* and *Morchella rotunda*. When I have found these, which is not very often, it has always been in dune slacks. The books do not identify these as prime places to look!

In spring, many of us visit the woods to photograph the wonderful flowers that grow there. The next time you are photographing Wood Anemone, see if you can find its little fungal partner *Dumontinia tuberosa*, a small brown cup about the size of a thumb nail. I have seen and photographed it, but have not yet been able to include it in the same picture as a Wood Anemone flower. This could be one of my projects for next year.

At the end of April, look for St. George's Mushroom, *Calocybe gambosa*, a dirty white fungus which often forms really remarkable rings, requiring a 20mm. lens at least!

May and June bring the spectacular bracket *Polyporus squamosus*, or Dryad's Saddle. This is quite common, and you should have no difficulty in finding one, but finding one in good condition is a different matter. The weather is beginning to be warm and dry, and they shrivel up quickly. In fact, summer weather, with its limited rainfall and drying winds, is not particularly helpful to fungi, but one to look for in the high summer months of June and July is the Summer Bolete *Boletus aestivalis*.

Some species can be seen at any time of year if the weather is right. Examples are the Fairy Ring Mushroom, *Marasmius oreades*, Oyster Mushrooms, *Pleurotus* species, Velvet Shank, *Flammulina velutipes*, and Jew's Ear, *Auricula auricula-judae*. There are many others of course, and many other specialists of spring and summer which I have not been able to mention. If you are interested in fungi and have difficulty finding them yourself, join your local Wildlife Trust, go on a fungi foray and find out who knows about the sites to visit. Good hunting!



Dryad's Saddle, Warwickshire, June



Bolete and Rodkore, Birminghamshire, July



# Nature Group Residential Weekend - Kingcombe, 26 – 29 August 2005



Yellow Horned-poppy - *Glaucium flavum*

A small group (nine residents plus day visitors) gathered at Kingcombe Centre in Dorset for an enjoyable weekend of photography organised by Kath Bull ARPS and Nick Jarvis ARPS.

After a welcome to the area by one of the staff we tucked in to an excellent meal after which we were introduced to some of the plants and invertebrates we might hope to see during the weekend.

Saturday morning dawned cool and dull but a few of us got up early to look at the moth trap catch. The Centre's Robinson trap did well - 177 individuals of 28 species - but a small actinic 'Moonlander' trap, kindly loaned to me by Worldwide Butterflies, was not so successful. The catch included both of the Swallow Prominents (*Pheosia tremula*, the Greater, and *P. gnoma*, the lesser - rarely seen side by side) and several fine Canary-shouldered Thorns *Ennomos alniaria*.

The day's venue was an old plant nursery - Ryewater nursery - which had been transformed into a wildlife reserve by its owner, Clive Ferrall (with whom I had made quite fortuitous contact earlier in the week). He kindly showed us round

the main parts of the reserve (including his tropical butterfly house) before letting us loose. We were impressed by the variety of habitats he has created - limestone scrapes, rough grassland, ponds, lakes, sunny banks etc. and although the weather was far from ideal in the morning we found Clouded Yellows *Colias croceus* flying and a solitary male Chalkhill Blue *Polyommatus coridon*. There were an enormous variety of botanical subjects, including the bright blue Chicory *Cichorium intybus*, and Wild Marjoram *Oreganum vulgare* set among a stand of Wild Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*.

After a cup of tea we wandered into Kingcombe meadows where we found Bloody-nosed Beetle *Timarcha tenebricosa* and roosting Common Blues *Polyommatus icarus* which occupied us for a time. Later we found and photographed two magnificent Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars *Deilephila elpenor* in the garden of Beech Cottage.

For our evenings entertainment Kath had invited Colin Varndell (our leader on previous Dorset weekends). He gave us an excellent slide show entitled 'Wild Dorset'.



Sunday morning was one of those magical misty late summer mornings with dew-spangled spiders' webs and those of us who were up early enough found no shortage of subjects. The moth trap had done less well, but there were still a few good subjects. We were harassed by a young Robin, who clearly knew all about moth trapping!

After breakfast we visited Powerstock Common, a Dorset Trust reserve lying on Lower Greensand but with an old railway cutting running through chalk. There were numerous Red Admiral butterflies *Vanessa atalanta* on Hemp Agrimony *Eupatoria cannabina* and we found a predatory Shield Bug *Picromeris bidens* feeding on a Herald moth caterpillar. After lunch, Douglas Hands and a couple of others made a beeline for the pond where they were found attempting in-flight shots of Southern Hawker dragonflies *Aeshna cyanea*. The old railway cutting provided a total contrast to the acid common, with abundant Autumn Gentians *Gentianella amarella* and a range of other chalk flora. We caught a fleeting glimpse of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum* but the most spectacular find was a fully-grown Fox Moth caterpillar *Macrothylacia rubi*, on its pre-hibernation wanderings.

Returning for afternoon tea some of us decided to listen to the end of the Test match while others relaxed or went off in search of other subjects.

The evening gave us an opportunity to look at images brought along by group members.



*Picromeris bidens* feeding on Herald moth caterpillar



Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar - *Deilephila elpenor*

Monday was a Bank holiday, so we decided to set off early for Cogden Beach on the Dorset coast - and arrived before the car park began to fill. We found excellent subjects including a Great Green Bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima*, bright fresh clumps of Yellow Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*, and - surprisingly so late in the summer - some pristine Yellow Horned-poppies *Glaucium flavum*. In places the shingle was fringed with flowering specimens of Restharrow *Ononis repens* and there were seed heads of Strawberry Clover *Trifolium fragiferum*.

Again, dragonflies exercised some of the group, as did a fine stand of the structurally interesting Greater Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, back-lit in the afternoon sun. We found numerous Garden Spiders *Araneus diadematus* and the closely related *A. quadratus* on their webs, although the wind caused some problems, as it did for those who attempted to photograph dehiscing seedpods of the Greater Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*

Finally back to Kingcombe for a last cup of tea and the journey home. All had a very enjoyable weekend; we were made welcome and well cared for, and found plenty of subjects for everyone.

John Bebbington FRPS

# Nature Group Residential Field Meeting

Tuesday 30th May to Friday 2nd June 2006

**Kingcombe Centre,  
Toller Porcorum, Dorchester DT2 0EQ**

Following the recent field weekend at the Kingcombe Centre, members agreed they would like to return there for a short break in 2006. A number of features contribute to Kingcombe being an good base for nature photography. Set in rural Dorset, the Centre has a variety of photographic opportunities on its doorstep - thanks to a Lottery grant and a great deal of hard work by volunteers), its own bird-hide, paths by the river, a pond with a dipping platform, plus access to Kingcombe meadows and Dorset Trust grounds.

The cuisine is of a high standard; organically produced from local sources and deliciously cooked and served. The menus and packed lunches are varied and healthy. Staff are friendly and helpful. A mini-bus is available for Group use and there is a comfortable lounge for relaxing after supper. Additionally, a variety of nature reserves, all within a short drive of the Centre, provide further photographic opportunities.

In 2006, breaking with tradition and hoping to encourage members who can't get away at weekends we are offering a mid-week stay. In all other respects the programme will follow a pattern of out for photography during the day, and, following supper, relaxing while showing and viewing members pictures.

In recent years there has been an increasing tendency for members to delay booking for events until near to the scheduled date. This causes problems! The organisers have to make a block booking for accommodation at the Centre and agree a cut off date for cancellation if insufficient bookings are received. In the event of cancellation, members who have booked early are disappointed. If you are interested in joining the group, but feel unable to give a firm commitment at this time, please register your interest. We would appreciate your cooperation in this matter

Cost:- £150 - £175 according to accommodation. Includes full board, packed lunches, accommodation and VAT at 17.5%

If you would like to obtain further information, register 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.

## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form as soon as possible/  
or to arrive not later than 8th January 2005

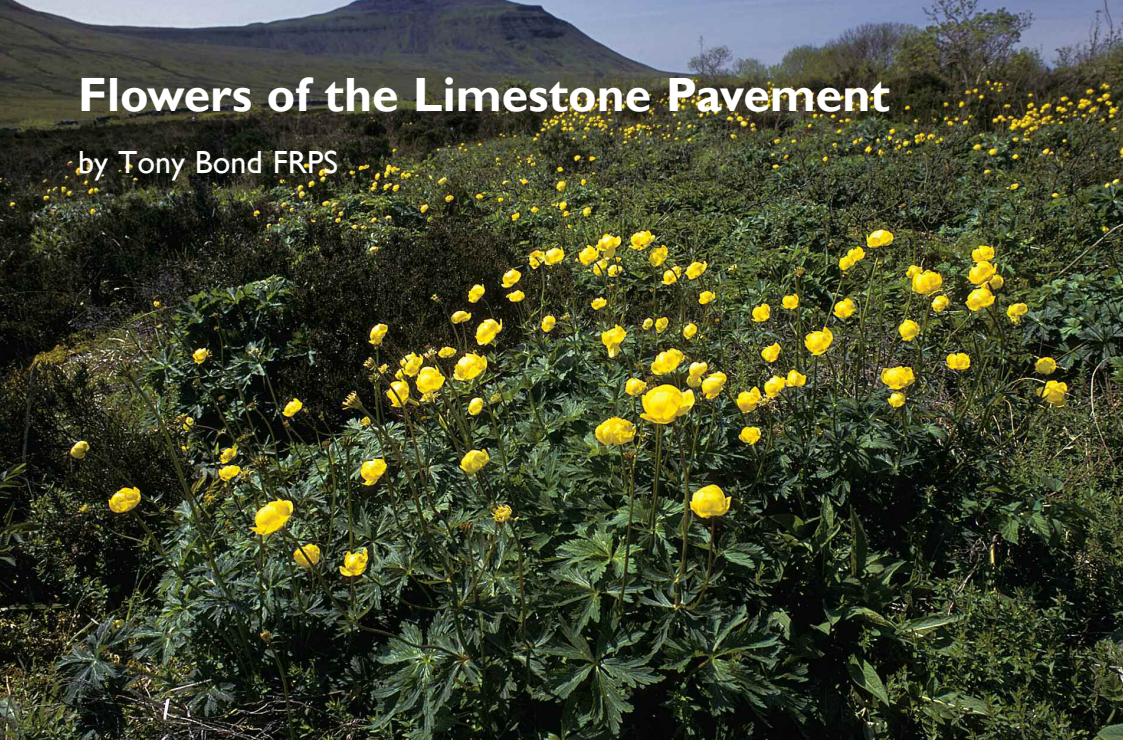
Nick Jarvis,  
31 Meadow Way,  
Irthlingborough,  
Northants, NN9 5RS

Tel: 01933 651477

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

# Flowers of the Limestone Pavement

by Tony Bond FRPS



One of the most distinctive habitats in Britain is limestone pavement. Examples are to be found in the Carboniferous limestone which stretches from Morecombe Bay eastwards through southern Cumbria and North Yorkshire. Limestone pavement is not restricted to Britain - the Burren, in the Republic of Ireland is famous for this habitat.

The origins of limestone pavement go back to the last Ice Age when glaciers covered northern England. These acted as giant planing machines in the places where we now find pavements. When the glaciers retreated they left these flat areas of limestone and dumped the occasional erratic. Since the retreat of the glaciers, rainwater has carved the pavements in blocks of limestone, clints, divided by deep fissures known as grikes.

Unfortunately, the fascinating shapes and contours created by water made the rock very attractive to gardeners. During the 1970s it was realised that unless positive action was taken, an irreplaceable habitat would be lost. This led to the purchase of Gait Barrows National





Nature Reserve (NNR), Silverdale, in 1977 by what was then the Nature Conservancy Council. Gait Barrows is the most accessible limestone pavement reserve and contains both damaged and undamaged pavement. Since the seventies, gardeners have been discouraged from using limestone by campaigns to stop extraction - you may remember one such campaign run by the late, great Geoff Hamilton of BBC Gardeners World. However, I have no doubt that extraction, legal or otherwise, is still going on somewhere.

Part of the fascination of limestone pavement is that you can find yourself looking at widely differing habitats all at the same time! There are enormous differences between the cool, dark grikes and exposed limestone and these result in very different types of flora. With the passage of time, soils have built up on the surface which may be of sufficient depth to support trees - Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) are the most common.



Conditions in the grikes are ideal for a range of plants which we would normally associate with a woodland habitat. Ferns are prolific, the commonest being Hartstonge (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*). Others include Hard Shield Fern (*Polystichum aculeatum*) and the nationally rare Rigid Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris villarsii*). Flowering plants are found in the shallower grikes and these can vary from the very common Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) to the rare Angular Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum odoratum*) and Dark Red Helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*).

On the surface, where there are accumulations of soil, you will find a wide range of limestone loving plants. In the spring these include such favourites as Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*), followed by Thyme (*Thymus drucei*), Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum chamaecistus*) and Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). While limestone tends to be very dry, any wet flushes may contain two specialities, Globe Flower (*Trollius europaeus*) and Birdseye Primrose (*Primula farinosa*).



If you are not already familiar with the delights of limestone pavement and wish to see them for yourself, you do need to be aware of the dangers:

- The rock is very slippery when wet
- Vegetation can often conceal grikes.

A permit is required to visit Gait Barrows and may be obtained by writing to:

Robert Petley-Jones  
 Site Manager  
 South Cumbria and North Lancashire NNRs  
 English Nature  
 Fish House Lane  
 Haverthwaite  
 Ulverston  
 Cumbria  
 LA12 8PE

Members of the RSPB may wish to combine a visit to Gait Barrows with Leighton Moss, which is just down the road.

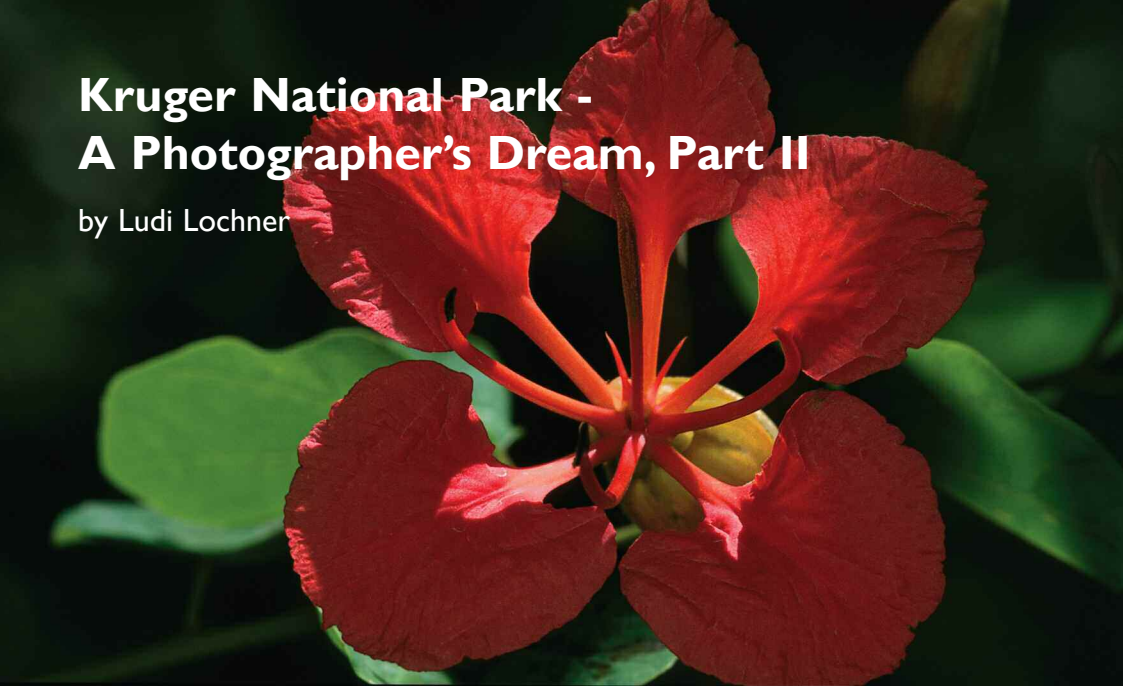
Pictures illustrating this article:

- Page 17: • Globe Flower (*Trollius europaeus*), North Yorkshire.  
 • Yew Berries (*Taxus baccata*), Gait Barrows.
- Page 18: • Dark Red Helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*), Gait Barrows.  
 • Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*), North Yorkshire.
- Page 19: • Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) in damaged pavement, Gait Barrows.  
 • Birdseye Primrose (*Primula farinosa*), North Yorkshire.



# Kruger National Park - A Photographer's Dream, Part II

by Ludi Lochner



## Planning your day

Generally speaking, lions and other members of the cat family (though not cheetah) are nocturnal and therefore sleep during the day, for instance in the shade of a tree. This will reduce their visibility unless they are close to the road. Therefore the best time for photographing them is either in the early morning or towards evening when they may be on the move. These animals can often be found walking along the roads as it is easier than barging through the undergrowth. During the early morning and late afternoon a road sighting can provide excellent photo opportunities.

Raptors and other large birds such as storks need the thermals generated during the heat of the day to keep them airborne. This means that they are most likely to come within photographic range when they are roosting during the early morning and late afternoon. To photograph these subjects, you must be out in the field when the camp gates open at sunrise (about 4.30 am in mid-summer!) and during the last two hours or so before sunset (6.30 pm in summer). You may also see them on night drives, which are organised at all the camps of the Game Reserve and which I can thoroughly recommend. Book the night ride when you arrive at a camp – essential in order to avoid disappointment.

Around midday, the camps can often be the source of exceptional opportunities for taking photographs of a limited number of species.

The grazers, comprising many buck, wildebeest and zebra, and the browsers such as the giraffe and black rhinoceros, feed towards a waterhole during the morning and then away from the waterhole in the afternoon. By positioning yourself near a suitable water hole or in one of the hides, some excellent photographs can be obtained of game coming to drink as the temperature rises. If the opportunity presents, set up your camera to capture the reflections of the animals drinking. This can add charm and interest to the photograph.

## Bush craft

In order to maximise your photo opportunities, it is very important to know as much as possible about the behaviour of your intended subjects. The best sources of information are specialised books on specific species, eg big cats, hunting dogs, elephants, and journals and magazines such as *The Ostrich*, *Africa Birds and Birding*, *Africa Geographica* and *Getaway*. TV programmes on wildlife can also be sources of information on animal behaviour.



In the early morning, some birds will be occupied with proclaiming their territories from high perches providing suitable photo opportunities. As the morning progresses, birds will be feeding but also seeking to dry their feathers after the dampness of the night before. This is a time when they will be sunning themselves and preening, another opportunity for interesting photographs. Having preened, they are likely to stretch their wings, another opportunity for interesting photographs, and then they may look around. This is often an indication that they are about to fly off. You should heed this warning and make the most of any remaining photo opportunities. Chris Weston mentions that defecation is another sign that a bird may be about to move off.

Birds begin feeding again at about 1.15 (you can just about set your watch by it!) If there is a watering place in the camp – a dripping tap, bird bath (now discouraged), or a pond, a number of seed eaters and birds like the Bulbuls will come down to drink. I carry a hide (from Kevin Keatley of Wildlife Watching Supplies – Tel: 01884 860692) and a suitable folding seat for these occasions. If you intend to use a hide, a tripod would be a necessity. However, it may be possible to manoeuvre your vehicle into a suitable position for use as a hide.

Elephants are generally benign creatures and will allow you to approach fairly closely. However, they can be dangerous when there are young calves – you should never come between a cow and her calf. A lone bull or groups of bulls are also usually benign but can show aggressive tendencies. Ensure that you do not become trapped within a herd, for example when elephants are crossing a road. Always give yourself an avenue of escape.

Be careful not to block a path used by hippos to and from a pool. The hippo is notorious for being the animal responsible for the most human fatalities in Africa. They can also cause serious damage to a vehicle.

Keep out of the way of rhinoceros. They are short sighted and very often bad-tempered and can cause serious damage to your vehicle, including turning it over.

All other animals in the Game Reserve are not dangerous to persons within a vehicle.

It can be rewarding to stop in fords, particularly those with water, and to spend as much time there as passing traffic will allow. After a while, things start moving and subjects are noticed which would not otherwise be spotted from a passing vehicle.

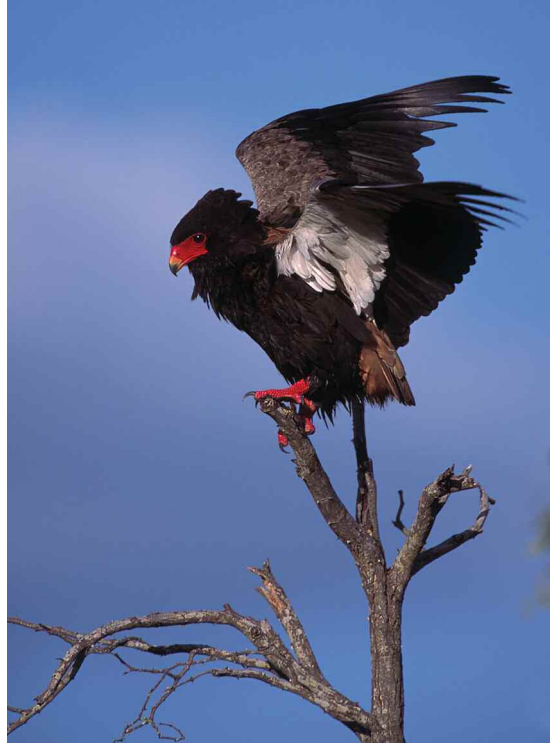


Birds of different species may gather in bushes or trees to eat ripening seeds or hatching insects. Although some may fly off when approached by a vehicle, they will often return and provide excellent photo opportunities. Patience and optimism are all that are required!

Photo opportunities are everywhere - be alert.

### General Tips

- Never send photographic equipment as unaccompanied luggage! Carry your lenses and cameras as hand luggage. My Lowepro Photo Trekker has yet to be weighed at Heathrow. Other, lighter equipment is packed in a Peli-case and checked as hold luggage. Whether or not you declare your photographic equipment on entry to South Africa is for you to decide. I carry a schedule of all the equipment that I take into the country and have persuaded the customs officials to rubber stamp the same schedule each time I enter. That seems to overcome the problem for me. If you are worried about excess weight, send your clothes and personal belongings as unaccompanied luggage.



- Carry your camera's instruction book with you. I find it useful to refer to my instruction books when attempting to resolve problems.
- I also pack a set of watchmaker's screwdrivers, lens cleaning equipment, a large Swiss Army knife and a Leatherman Wave tool.
- Always carry spare batteries for your camera and flash - batteries are not generally available from shops in the Game Reserve.
- Pack a length of string - useful for temporarily holding back foliage at a camp watering spot. Duct tape can also be useful (ie for attaching a temporary perch above a bird bath).
- Set up your equipment before you leave camp. If you don't, you may miss opportunities. It is good practice to return all camera settings to a standard setting after any picture taking session.
- Always be ready to take a picture - unusual photos will occur when least expected. My bean bag is permanently on the car window with the camera plus 400mm zoom lens on my lap, my cotton bush hat protects the lens from dust.

- Don't just shoot close-ups. An animal in its natural habitat with the background in focus makes an attractive picture.
- Animals and birds move quickly - if you have a good shot lined up, make several exposures to ensure that if the subject moves or blinks you will have more than one to select from.
- Flash, including fill-in flash, tends to mesmerise birds and they will often remain in position for a number of rapidly-taken flash photos. Try to get a highlight in the eye, particularly if the eye is black and surrounded by black feathers. Fill-in flash can be helpful in these circumstances. A slight angle of the head usually avoids red eye.
- Exposed film is a valuable asset. Ensure that no film is ever mislaid or lost. Once removed from the camera, store your exposed film immediately in a safe place. After each session, replace exposed films with unexposed rolls.

### Final Words

For the serious wildlife photographer, there can be few destinations that beat the Kruger National Park for photo opportunities. You would be unlucky not to see the Big Five – lion, leopard, elephant, rhino and buffalo in a visit of a week to ten days.



The Park has the advantage of offering reasonably cheap accommodation, food and drink. Having once visited it, you will want to return!

Pictures supporting this article:

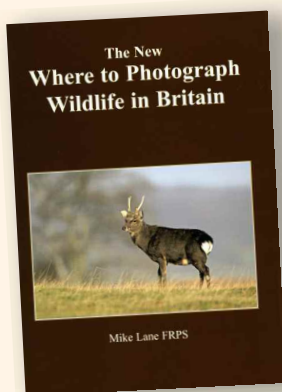
Page 20 *Pride of the Cape*,

Page 21 *Brown Hyaena and pup*,

Page 22 *Bateleur Eagle and Rock Monitor*,

Page 23 *African Monarch*.

Mike Lane's New



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## Where to Photograph Wildlife in Britain

**47 of the top sites in Britain to photograph wildlife**

Britain is not an easy place to photograph wildlife. Apart from the unreliability of the weather, our birds and mammals are not very approachable on the whole. However, there are places where our wildlife can be photographed with relative ease. Some of these are well known, such as the Bass Rock, but others are kept secret by a few in the know.

This book aims to show you some of these 'secret' locations. It is not a guide to where wildlife can be seen, there are plenty of those already, especially for birds. It concentrates purely on sites where photographs are possible without the need for extensive fieldwork.

Site maps are provided for most of the locations. There are details as to what you can expect to photograph, at what time of day, and with what lens. Everything you need to find approachable Pine Martens, Brown Hare, Grouse, Deer, Seals, Kites and more.

Available online from [www.nature-photography.co.uk](http://www.nature-photography.co.uk) or by post from the author: Mike Lane FRPS, 36 Berkeley Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands B90 2HS U.K. Contact Mike for further details: Tel 0121 744 7988

Email [mikelane@nature-photography.co.uk](mailto:mikelane@nature-photography.co.uk)



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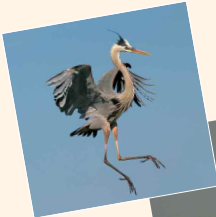
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# The Isle of May

by John Bulpitt FRPS



Since I became an enthusiastic nature photographer in the mid 1990's, I have paid an annual visit to the Farne Islands and/or Bass Rock to photograph sea birds. The boats from Seahouses/North Berwick respectively are always full of photographers willing to swap ideas about how and where to photograph wildlife. But on these trips I have never heard a reference to the Isle of May nor as an avid reader of nature photography books have I ever seen a reference to 'The May'. And yet it is by far the best location I have experienced for sea bird photography.

It was only towards the end of 2004 that I first heard about The May. Gordon Bramham ARPS said that after a week's stay on the island he had thrown away all his earlier sea bird pictures and he gave me the contacts I needed to plan a trip.

The May is situated in the mouth of the Firth of Forth a few miles off the coast of Fife. Ironically Bass Rock can be seen clearly from the Island. The May is 1.5 km long and is a haven for tens of thousands of nesting seabirds, which flourish on the steep cliffs and rocky shores.

A light beacon, the first in Scotland, was built in 1656. It required between one and three tons of coal a day. This would be logistically difficult today so one can only imagine the problems in the seventeenth century. The current lighthouse was built in 1816, by Robert Stevenson, the Uncle of Treasure Island author, Robert Louis Stevenson. It has been a National Nature Reserve since 1956 when the lighthouse was automated.

I visited The May for week in July 2004 with Richard Revels FRPS. Day trips are possible but if you plan well in advance it is possible to stay for a week. There are only 6 bunks in an old lighthouse and preference is given to bird ringers. If you are keen to visit, contact:

Mike Martin, Booking Secretary, 2 Manse Park, Uphall, West Lothian, EH52 6NX.

To be reasonably sure of a place contact Mike early in January.

We arrived by boat from Anstruther after a rough crossing on a wet Saturday morning. The boatman was obviously used to photographers as he had a hoist to lift our equipment plus clothing and

food and drink for a week ( or slightly longer as there is no guarantee that you will leave on the appointed day). Heather Angel had been resident the previous week and was waiting on the quayside to be taken back to civilisation.

Our accommodation was warm and comfortable with a gas cooker, two gas fridges and emergency food cupboard which would have fed us for a week if we had been unconcerned about shelf life. A chemical loo with the deceptively romantic name of 'Elsie' was situated in an outhouse.

There was a lounge with a small library. Residents were encouraged to write a daily log - these dated back to 1934 and made fascinating reading. We did not have a shower and somehow the sea never seemed that tempting!

There are two resident wardens as well as a number of ringers and researchers who live on another part of the Island. The wardens were extremely helpful allowing us to recharge our batteries as well as allowing us to use a one man hide overlooking a sandwich tern colony.





One researcher was in residence – Dr Mike Harris from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology – one of the world's leading authorities on the Puffin. His book 'The Puffin' (ISBN 0 85661 038 0) makes fascinating reading. Today there are 68,000 pairs on The May compared with only 10,000 in 1982 and less than ten in 1959. Puffins can fly at 50mph, and into a 60 mph gale. Their wings beat at up to 400 beats per minute; they weigh 400/500grams; and have a life expectancy of 25 years. They can carry up to 60 sand eels in their beaks! Unfortunately this topic never comes up when I play Trivial Pursuit with my family.

The weather during our first couple of days was overcast, which allowed us to explore the Island thoroughly as well as giving the right light for portrait shots. Apart from Puffins and sandwich terns, we photographed arctic and common terns, oystercatchers, lesser black backed, great black backed and herring gulls, guillemots and bridled guillemots, kittiwakes, razorbills and fulmars.

On day three the wind got up and we were able to concentrate on our real task for the week, photographing sea birds in flight. We spent many hours on North Plateau above Bishop's Cove in the South of the Island, which was ideal as it was close to many of the main nesting sites and on a direct flight path to and from the birds' fishing grounds.

Richard and I thought that we would work well together: my knowledge of sports photography coupled with Richard's massive experience as a pro wildlife photographer would combine well when trying to nail a difficult subject like puffins in flight. The truth is that Richard brought far more to the party than me. It just goes to show that knowledge of the subject has far more value than technical skill in photography. Although both are important, technical skills are relatively easy to learn.

We were both using Canon 1D's and appreciated the advantages of digital when tackling such a tricky subject. I was using a 70-200 f2.8 lens with a 1.4 converter, Richard a 300mm f4. Both combinations were hand held and the light was usually good enough to shoot at a minimum of 1/1600th at ISO 200. At the time I was shooting JPEGs but I have been persuaded that RAW is better for nature photography particularly for correct errors such as underexposure.



In sum a wonderful week. If you have enjoyed Bass rock and the Farnes, you will be bowled over by The May. Anyone contemplating a visit is welcome to email me: [john.bulpitt1@virgin.net](mailto:john.bulpitt1@virgin.net).

#### Picture details

Page 25: Puffin in flight. Canon 1D, 70-200 + 1.4. between 1/1600 and 1/3200 at f4.

Page 25: Our lighthouse 'home' during our stay.

Opposite: Razorbill in flight, Canon 1D 70-200 + 1.4 converter. 1/1600 f4.

Above: Young puffin. Sometimes they get lost on their way out to sea. This one wandered into our back garden and of course we had to photograph it before sending it on its way.

Inside Front Cover; Oystercatcher. Canon 1D, 500 f4 + 2x converter at f8, (lens borrowed from Richard in case my wife thinks I have been keeping something from her!). tripod .

Inside Front Cover: Rabbit - there are lots of them on The May, some very confiding.



Greater-spotted Woodpecker



Lichen *Xanthoria parietina*



Whooper swans

# A photographic journey

Stephen Deakin LRPS.

When my father gave me my first camera, he sparked a life long passion - to record the world around me on film. That first camera was a simple cartridge loading Halina; the only adjustments being weather symbols. The first time I used it was on a European holiday, I would have been seven or eight, and on visiting some tourist spot or other, one of the other passengers on the bus pointed out that I had not removed the lens cap. That mistake corrected I then managed to get some really good out of focus shots of the strap. I was always careful to ensure that the horizon was never horizontal in order to add a dynamic element to the picture. Since then I must have made every mistake in the book.

Journeys by motorbike seemed capable of vibrating loose and even destroying a couple of cameras, including the tank like Zenith which I purchased second hand at age sixteen - my father's camera lost its viewing screen on one trip. Minoltas attracted dust to their back plates or film roller guides which even Lehmann's, the camera repair people, could not prevent from recurring. I recall one of their chaps saying that he had never seen a more accurate meter than on a Minolta 3. Accurate metering aside, knowing that the film would be scratched led to my purchase of a Nikon F3 for the simple reason that it had a plain film back plate which did not hold dust. At that time I thought that the F3 would see me through till the end of my photographic days. Okay, auto focus had arrived with the F4 plus a few lenses and a pretty hefty price tag, but I reasoned that by careful lens selection, I could live happily without an auto focus body and for many years I got on very well with my F3, 20mm, 60mm AF Macro, 105 f1.8 (the best lens I have ever owned) and 300 f4 AF. Later, once the price was right, I added an F50, not only for use with the 300mm for nature shots, but for social portrait work - at work I was often called upon to 'record the moment' and it became necessary to have a large quick-recharge flash unit for the F50 so a Metz 40 joined the camera bag, along with a waist-mounted Nicad battery pack.

The years passed - somewhere along the way along I obtained my 'L' from the RPS. That was once I understood how to make up a submission of slides, completely misunderstanding at first just what was required of such an award.

I now use a Canon 10D. How fantastic these digital cameras are! Who could have guessed that so much progress would be made so quickly. Now my home 'lightroom' is producing A3 prints which to me at least, are of knock out quality.

The Canon 10D is a cracking good camera and the bundled software works but I do not like the RAW conversion program, finding it difficult to comprehend. Upon seeing some wonderful images shot as RAW files with a 10D it became immediately apparent to me that RAW image recording is the only way to go. Or so I convinced myself at the time. Getting what one originally photographed not only to display upon a screen correctly but also transferring that vibrancy through to the printed image must be one of the biggest problems with digital capture. I never got around to printing wet/chemical colour images finding black and white difficult enough, also my darkroom was just not of that capability. When I finally moved into a home of my own one of the intentions was to have a permanent darkroom and a model railway. Neither happened. Looking back I am really glad I never got around to fixing up the rear bedroom as a darkroom. The model railway is on hold but is an idea that surfaces from time to time along with the desire to buy a new Triumph Bonneville.

Now I have 'gone digital' it is right for me to expect almost instant results with just the press of a button. I think the reasonable answer to that is no. I do not use half or even a quarter of Photoshop CS' functions. I like the ability to amend the metadata of the image in the browser but find Photoshop's inability to see Windows character map images of symbols really frustrating. Try adding ?? to your metadata entries and see the result. I have settled for three entries in the keyword column - eg, bird, animal etc., species, then gender. Now on searching for images I can



call up the appropriate specie and gender if required. The only problem with this method is the Keyword list is becoming extensive.

Photoshop works really well with dual displays, so I have installed a Matrox dual head video card (around seventy five quid) in my PC (an excellent investment) and am currently using a basic fifteen inch for drop down menus and pallets and a Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB to view images.

Photoshop is not a complete solution. I still have to download images via a third party software (in my case Canon's own) to extract the voice files from my S50 and the embedded JPEGs from my 10D (this is for easy storage and playback through the DVD player), the RAW files go in their own file. That sounds easy enough but misses out one vital step - the appended metadata. Images still need to be opened in Photoshop before splitting or stripping out any individual images, this is the only way I have found to keep all the data not only the same but searchable. I do wonder if I am missing something within Photoshop or has it all been put right in CS2?

It has become apparent that within a few years the decoders and/or hardware to read stored digitised information can become unavailable, rendering the data unreadable. The only device still in use since the start of the modern PC is the Hard Disk Drive (HDD). Floppy disc drives are no longer fitted as standard to some PCs and serial ports are no longer fitted to all motherboards, having been superseded by USB and Firewire. The same might be true of digital image formats in the future. So Adobe have produced a program capable of converting RAW data files into what will become known as Digital Negatives (.DNG). Available as a download to registered users at Adobe's web site <http://www.adobe.co.uk/> Hands up all the clever people who realised that Adobe did not intend the DNG plug-in to actually work like any other plug-in. If you are bemused, as I was after downloading the so called future preferred digital file format, read on for my solution to working with DNG files. After downloading you should move your current Raw file converter from the Plug-in folder and install the new one which then sits there and does nothing. The Adobe web site 'Help' says double-click on the icon to open DNG converter - to do this you

need to use the follow the path: Program files>Adobe> Photoshop CS>Plug-ins>File formats folder. Not really easy to access, or I don't think so anyway. After talking to the Photoshop help line (0845 052 2222) it became a little clearer what to do with the DNG converter. I decided to copy a shortcut to the Start menu. Now its much simpler to select a folder containing RAW pictures after opening the converter or find pictures in the browser then go to Start select DNG and convert. Pictures of other formats such as JPEG will not be touched. Personally I shoot only in RAW mode now as I have found other formats are too easily mucked about with for my liking. Will I be converting all those RAW pictures to DNG? The more I think about this question the more I think not. Conversion to DNG can wait until that format is required for a specific reason. At the moment the few files I have converted as experiments have been saved to the same folder, but it may be preferable to have a separate HDD on which to store all DNG files upon. My motherboard is already fully loaded with drives so my only option is to have an external drive. This might prove to be sensible as Photoshop CS DNG is supposed to be compatible across Mac and Windows platforms. However, I believe Apple format their HDDs differently to Windows and are thus rendered unreadable by each other. If anyone has actually used DNG on both systems from the same store I would be delighted to hear of the results. I guess a file burned to DVD-R or possibly DVD-RAM would be the ideal way to feed Wintel and Macintosh machines cross platform.

All I now need to do is concentrate on improving my 'Seeing Eye'? Surely those superb images must be achievable now? That is assuming I don't make the wrong camera settings or the automatic functions don't get in the way. My first ever Kingfisher sighting was not captured at all because the camera would not fire, I have no idea why, and of course, once the Kingfisher had flown away, the camera worked perfectly!

Editor:

Some of Stephen's images can be seen on page 28.

# Nature Group Convention - Brooksby, 12 -14th August 2005

Thirty five members and friends arrived at Brooksby on the afternoon of Friday 12th August and gathered together for tea and cake before settling in to their rooms for the weekend.

During the evening we were treated to a fascinating talk on underwater photography by Malcolm Hey. He showed some wonderful pictures of the creatures beneath the waves, superbly lit to bring out their lovely colours. Sometimes it was difficult to comprehend just how small some of these creatures actually were and hence how difficult it had been to photograph them in the swaying currents of the sea.

The next day, Saturday, commenced with a hearty breakfast before we were given a choice between indoors or outdoors. Indoors we had a distinctions advisory session with members of the Nature Group Panel. Several groups of prints were put up including a fascinating panel of lichens taken by John Jones at locations across the British Isles from Cornwall to the Outer Hebrides. Others included birds, flowers and wildlife from both the Falklands and Africa. Comments were made and advice given by our experts with the hope of producing successful submissions in the future.

Several members chose the outdoor option and took the opportunity to go to Browns Hill Quarry, a local nature reserve, to look for butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies. However the weather was not so kind and the rain that had threatened all morning decided to descend heavily, calling a halt to the proceedings.

Following lunch we all took shelter in the lecture theatre and enjoyed a number of short talks including one by John Jones entitled 'The Skokholm Experience'. John leads many trips to this wild life haven and his pictures illustrated the flowers, lichens and birds that can be found there. It certainly seems to be a nature photographer's dream.

In the evening, after an excellent silver service dinner we enjoyed a talk on insect photography by John Bebbington. John uses a unique range of supports, lenses and flashguns to produce superb pictures of plants, butterflies, moths and other insects and his equipment is often purchased cheaply but cleverly adapted by him to bring out the detail in his subjects.

On Sunday morning we were treated to another feast of insect photography, this time from Andy Callow. His pictures concentrated on even smaller creatures to be found in our countryside and he showed many examples of these at enlargements up to ten times on film!

At several times during the weekend members were given the opportunity to show their own work and we could see the diverse interests of our membership. Most were projected slides but there was one digital sequence, taken by Maggie Manson and shown via her digital projector. Many members now use digital cameras to produce prints but I am sure that future meetings will include an ever increasing number of projected images as we grasp this new technology.

The convention broke up after lunch and we each made our respective ways home after what had been another very enjoyable event. It had been an excellent opportunity to renew old acquaintances and to make new ones, to discuss different techniques and to see the superb results that can be produced. Our thanks go to the organisers, Martin Withers and Robert Hawkesworth and to their helpers for their efforts to make this weekend so successful, also to the staff of Brooksby Agricultural College, Leicestershire for looking after us so well. I hope that in two years time even more members will be encouraged to join in.

Ian McEvoy

# Obituary - Michael Shirley ARPS

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It is with sadness that I have to report the death of Michael Shirley at the age of 84. Michael had an indefatigable spirit, a spirit that gave him command of his life until the moment he died, from a coronary thrombosis, in his own home, 'Laburnums', in Horam, East Sussex. Confined to bed for just a few days, with some 'chest infection', he told me this was the first time in his life that he had been ill, and unable to work in his garden. Whatever the cause of this indisposition, he had no intention of being moved to hospital, and continued to give orders to whoever came to assist him until the moment he died.

Michael was an only child. At an early age, and while in boarding school, he developed a love of nature, and a curiosity, especially about insects. On leaving school he joined the Natural History Museum in London, then during the war years he followed a career as a fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force flying Spitfires and Typhoons. He enjoyed his flying and continued in the post war years as a civil aviation pilot based in Iran. He loved to relate stories of incidents involving his daring piloting skills and mishaps.

Upon retirement, in the late 1970's, he, with his wife Joan returned to live in his parents 'property' in Horam. I first met Michael when in the early 1980's he joined Tonbridge Camera Club, the United Photographic Postfolios, the Royal Photographic Society and the Nature Group. Michael was a keen supporter of these organisations. He led Nature Group field trips around East Sussex, and many is the time that those present would sit in his sun lounge drinking tea while discussing the days events, identifying subjects, or being shown some new piece of equipments that he had made. Michael loved a practical challenge. On the club circuit he was a perceptive judge and an interesting lecturer, often using a practical, hands-on approach.

Throughout his life he continued to be a committed naturalist, knowledgeable and questioning, never taking anything at face value, always ready to disagree with a statement or an event that he considered was false or pretentious, but equally ready to admit he was wrong on those few occasions when he could be proved to be so.

His memory and intellect were phenomenal. He was observant. He loved originality. 'I can refer you to a definitive picture of... Why take another like it?' 'Branch out on your own. Do your own thing' was his advice. This was in his later years when his eyesight was sadly failing and he did no new photography. Determined as ever, Michael then invested in Lunar software for the visually impaired, and with the help of friends, despite increasing macular degeneration, he continued to communicate via the Internet.

Michael managed his large garden until a few days before he died. He told me he was making it more labour saving. Although he is much missed by many of us, I like to think that Michael has told enough stories and spread a little of himself around to so many people that he won't really go away. One cousin survives him; his wife Joan died a few years ago.

Kath Bull ARPS



Great Diving Beetle - Michael Shirley ARPS

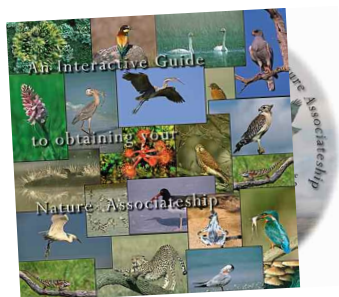


# 'An Interactive Guide to Obtaining your Nature Associateship'

Updated V2.0 CD-ROM now available - for PC only.

- Containing four additional successful applications and advice on electronic submissions.
- Approved by the RPS Council as an official RPS publication, and by the Chairman of the Distinctions Advisory Panel as guidance advice. Over 140 copies sold to date.

The best advice for anyone considering applying for an Associateship in Nature Photography is to attend a Nature Distinctions Workshop. However for many it is not always possible to attend, and the CD is designed to cater for such applicants.



The guide is the result of collaboration between John Myring, Colin Smith FRPS and Tony Wharton FRPS, with advice from Chris Mattison FRPS and in discussion with Carol Agar, RPS Distinctions Manager. It was the first distinctions guidance CD-ROM to be produced, not only by the Nature Group, but for the RPS as a whole. The 'Guide' benefits from the extensive experience of the authors viewing of numerous applications, both successful and otherwise and takes a structured approach, leading the user through all of the aspects that need to be considered. Coverage is given for both print and slide applications as well as the additional requirements needed to make a Digital application.

Users will find a main menu, the sections of which lead to further sub-menus which expand into specific sub-sections. The main sections include:

1. An introductory detailing the procedure of assessment day and how applications are assessed.
2. Advice on selection and presentation of prints, with an interactive section to emphasise consideration of print formats and layout.
3. Advice on selection and presentation of slides, with interactive sections covering masking, spotting and showing order.
4. An interactive 'tutorial' set of twenty seven images from which to select the best application set , considering both the good and bad points of each image, and comparing their opinion to those of the authors who provide comments on each of the twenty seven pictures individually, using 'hot spots' to demonstrate points for consideration. Finally the authors' selection is shown with reasons for including/omitting images.
5. There is a selection of successful applications shown in the form of individual presentations.

The CD-ROM (PC only) is available for only £10 - including p&p. To purchase your copy send a cheque for £10 payable to 'RPS Nature Group' to Nature Group Treasurer, Trevor Hyman LRPS, 3 Northcourt Lane, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 1QA.

## Congratulations

**The following members recently achieved their Associateships:**

Terence Bickley, Atherstone, Warks	-	Mixed subjects	slides
Eric Garnett, Liverpool	-	British Butterflies	prints
Elizabeth Hilton, Gower, Swansea	-	Geology	prints
John Price, Skipton, N Yorks,	-	Birds of the World	prints
Paul Sievers, Newbury, Berks.	-	Alpine Flowers	slides
Ronald Thomas, Birkenhead	-	British Birds	prints

