

CAMERACRAFT

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 THE GUILD OF
PHOTOGRAPHERS



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The world gets smaller when wind and weather drive you inside. That's been the experience for too many readers in the UK for the second half of 2024, with the relief of some lovely days in the gaps between uninspiring and difficult conditions. As we are promised a La Niña phase to the ocean currents and atmosphere starting now, with the general poor conditions and serious weather events already arriving as El Niño fizzled out, photographic horizons may contract in 2025.

For some this works. More events make allowance for moving indoors. I found myself at my grandson Ed's wedding in the summer, as a guest and not a photographer, running for my car because I always carry an umbrella and I'd popped two more in for good measure. The hotel had one and another guest did, so by one means or another we got the bridal party a dry-ish quarter of a mile from the reception to the 12th century abbey, where photographs were allowed after pre-arrangement with Historic Scotland. I got a wee bit wet, but the wedding dress was not trashed. The official photographer naturally had a brolly too – they make great shapes against the stormy sky looking out from a crypt-like refuge. But the guests, and all cameras present, needed protection.

For this issue, which was produced during the final quarter of the year, there was a new macro lens to look at and this got me digging out my slightly makeshift macro kit and thinking about upgrading. The weather stayed fine and the week the lens came there were butterflies and bees in warm sun, not so warm the butterflies never stayed still. Subjects for a long tele trial were in good enough light, and with unexpectedly good scale at close focus even those insects were worth looking for.

One week after I took the last shots, there was not a bee to be seen. I could easily have had no macro subjects even when autumn woodlands were looking fine. I looked up the butterfly farm I used to visit – closed during Covid, never re-opened, and no alternative within over 100 miles. I'm a member of RZSS (Edinburgh Zoo) and RHSS (Edinburgh Botanical Gardens and other woodland and garden sites, some just too far away) but by the end of the season photogenic aspects had faded.

Of course it will all come back! Spring is closer than you think. In the meantime, there are two major photo shows in London – the Societies (Hammersmith) in mid-January and The Photography Show (ExCel Centre) a few days before the Ides of March. The Guild of Photographers has a much smaller event, Photohubs in Stoke-on-Trent on the last of January and first of February but for me it adds up to keeping fairly busy during what is usually not the best quarter of the year.

I think that 2025 may be a time for moving my studio out of a small space into a much larger high ceilinged room, and making that small space back into a darkroom again. I've collected some vintage kit, nothing like the modern full darkroom I sold around twenty years ago. I have very comprehensive Elinchrom studio flash kit, even if that is now a couple of generations passé. If I need to retreat from a hostile great outdoors, I should be able to.

Nothing beats being out and about for few miles, city or country, with a camera. There's a good chance I will do that instead – and take the umbrella!

– David Kilpatrick

Email: editor@iconpublications.com

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Sigma's fast APS-C series launched in Canon RF mount



SIGMA's APS-C size mirrorless dedicated prime lenses, the 16mm *f*1.4 DC DN Contemporary, 23mm *f*1.4 DC DN Contemporary, 30mm *f*1.4 DC DN Contemporary and 56mm *f*1.4 DC DN Contemporary are now available for the Canon RF Mount alongside the 10-18mm *f*2.8 and 18-50mm *f*2.8 zooms.

Though the lenses are not full frame, they are ideal for use with the full frame bodies in crop mode for video or stills, as well for use on the APS-C bodies. A control algorithm including AF drive and communication speed optimisation has been developed specifically for

Canon RF mount. In addition to realising high-speed AF, the lenses also support Servo AF and in-camera aberration correction on supported bodies. The mount is rubber-sealed to cater for use in a variety of environments.

For those who already have these lenses in Fujifilm X, Sony E or L mount a mount conversion service is available. As yet no full frame Canon RF lenses have been announced by Sigma or any other independent makers. The series is also made for MicroFourThirds, Canon EF-M and Nikon Z, except for the 23mm. <https://www.sigmauk.com>

Sony's killer low light combination – the Alpha 1 Mark II and FE 28-70mm *f*2 GM

THE NEW Sony Alpha 1 II is a combination of high-resolution, speed, and AI recognition designed for a variety of professional applications. Additionally, Sony's ultimate E-mount lens for creators offers high resolution, beautiful bokeh, and advanced autofocus.

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- Stable shooting with reduced distortion and noise, ISO 100-32,000
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- 3.2-type LCD monitor with 4-axis multi-angle.
- Price: £6,300
- The FE 28-70mm *f*2 GM claims:
 - Sharp, refined rendering in a unique constant *f*2 standard zoom lens.
 - A compact, lightweight lens packed with superb optics and functionality.
 - Precise, tenacious AF tracking with instant response including four XD (extreme dynamic) linear motor to control the large and heavy focus group.
 - Control functions including Linear



Response MF for intuitive manual focus, adjustable zoom ring, torque, and an aperture ring.
Price: £3,050



See: <https://www.sony.co.uk>

Elinchrom to stage top names at the Societies London show



ELINCHROM UK have announced their Live Stage Speaker Schedule for the 2025 London Photo Trade Show, taking place at the Novotel London West, Hammersmith from 16–18 January 2025.

This year's schedule features an impressive lineup of industry-leading photographers who will share their expertise, demonstrate innovative techniques, and showcase the latest in lighting technology from Elinchrom. Attendees can look forward to a series of live demos and talks designed to inspire and inform photographers of all levels.

Each session promises to deliver actionable insights and creative inspiration, with photographers demonstrating how to achieve stunning results using Elinchrom's cutting-edge equipment. Visitors will also have the opportunity to meet the Elinchrom team, who will be on hand to provide equipment demonstrations and customise solutions.

Thursday, 16 January 2025

- 10:30 – Elli Cassidy: Modern & Minimalist Maternity: Elegance in Simplicity
- 11:30 – Bjorn Thomassen: Top 5 Features to Elevate Your Portrait Photography
- 12:30 – Therese Asplund: Creative Lighting and Unconventional Styling –

- Fashion Portraits My Way
14:00 – Victoria Baptiste: My Journey: Crafting a Unique Path in Photography
- 15:00 – Emma Jane: Basic Newborn Lighting

Friday, 17 January 2025

- 10:30 – Neil Shearer: Liven Up Your Product Photography
- 11:30 – James Musselwhite: One Light Portraits
- 12:30 – Paul Wilkinson: Mastering Portrait Photography
- 14:00 – Therese Asplund: Creative Lighting and Unconventional Styling – Fashion Portraits My Way
- 15:00 – Victoria Baptiste: Inside Boudoir: Capturing Confidence and Elegance

Saturday, 18 January 2025

- 10:30 – Victoria Baptiste: Perfecting Popular Poses: Avoiding Common Mistakes
- 11:30 – Paul Wilkinson: Mastering Portrait Photography
- 12:30 – James Musselwhite: Four Portraits in 60 Seconds
- 14:00 – Gary Hill: Creative Headshots
- 15:00 – Emma Jane: Basic Newborn Lighting

Free registration for the event is available until 15 January 2025. <https://thesocieties.net/convention/> <https://www.elinchrom.co.uk>

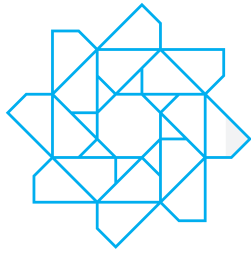


Meet Rotolight continuous lighting too at the show – they are running Free Stage Live Model Shoot demonstrations featuring their innovative LED movie/still lighting system, <https://www.rotolight.com>

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Saturday 18 Jan: 10:00–16:00

Register now for **FREE** entry to discover the latest gear, trends, and connect with industry experts.

Supported by top photography brands, see the full exhibitor list on our website.



"Definitely by far, one of the best events in the world for photographers. This convention not only brings together some of the worlds most amazing photographers, but it offers fantastic learning opportunities through Masterclasses and practical demonstrations." – Maria Michael



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*Pre-register before 12 Jan 2025 for FREE Trade Show entry and avoid £10 entry fee to Trade Show.



TOM HILL

Welcome to the Twilight Zone – where deep greens and blues are the colours we choose...



“We need something to cheer up our readers in January...” stated the email sent to me from the editor of this publication as the theme of my contribution for this edition.

I started off by digging out this favourite snow scene, taken on the Pennine Way one late December about 15 years ago. Nice pic – dying to be a Christmas card. But I can already hear your collective yawn from here. We could discuss the technical aspects of snow exposure forever, but I’m not especially that way inclined. Sure, you can take snowscapes in winter. But I guess you already knew that.

Then I started thinking about winter evening cityscapes, like this North Kensington gasometer at a Dutch angle or the silhouetted seagulls swooping over the South Bank of the Thames opposite Westminster, the latter a lucky iPhone snap. All pleasant looking enough, but still nothing special, especially as stand-alone images, though if you are sequencing prints on a wall those contrasting angles work.

Blue Monday

Instead, let’s talk about the winter blues. Any readers old enough to remember ‘Blue Monday’ – a 12” single released by the legendary Factory Records in 1983, recorded by Manchester rock band New Order – might relate to my comments about smartphones and photography further below.



Blue Monday as a concept, rather than a record, is, apparently, the most depressing day of the year. The third Monday in January. According to Wikipedia the day was calculated in a 2005 press release by a UK travel company, which was unsurprisingly trying to promote January winter sun holiday bookings. They used a ‘scientific’ (yeah, right) formula thus:

“The formula uses many factors, including weather conditions, debt level (the difference between debt accumulated and ability to pay), time since Christmas, time since new year’s resolutions have been broken, low motivational levels, and the feeling of a need to take action.”

There you go – it’s official. Blue Monday is upon you and there’s

Tom Hill is a travel writer, copywriter and sometime photographer living in the Scottish Borders in the UK.

Tom’s book fundraising for the British Heart Foundation ‘The Cobbler’s Children’ depicts his 40 years in the imaging business... check out details at bigfrogsmallpond.co.uk



nothing you can do about it. Or is there?

Photo Therapy

On a personal note, I've been plagued for much of my life by indeterminate periods of mild to moderate depression, and it's always worse from when the clocks go back at the beginning of GMT until about the end of March.

As well as antidepressants and an unhealthy amount of alcohol, I also found that hiring a daylight lamp, which counteracts Seasonal Affective Disorder quite well, was useful. Yet counter-intuitively, I discovered that forcing myself to go out and take photos was good

therapy. I love to venture out from November to February, especially at twilight, when I find that winter evenings can, for a short window of opportunity, provide a magical hour or so when the skies have a dark blue quality all their own.

The waning sun, if it's been a crisp day with little cloud cover, can sometimes lend an eerie slightly 'cold' greenish glow to buildings and landscapes. As a bonus, unlike during British Summer Time hours, you can be home with your pics bagged before 6pm in time for a reviving drink!

Additionally, I would always find that using some fill flash nicely highlights sharp detail in the

foreground, while exaggerating the darkness in the background. If you get that balance just right, I think it adds a real depth and quality that can only be achieved on winter evenings.

The image I've included here of a *memento mori*, a bunch of flowers left in someone's honour, the blooms having died but remaining tied to the railings near Colwyn Bay seafront, is the sort of thing I'm trying to describe.

Or perhaps the 'face' of a pay-per-view telescope, taken just after sundown on a ferry crossing the Delaware River might qualify as one of my better 'twilight' snaps. It was taken on a 20-year-old Fujifilm Finepix S2950 'bridge camera' with a piece of black string for a strap – but its pop-up fill flash capability was excellent. It's all about subtly lifting the foreground detail.

Night-time is the right time

I have only an old iPhone 8, which is fine for taking daytime snaps or 'mates in the pub' pics, but it struggles to render any level of sharpness in low light.

I'm told that more modern phones can handle low light well, with their superior software – but I'm of an age where I still think phones are for making telephone

calls and cameras are for taking pictures.

I'm rapidly being proved wrong, as I've made some cracking opportunistic iPhone snaps (even on the Mark 8 model) at twilight or on winter afternoons. One of my favourites is this of pigeons flocking at St James St station.

The great thing about winter photography is the sun being so low in the sky at even 3pm. This affords super opportunities involving lovely long shadows. For example, see this image grabbed on Preston railway station platform one November evening a few years ago.

Finally, don't forget that the slow exposure times required for night-time street scenes can also be used for creative effect, even if it's by accident. I love this iPhone snap of a night bus leaving a London station – it has a surreal quality for me; yet it was *taken by the phone* while I was trying to dial a friend's landline number. OK, I admit that I straightened up the perspective in post-production, but the content is all original – my own work!

So, this January, forget Blue Monday, keep your eye on the sky, take your fill-flash device of choice out of the kit bag and get some good old fashioned photo therapy. 📷



THE TAROT

HEATHER BURNS





Heather Burns has gained a further Master Craftsman degree from The Guild of Photographers for this series of Tarot Major Arcana cards. Heather will need no introduction for Guild photographers, and many readers of *Cameracraft*, for her very consistent gothic art editing. Here we show the cards in the order of her print panel, reading top and bottom rows on each page in order left to right.

Catch up with Heather, who is also known for her wildlife and landscape photography and dedication to the charity Remembermybaby, on Facebook as [heather.burns.50999](#)



THE TAROT — HEATHER BURNS





THE TAROT — HEATHER BURNS



POISED FOR SUCCESS

When we encounter a distinctive style which clearly runs through a photographer's work across a range of related genres, we need to enquire about influences – often from painting, theatre or cinema – which have helped create a unique look.

Sandra Vaskyte and her husband Vid have built a successful social business in Sutton, Surrey, as San Vid Photography with Sandra's creative vision at the heart of it.

We asked her about their journey over the last few years, and the origins of her style:

My photographic journey began in 2006. At that time, I had recently graduated from an art college in Lithuania, majoring in art education. But during my student years, I realised that I wouldn't be a teacher – it wasn't what I wanted to do.

Shortly after leaving college I got a job as a school photographer with a company, even though I had no photography experience. It was a totally new chapter in my life. Here I gained a wealth of knowledge about working with people of all ages, posing, and technical skills. I had to learn to work quickly and in an organised manner. We took hundreds of solo and group portraits a day. It was not an easy job, but it brought me good experience.

Gradually, it became monotonous. I needed creativity – I needed to express myself somehow. Since childhood I had been a dreamer, close to art and always drawing.

While still working at the company, I started taking photos for my own pleasure. These were experimental portraits of friends. The search for myself, my own photographic style, began. I can assure you that it will never stop, because

Sandra Vaskyte's beauty, boudoir, maternity, wedding and portrait work wins awards thanks to her eye for posing and poise. From subtle hand gestures to facial expression and body language her imagination gives her sitters a touch of magic.



experimenting is damn interesting! To step out from the comfort zone and try something new is a must, otherwise your creative space is restricting.

I met my husband in 2009. We both already had a connection with a photography. As a landscaper (him) and myself a portraitist we connected two passions into one and became what we are today. It came naturally, with no big planning and discussing how to conquer the world (lol).

We love to dream, to bring those dreams to life and to share with others is the main aim. We started from shooting events together. Since I had experience in portrait photography, we started photographing children, models, families, and later weddings. Gradually, we got involved in creative portrait

photography. Today, we are happy to have the opportunity to work together with clothing designers, headpiece creators, makeup artists, and models who have become our friends.

We are both Nikon users: Nikon D850, Nikkor 85mm f1.4, Nikkor 70-200mm f2.8, Nikkor 24-70mm f2.8

I think I'm constantly in creative mode. Any smallest thing might inspire me to generate a vision in my mind, for instance, a piece of interesting jewellery, a gorgeous fluffy dress, a specific colour or architectural fragment.

Sometimes it takes only a blink of an eye, sometimes years. I've been nurturing the idea of creating a distinct maternity portrait for a year now, but I'm still waiting for the right moment, that special

model, that mood, you name it...

Nature and the interesting places which we keep scouting as a family are a great source of creative inspiration. We live in Surrey, and the southeast of England offers a

plethora of photography spots, each unique in its own way. From picturesque landscapes to captivating architecture, Surrey is a photographer's paradise but I lost my mind visiting Dartmoor National Park in Devon. This is a place from a fairy-tale, with the enchanted Wistman's Wood at its heart. Of course we couldn't resist taking pictures at this magical place 😊

But mostly inspiration come from music, poems, quotations, paintings or photography by other artists, too many to mention. Photography for me is something that helps creative energy release its most beautiful moments, unique ideas. It's like a connection between two worlds: reality and dreams. With the help of photography we can unlock

our emotions, to open our soul, to visualise. We can imprint a tiny moment in time and collect cosy memories. Isn't that wonderful?

In my photo portraits, Woman dominates and everything revolves around her. She is like a flower – the source of beauty, toning, exciting, healing and giving magical powers. She is bright, fresh, seductive, and radiating the strongest feminine energy. She is a mother, a daughter, a wife, sister... she is a magical heart-opener that cleanses the deepest corners of the soul.

I like depth, rich and bright colours, and contrast, especially in studio portraits. In painting this style has always been close to my heart. I remember being scolded by my art teacher at school for darkening the colours in my paintings. I love experimenting with colours in

Photoshop, it's a kind of therapy for me.

I have accumulated a digital library of various objects that I could later use in a photomontage to emphasise the story I am creating in the photo. For example, I used a pink flamingo that I photographed a couple of years ago at the National History Museum in London. I had a photo of a flamingo in mind when we were working with the model in our photo studio, but I wasn't sure if I would compose it properly because the flamingo was photographed behind glass and in completely different lighting. I tried several options for how to correctly position the flamingo because I wanted to create a connection between the bird and the model. I wanted to convey a sense of grace, light movement, and flirtatiousness. I got a silver award in the Guild's monthly photo competition for this, thanks to the judges!

Nature is one of my biggest sources of inspiration. I especially love old twisted tree roots, narrow forest tunnels, mossy stone fences, fog and mist. In gloomy environments, I like to emphasise the main character of the photo with a bright



"Charming... alluring... super feminine and powerful... this was the last session taken in Summer with beautiful model @KristineGoldfield".

dress or fabric, especially red, a dreamy pose and emotion. I love to play with hand movements and soft, dancing poses. I'm a natural light photographer. I like the big stream of light from the sky, slightly obscured by clouds, it gives such a softness to the model's skin.

I place particular importance on pregnancy portraits in nature. Pregnancy is often associated with new beginnings and growth, which can be beautifully symbolised through an outdoor environment that embodies life and renewal. I call future mothers Goddesses. I want them to radiate a special energy in the photos. Most women feel unattractive, flawed, and insecure. My goal is to convey through photography what queens they all are, what feminine power lies within them, and simply how beautiful they are.

Every day is a unique journey with ups and downs. I am grateful to have the opportunity to create and to try, to learn something new every day. It is such a pleasure to be among so many talented and wonderful photo artists in this magazine!



Pregnancy portraits are an important part of San Vid Photography's offering and can range from simply classical to costume staging to suit the client. Sandra keeps a full range of regularly updated costumes and accessories in the studio and works with wedding and special occasion dress designers like Wisteria Creation and CC Millinery Creations.







Sandra loves woodland settings and seasonal shoots. Kristine Goldfield, from Latvia and based in the UK, is one of her regular favourite models, above, page 13 and page 18. Says Sandra, "There is always an adventure waiting in the woods... it was truly a great experience together with beautiful model Fauzia (@mrst_model) below. We had so much fun creating some dreamy images in woodlands."





For this beautifully costumed and posed composition, balletic and painterly with hints of 18th century France, Sandra used a picture of an equally well posed flamingo found the Natural History Museum, London. Her studio lighting manages to produce wonderful skin colour and shading yet the museum exhibit fits in despite being in completely different lighting beyond the photographer's control.





Sandra loves warm colours and especially the use of reds to give the women in her photographs an assertive power – “Red – what an energetic colour, symbolising warmth, royalty and mystery... it’s such a feminine colour, representing love, desire and self confidence”, she says. For more information see San Vid Photography on Facebook or visit the website <https://www.sanvidphotography.com>



THE MACRO MENAGERIE OF LEE FROST

The use of colour in both the subjects and the background sets Lee Frost's macro fauna gallery apart from most. The light quality given by putting a special enveloping bounce reflector fitted to camera flash pushes light into the backgrounds behind his often focus stacked subjects – but it is enhanced in post-processing?

We asked Lee to tell us how these amazing pictures were captured, using the gear of choice for such macro work, the OM-Systems MicroFourThirds bodies and the 60mm f2.8 M. Zuiko macro lens with an added Raynox attachment.

Lee writes: You will often find me photographing bugs way before sunrise. This may sound crazy to some, but it has its benefits. Insects are cold-blooded, so when the temperature drops at night this immobilises them, in contrast to a warm

Faces you never see eye to eye, and colours which pass you by, are all around you in our world of insects and spiders. Staffordshire specialist Lee will be talking about his award-winning extreme close-ups at the Photohubs day on January 31st.

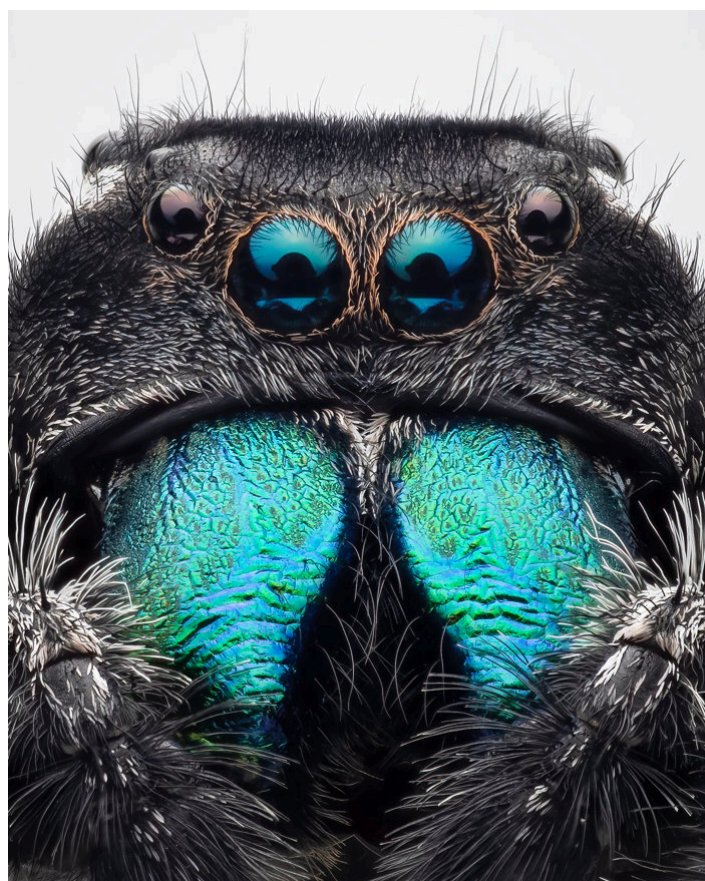
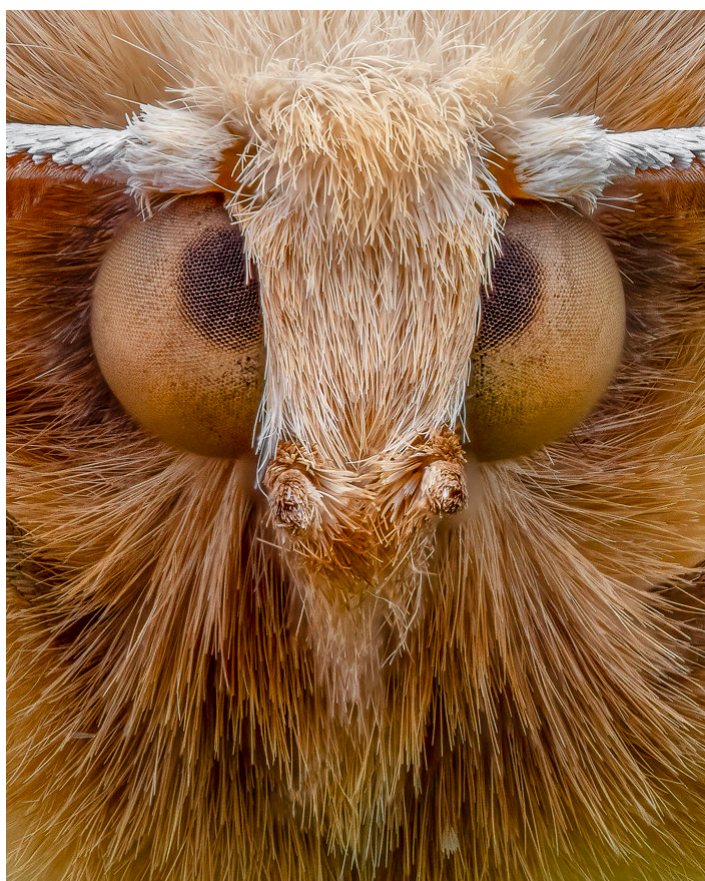
midday in the sun when they are too active to shoot. It's not just about getting up early – I keep a close eye on all the weather elements to get the perfect conditions of a big temperature drop, humidity, and no or little wind. If all of these look promising then I'll be at my local nature reserve around 3am.

Going out at this time gives me the opportunity to get close to the insects without them flying or running away. This also allows me to be creative. I carry a set of coloured cards with me in my camera bag, which I can put behind the subject.

I do this because using flash you will often get a black background unless it is very close. The card gives a less distracting clean background.

Another benefit of an early start is that you often get morning dew. This is why I look for a big temperature drop with high humidity – the more dew the better for me! There's nothing more pleasing than seeing your subjects covered in droplets, as the water magnifies the small details. Sometimes I place a flower behind the insects to be seen refracted within the droplets.

Nearly all my macro images are taken out in the field. I love the challenge of finding and photographing them. I can remember the first time I picked up a camera (second hand Nikon D90) around eleven years ago. I hadn't got a clue how to work it, I self – taught myself by going out there and learning everything about the camera. I can remember the first insect image I took, with a 70-300mm lens, of a ladybird, It was by far a great image, but I was amazed at the details I could see, and from this moment I was hooked. I knew that I wanted to get closer, so that's when I bought myself a prime macro lens (Sigma 105mm). Since then, I've had number of lenses and bodies. My set up currently is an Olympus **OM-D EM1-III** with **M.Zuiko 60mm f2.8** macro lens. I often combine this with a **Raynox DCR 250** close-up lens that attaches on to the front element giving me





around 4x magnification. At so close to the subject the depth of field is extremely limited, even moving a fraction of a millimetre you can be out of focus.

To get more of the subject in focus, I normally focus stack images together. This means taking multiple of images with a slight shift of focus plane between them, combining them in stacking software to get one overall image (some OM models do this in-camera). The subject needs to be still, so either going out early or evening when they're more settled and learning and watching their behaviour really helps. On most cameras, you focus on the front on the subject manually and shoot on continuous burst mode, whilst moving the camera on a focusing rail or changing the lens focusing, front to back. With Olympus/OM Systems, you don't have to move the camera at all as it has a great focus bracketing feature using

the lens's AF motor for the steps. Whatever you are shooting still needs to be still – ideally so does the camera, though hand-held focus stacking is found in the latest OM-Systems models.

When I first started macro, the most challenging aspect was the lighting. Insects are constantly on the move, and most are very reflective too, making it extremely difficult to get a decent image.

Using flash helps. I use a **Godox V350-O** which freezes the movement, and to get the best soft lighting it's important to get a well designed flash diffuser which spreads the light evenly over your subject, without harsh highlights, revealing well-lit details. There are now plenty of diffusers out there, but I find the **Cygnustech** diffuser to be one of the best (I'm now an ambassador for them too).





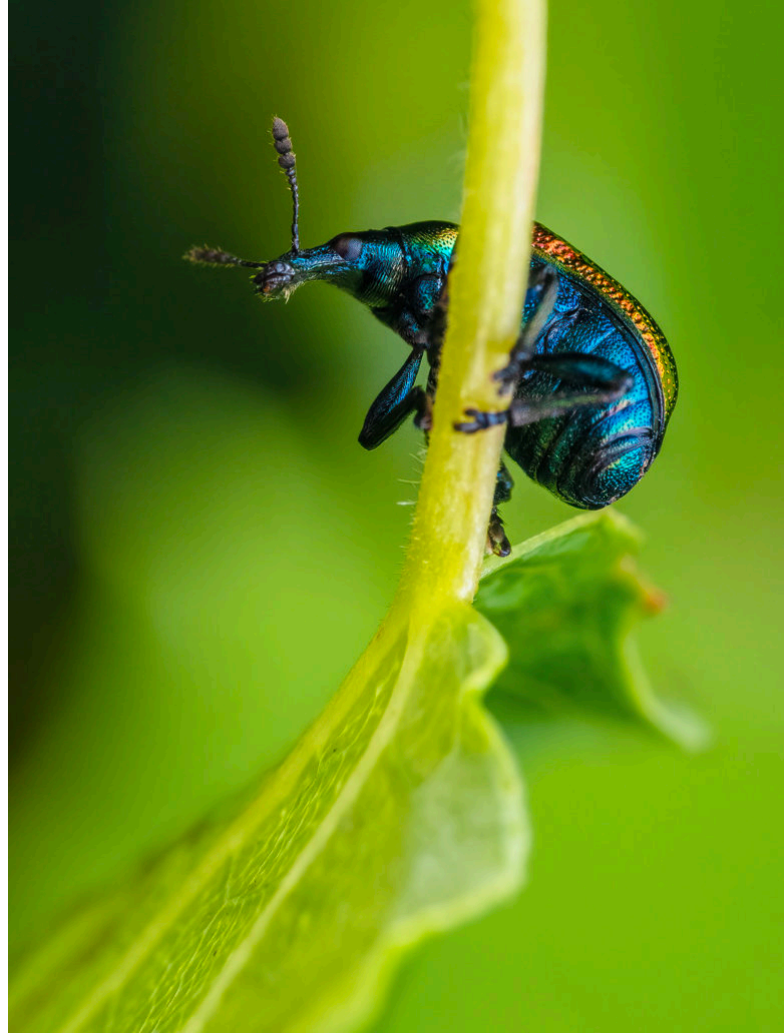


Garden bugs and beetles

What's great about macro photography is you don't need to go far to look for subjects, most of my images are taken within my own back garden. Planting certain plants and creating different habitats around the garden really helps to encourage insects to visit – I have a log pile, an uncut area of grass and plenty of bug hotels.

I would say some of my best images have come from my garden, which is great as I don't have a lot of time as I work full-time and have a young family. I often grab the camera quickly to take some images. I regularly see a good number of shield bugs, ladybirds and bees that visit and, the odd cool finds like a snakefly or a dingy skipper butterfly.

Top: Hazel Leaf-roller Weevil (Apoderus coryli). Below: Green Shield Bug (Palomina prasina). Right: Aspen leaf-rolling weevil (Byctiscus populi).





Overwintering with my pet mantis...

In winter, it's difficult to find insects as they're hibernating or in a larva stage, so I keep practicing and not feeling rusty when spring arrives. I often take pictures of my own pet praying mantids or jumping spiders. This wandering violin mantis (*Gongylus gongylodes*) was one of my winter shooting subjects. Although I prefer the challenge of shooting outdoors within the elements, this subject was still quite challenging as they mimic a leaf blowing in the wind by swaying constantly, so I had to wait for that brief period when it stopped moving to perform a focus stack. I ended up with this portrait from 22 images focus bracketed.





THE BEAUTIFUL CRAB SPIDER

I have so many subjects on my bucket list to shoot, so in 2024 I took a trip from my Staffordshire home down to Dorset to try to find the beautiful pink heather crab spider (*Thomisus onustus*).

Traveling over 220 miles (around trip) to find this spider was worth every mile. After hours of searching, I finally found one (*top left*) that was perfectly camouflaged against the bell heather. Heather crab spiders have the ability to change colour from pink to yellow to blend in within the flower they're sitting on, to ambush prey and camouflage themselves away from predators. This makes it even more difficult to find the spider, which are only 5mm long. I took a few images, compositions and focus stacks of this amazing spider adding different colour background cards behind the subject to remove anything distracting, following my established photographic style.

Because of the long trip I stayed over. The next day I continued the search to find more. I went on this expedition happy to find just one, and I was so stoked to stumble across this epic scene (*top right*). This heather crab spider had recently moulted her exoskeleton, which made a great foreground and told a story within the image. This spider is normally all pink (*top left*) but this one had blue hues because of that recent moult making it even more special!

I also found a flower crab spider (*Misumena vatia*, bottom right) within a foxglove. With the flower swaying in the wind there was no question of focus stacking. I had to take a single shot, but I was happy with the contrast of the spider against the flower, and the composition.



For further images and info see:

Facebook: search for Lee Frost's Capture Of Life

Instagram: lee_frosts_capture_of_life

PhotoHubs, Doubletree by Hilton, Stoke-on-Trent:

"The World Beneath our Feet" talk 31st January 2025, 10am. Workshop: Macro Masterclass, 13:30pm-16:30pm.

For booking details visit:

<https://photohubs.co.uk/guild-awards-2025/>

EXPERIENCE & EXPERIMENT

When life was normal for Angi Wallace, she enjoyed getting out and about. She was not a photographer, but she was a keen camper, cyclist and walker in time off from a busy career from State Registered Nurse to specialising in Rheumatology care. On holiday in Skye, she came across the Skye Serpentarium, perhaps an unlikely location for a reptile rescue centre. And that was when reptiles and frogs got her hooked.

She found a great reptile shop at home in Darlington, bought a snake... and pretty soon gained experience keeping over sixty snakes, frogs and lizards. She met a new partner, and moved south to Gloucestershire to open a reptile shop with him. It was a success, soon with three branches. Then she realised life was taking far more out of her than even this business should have demanded – and discovered she had contracted encephalomyelitis, ME.

Angi's partner saw she would need to move to a desk job and grabbed a chance to buy *Reptile Care* magazine which she had already written for. With three weeks to go before the next print deadline, she learned layout and production in two. The magazine needed photographs, and her Fujifilm point and shoot served at first. She moved on to a Canon 300D, and learned to shoot all manual on one of the first DSLRs, mastering

Angi Wallace is an eclectic artist in multiple media with a love from organic forms and the spiritual impact of colour. Well known in the world of reptile and amphibian keeping, she's also a dedicated explorer of new ways to create images and a prolific entrant and winner in competitions.



There's no faking in pictures like this Guild Silver Bar winner from Angi. The frogs she keeps as pets are happy to pose with the flowers or plants.

focus and aperture settings critical for the small creature close-ups. A local portrait group formed by keen amateurs happened to meet in a scout hut in their street, and she joined this, learning lighting and how the camera and photographer interact with larger human subjects.

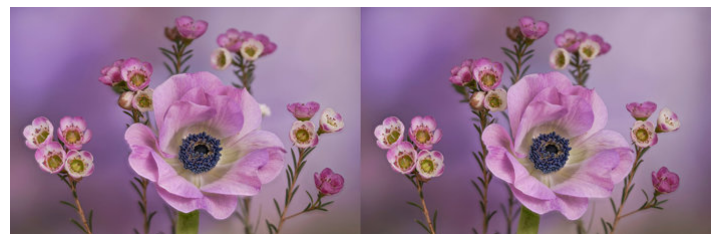
In 2014 she moved back north to Newcastle, meeting her partner Michael Matthews in 2017, sharing his interest in landscape and wildlife photography. Before Covid hit, her ME kicked in badly but she was determined to be independent even if her photography had to move indoors with subjects at table top level. With her pet frogs as ideal subjects, she gave workshops based on her experience as a specialist in this field. At the same time, she started sending pictures out to contests and gained publication in magazines like *Amateur Photographer*. Their team stayed in touch and in December ran a full feature on the creative and technical aspects of her main project since 2023, developing the art of submerging flowers in water and adding milk, paint, dye or natural colours like beetroot juice to stream down and form clouds.

Here her experience as a nurse may have been useful, as she uses syringes with the best gauge and length of needle to inject the liquids into the shot quickly and precisely.

Angi has been a member of the SWPP and NPS for 15 years now, and won many awards. Most have



Experimental approaches: above, small fungus set up using long exposure and smoke with creative lighting. Right, test shots for 3D macro. To see the effect, you will need close-up glasses and practice de-crossing your eyes.





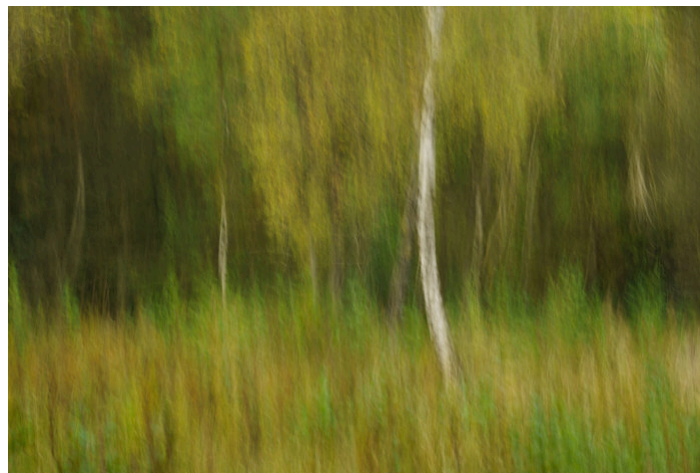
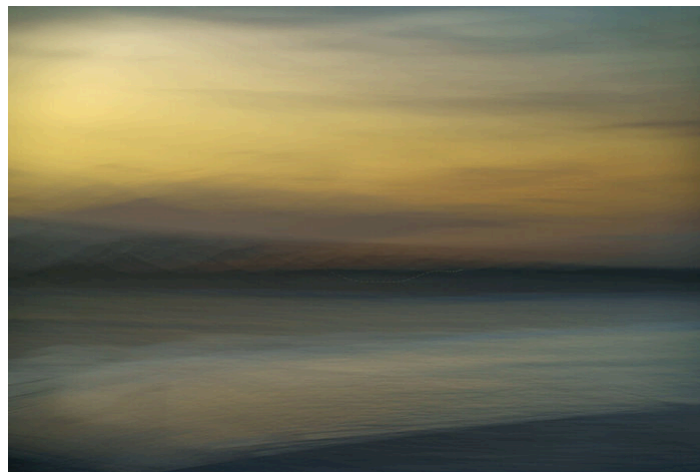
The foxgloves with beetroot juice in the water, and whole milk placed expertly using a long syringe, are hanging from above, inverted. Angi makes all kinds of supports for these shots, working on her dining room table with a tank she fills and can empty with the help of a caravanning portable shower pump. Many attempts may be needed to get exactly the right effect, developing her approach based on the work of Netherlands photographer Robert Peek.

*To read about Angi's interests in music, art, folklore and the cycle of the pagan year visit her website <https://angiwallacephotography.com> or follow her on Facebook as **angi.z.wallace***

been for her frogs and flowers. She's always used whatever teaching resources could be found, and studied work she likes from other photographers. This led her to shooting macro (she prefers to work with Sony full-frame and an adapted 180mm macro lens, with manual focus and a motorised focusing rail) and experimenting with focus stacking on small static subjects. "I like using the focusing rail although I have OM-Systems kit which can do in camera stacking with the 90mm lens", she told us. "Using the rail to move the camera instead of focusing the lens means I can take as many steps as I need."

Most recently Angi had a go at 3D macro, a format she saw in a *YouTube* tutorial from Allan Walls (allanwallsphotography.com). She regularly watches livestreams which have an active comment community, such as Allan's Thursday evening (8pm) login designed for his European time-zone watchers. On the previous spread we reproduce some small examples intended for 'de-cross' eye viewing, though these work much better on a screen with the ability to change viewing size.

She has also produced sets of images using intentional camera movement, and like her earlier

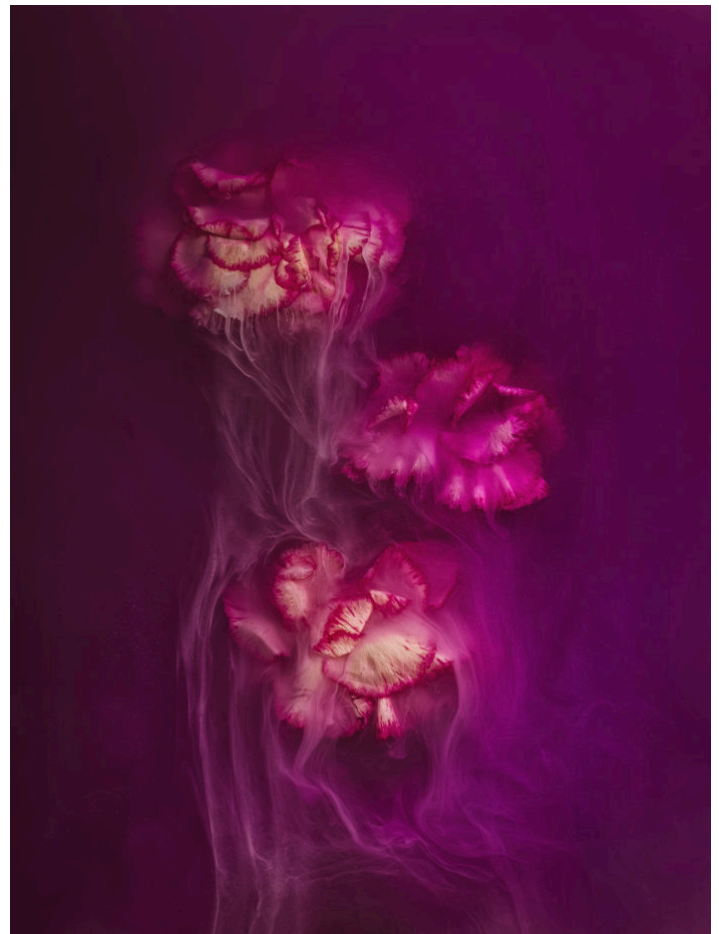


ICM is a dynamic technique which opens up the hours and conditions of light to studies made without a tripod, and sometimes even improved by the kind of shake likely from the effects of ME. The submerged flowers and flowing colours require camera support, as do the macro studies. Carnations with milk and beetroot juice, Silver and Bronze winners left and right below.

wildlife, amphibian, reptile and flower studies these have done well in competitions. She's gained more SWPP and NPS awards than we can possibly mention (her website has a full list) with International Garden Photographer of the Year and EISA short-listings, category winners and placings. Three times she's won the National Photographic Society's Photographer of the Year.

Despite her ME condition which can be severely disabling at times, she has with the support of Michael become one of the most successful competing photographers in the UK even though her subjects are nearly all at table-top scale and level. Every year she tries to tackle two new genres or learn skills for two new projects, and to use this experience to experiment further.

In 2024, she joined The Guild of Photographers. Her flowers in water have been a hit in the monthly contest, with the example on the right one of three gaining Gold. As an artist she has given up using acrylics when painting because of their toxicity, and now works in watercolour. She looks for more eco-friendly pigments and dyes (like beetroot juice and whole milk!) to use in her flower study tank.





Tamron 90mm f2.8 Di III Macro VXD

Classic successor for Sony E and Nikon Z

From the introduction of the very first Tamron Adaptall 90mm f2.5 Macro in 1979, there's always been at least one similar lens in their range. In 1990 the SP 90mm Macro cut the aperture to f2.8 but went autofocus and in 1999 extended to 1:1 – true macro, rather than the 1:2 of the earlier models. Since then there have been improvements in design and coating to match digital sensors, in autofocus, in performance and ultimately to add stabilisation in 2012. All of these have been in SLR or DSLR fittings and while Tamron has continued a tradition of extremely close focus in wide and tele lenses for mirrorless systems, there has never been a 90mm macro.

Now there is, for both Sony E and Nikon Z full frame coverage. It's a completely new design and owes most to the discontinued but acclaimed 60mm f2 Macro for APS-C DSLRs, with no physical lens extension and purely internal focusing. It's also fully upgraded in terms of coatings and environmental sealing, and uses the VXD voice-coil AF drive. It is not stabilised but relies on the sensor-based stabilisation in all current bodies the E(FE) or Z mount offer.

Since the first question any macro lens buyer asks will be "what is the clear working distance between the subject and the lens at 1:1?", let's answer that now – it's 80mm, and if you fit the large deep lens hood, it's more like 10mm. You would not try life-size macro in field conditions with the hood attached as it would most likely touch the subject, its support or the ground. 80mm is not too bad though it is roughly half the working distance of 90-100mm AF macros made for DSLRs.

It can be directly compared only to mirrorless macros like Sony's 90mm with a 130mm lens to subject distance, and the main competition of Sigma's stabilised 105mm, also 130mm away at 1:1. The Tamron is lighter, physically

shorter, has a wider angle of view for general use in studio and outdoor work, and costs less. The lens hit the shops around November 5th and has been priced at under £600, where the Sigma is £730 and Sony's 90mm G OSS is £819. Canon's RF 100mm f2.8L IS USM I £1,449; Nikon's Nikkor Z 105mm f2.8 VR S is £1,049. What marks out all of these is optical stabilisation, which we have to assume to be intelligently geared to close focusing right up to 1:1.

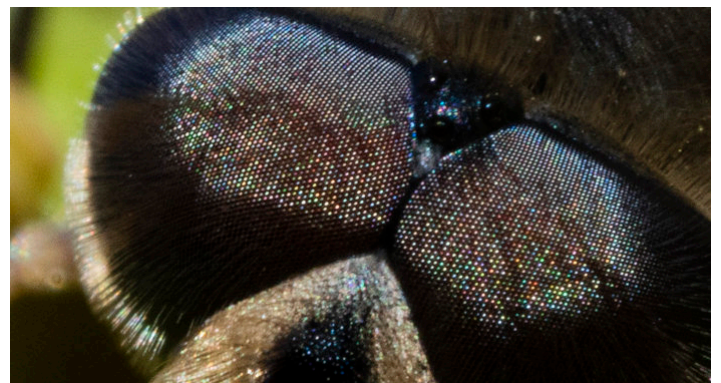
This is where I suspect my 2019 experiences with the Sony need considering:

<https://bit.ly/417WbiC>

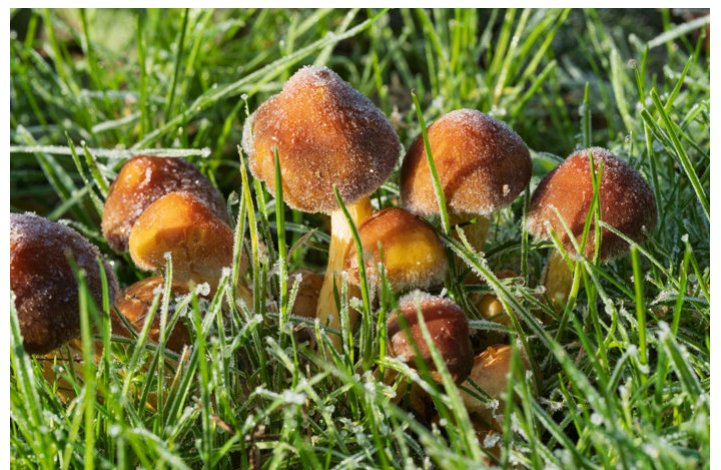
I suspect the unsharpness was caused by the OSS stabilisation system. To be sure, I found another example of the 90mm, mint secondhand and the same 2019 manufacture date. On checking, this lens was perfect – none of the edge of frame blur found with the lenses I tested in 2019.

When an internal focusing macro is at 1:1, it's normally got an angle of view equal to a lens about 60% longer, rather than twice the infinity focal length which would be the case with a Tessar-type macro lens using physical extension alone to focus close. It's complicated to map sensor-based stabilisation to the changing angle of view as any lens gets much closer than a quarter life size. When a lens claims minimal 'focus breathing' this means the angle of view does not change with focus. Traditional macro lenses change greatly, with double the infinity extension by 1:1, and thus half the angle of view.

All the new lenses with optical stabilisation must be programmed to take this into account, but the new Tamron 90mm has no stabilisation. It also claims minimal focus breathing, and as I've explained, this goes along with a much closer than normal distance to the subject at 1:1. Tamron seem to have designed this macro to be optimal with sensor-based stabilisation.



In the field hand-held shots can be very sharp with the Tamron thanks to effective sensor stabilisation and low noise high ISO. The hoverfly was taken at f13, ISO 640 (detail at 300dpi) and the frosty honey fungus at f16, ISO 800. Both were on APS-C crop frames (26MP).





The 90mm view is perfect for sunsets like this one, making more of the red fill the frame than a wide angle shot. Below, when a landscape needs more angle of view, it's easy to shoot a hand-held set of three frames and let Photoshop stitch a panorama. This view is 125 megapixels to print 2 metres long.



It has truly excellent corner to corner resolution at infinity, and maintains this with a very flat field all the way to 1:1 meaning copies of stamps should be as geometrically perfect as records of murals. It's worth noting that the Tamron 90mm of 1979 was introduced as a technical lens, not really one for flower and insect specialists. It was discovered by photographers outside the studio or the lab who might, ten years earlier, have been working with a 100mm macro lens head on auto bellows to capture natural history subjects. This latest lens is made for a different world.

Minimal focus breathing is also required for AF-based focus stacking (bracketing, even if the stack is not created in camera). It's why the OM-Systems M. Zuiko 60mm *f*2.8 Macro has been so successful with this technique – instead of leaving the lens focus locked and moving the camera or subject on a precision rail, focus change from fixed camera and subject positions works well. After being sure that the key performance of the Tamron was excellent, focus stacking needed checking using the A7RV's focus bracket function. It's a long time since I bought *Helicon Focus*

software to do this, and my licence had expired, but they offer a free trial period .

The obvious macro subject like my red Anthurium close-up overleaf showed the expected result with 20 bracketed raw files. However, the studio still life with shoes (deliberately composed to be too deep for a single shot even at *f*22) revealed that the Tamron is better suited than Sony's own 90mm G macro. Where the Sony lens needed 30 shots, the Tamron did the same job in 20. Helicon stacks raw files where the difference would be roughly 1.4GB per stack compared to 2.1GB. You

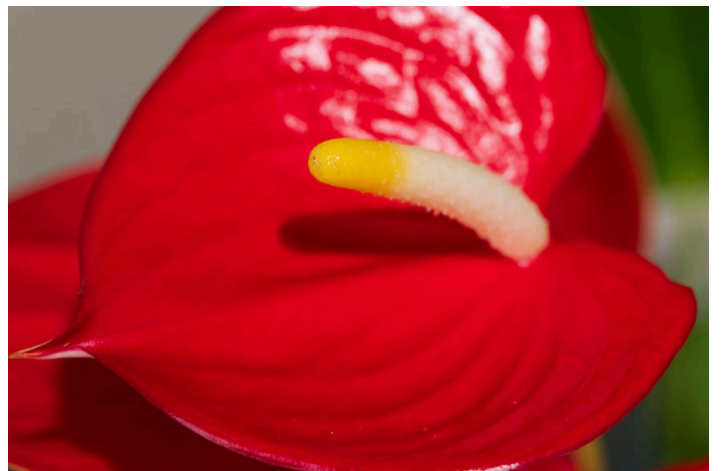
need a lot of storage space – fortunately Helicon creates a .DNG file which can be processed just like an original raw, and cards full of brackets can be binned.

At around 90cm to the closest part of the shoes, the Tamron took in a wider field of view than the Sony. It has exactly the same field at infinity, as you would expect. In the studio, where it could be used for portraits or products, it needs a little less space. At 1m distance, the Tamron was 92% of the Sony's focal length and more like using a conventional 85mm.

Outdoors, it's a lovely lens to use with very good colour and



Here are two practical examples of close range, rather than extreme macro, focus stacking. For the shoe above, the depth of the front toe to rear heel was 30cm and the toe was 90cm from the camera position. The final shot on the left used 20 focus bracketed frames at $f4$ covering the shoes: even at $f22$, the depth of field available would be just 15cm on a 12 megapixel shot. The stacked image is sharp at over 50 megapixels. The right hand slices show the first shot and last shot. Below, Anthurium flower spike and red leaf, stacked result upper left, 20 frames at $f8$ – a smaller aperture is essential with closer subjects. Note the blur on the background elements. This is more than a greatly stopped down single shot would show. Stacking boosts sharpness within the subject depth only.



contrast. The exceptional overall sharpness brings landscapes to life, and it's a perfect focal length for sunsets, hill country views, woodlands and rivers. These are all subjects where a longer lens pairs up well with a wide-angle. I stitched a few panoramas when views needed more horizontal angle, and the frames joined perfectly in Photoshop with so little vignetting or distortion to deal with.

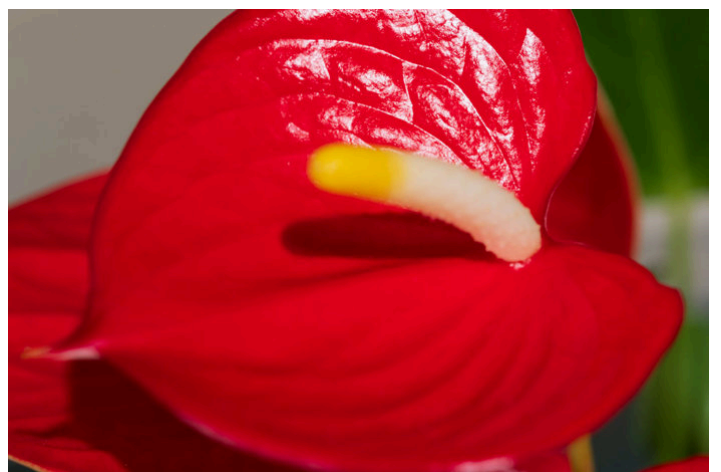
The Tamron has very fast AF which can handle moving subjects

in a way older generations of long macro just can't. In fact, it's an all-rounder which even can be recommended for weddings, though something like Tamron's close focusing 70-180mm G2 $f2.8$ zoom will win that decision given the cropping power of pro full frame sensors.

Social, commercial, scientific, creative – whatever your field it's a lens worth looking at.



<https://amzn.to/4fa5mCf>
<https://www.tamron.co.uk/>



GODOX iM30

Tiny manual slave flash ideal for macro

Macro specialists have been buying one new battery flash unit which has very few features – no dedication to any camera system, no TTL, no wireless function, no modelling light. Instead the Godox iM30 offers extremely low output further controllable by manual settings down to 1/64 – with a full power output of GN15/ISO100/m, 1/64 means GN1.9 or an aperture of $f1.9$ at ISO100 with the flash 1m away from the subject. And it has a built-in optical slave cell with both standard and pre-flash modes, enabling slave operation with most TTL-dedicated flashes, which otherwise trigger the slave with their pre-flash measurement pulse.

It's the small size, minimal weight of 78g, and slave function which allow macro users to mount two, four or six of these in a ring round the lens with brackets allowing angling inwards.

In practice the power range is well suited to close up or macro, but also for special use in the studio or on location. It's small enough to put light inside cabinets, under or behind things, to do hair or translucent clothing backlight, or add textural skim light to food shots.

The full power recycling is 3.6s with an expected 250 flashes per battery set, but what counts more is the minimum power. I was able to shoot 8-frame OM-5 in camera focus stacks using flash at

I used an AI powered fungus identifier site for this specimen, providing details of size, habitat, colour, location and date taken. Response: "Based on your description and the photos provided, this mushroom appears to be a member of the genus Coprinellus, likely Coprinellus micaceus or a related species. . . . mushrooms in the Coprinellus genus are part of the "inky cap" group because their gills can dissolve into a black, inky liquid as they mature." In the shots this process can already be seen happening. OM-5, 60mm macro, $f13$ and ISO 200, one iM30 in camera at 1/16, one further away, beyond and above the subject at 1/8 power for right hand repro, 1/4 for the two smaller examples.

<https://www.yeschat.ai/gpts-20TolcBVlr-Mushroom-Identifier>



The iM30 with box. Right, two units as used for the shots below, one on camera, slave on mini tripod.

minimum power, aperture $f5.6$, with 0.1s interval for the flash to recycle. At 10fps the iM30 could fire 12-14 flashes at minimum power depending on battery state. What this little gun will not let you do is use old batteries, it has a warning for low battery which disables firing even if it appears the ready light is on. The colour temperature is $6500K \pm 200K$, which



is on the cold side, a very clean white light as the tiny fairy ink cap below shows. The gun is well made with a metal hot shoe, a 2.5mm sync jack cord minijack connection (cord not supplied), a battery cover

with an elastic tether meaning it won't get lost, and comes with an oversized soft pouch. At only £32, it's also great value. – DK

<https://amzn.to/49tZXVC>



Viltrox 16mm f1.8 FE *Designed and built to high end range standards, the full frame fast super-wide has zero distortion and a smart OLED display.*

Some lenses are made for low light and some are made for wide-angle coverage. A few are made for both but usually cost accordingly and can be too large and heavy to fit in with daily outfits. The Viltrox 16mm f1.8 costs under £550, is solidly built but not too heavy or bulky, and combines very fast STM+ AF with a smart illuminated OLED display and on-lens focus point memory buttons. It goes a step beyond the features of the Zeiss Batis 18mm f2.8, and unlike the slightly smaller and lighter Sony G Master 14mm f1.8 it can take conventional 77mm filters.

The combination of f1.8 at this focal length with a nearly flat rather than domed front element is probably down to being 16mm and not any shorter. Sigma's 14mm f1.4 DG DN is not only nearly twice the 550g weight it's so big it comes with a tripod foot, and has the expected strongly domed front glass. The Viltrox occupies a unique position technically and on price. It's superb value mechanically (metal!) and optically has 15 elements in 12 groups, with 4 ED glass and 3 aspherical. It is not entirely flare free, but well controlled, with good contrast and colour.

It's officially stocked by WEX and other stores so you may be able to get one in to look at, though direct ordering (taking a few days for delivery) can save £100. However, a vendor with a good warranty and replacement policy is advised.

On my A7RV, the lens seemed to behave just as a native Sony should for face and eye AF, tracking, and how the EVF displayed focus points and zones. On other bodies, user reports indicate there can be anomalies like Eye AF only working if set to Animal, even with human subjects. There are some reports of AF not working at all, and that the illuminated LED display drains the battery even when the camera is off. I did not find any problem, but was aware that battery use is affected by the display. It's extremely useful to have at night to confirm things like manual focus set to infinity for astro

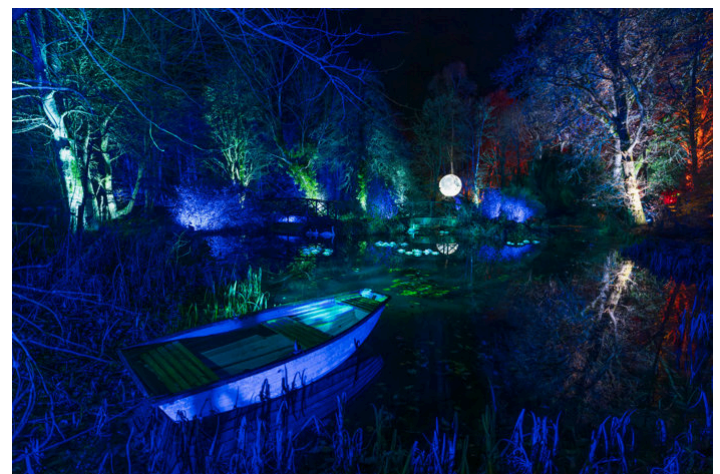


The 16mm is a substantial lens in a metal barrel, with an aperture ring (on/off 1/3rd stop clicks), AF/MF switch, Fn1 and Fn2 custom buttons for AF memory and camera functions, and an excellent illuminated LED display. At night (Monteviot, Jedburgh, below) hand-held work at f1.8 was possible.

skies. I took the lens to a firework display and the accuracy of the MF distance scale came in very useful – most 16mm lenses won't distinguish between 10m and infinity.

I ran a suggested firmware update via their app on my iPhone with apparent success but it disabled the LED aperture, focus distance, depth of field, and A-B focus point setting via Fn1 and Fn2 sealed rubber buttons. Manual focus was also disabled with the LED locked to displaying an infinity symbol (though AF kept working). I had bought through the Viltrox store on Amazon, and arranged a refund. One was re-ordered direct from Viltrox UK and works perfectly, so until they change the firmware update method, it's frozen in time.

As for performance, it's optically superb and the STM+ stepping motor AF drive is as good as any. MF focus by wire is very finely controllable with the aperture set to f1.8 (MF is with the lens at working aperture) and the 1/3rd soft clicked (and de-clickable) stops from 1.8 to 22 + A are positive and smooth. The aperture has nine blades – not the most regular rounded polygon, but



bokeh is attractive and when defocus effects are wanted f1.8 or f2 make perfect circles. It is worth stopping down to f2.8 for a little more depth of field, and to f4 to reduce strong vignetting, but it's very sharp wide open. The aperture closes audibly by motorised micro-steps causing a shutter release delay when stopped well down using AF-S, though using Manual exposure reduced this and AF-C eliminated it in most conditions (many lenses including Sony's own do this). Geometry is nearly perfect even without the Adobe compatible lens profile, which corrects for full

aperture vignetting. From f5.6 to f22 you may prefer results with the profile turned off.

The lens comes well packed and presented, but with minimal instructions in print, and just a PDF of those on line. The lens cap is lightly made and the petal hood clicks properly into alignment in reverse stowage position but has no click in working position and can easily be rotated a touch by accident to intrude into the shot. And that's the only obvious flaw!

<https://amzn.to/3V7BvTO>
<https://www.viltrox.co.uk/>

A composite of three frames – two vertical tripod exposures of fireworks, 5 seconds at f8 at ISO 100, manual focus at f1.8 memorised on lens button Fn1; one horizontal hand-held exposure of the crowd, fire and fairground ride feathered in at the bottom of the combined frames using Photoshop Layers, 1/160s at f1.8, ISO 1000 (Sony A7RV).



Sigma 150-600mm + 1.4X + MC11 = 840mm FE

At the end of 2024 a retail offer appeared for the Sigma 150-600mm f5-6.3 DG OS HSM Contemporary plus 1.4X TC-1401 Teleconverter, in Canon and Nikon DSLR fittings (EF and FX), for £925 including VAT.

This 2014 lens has outlived the 50% more expensive, bigger and heavier Sport DG OS HSM in these older SLR (and Sigma SA) mounts, but has never been made for mirrorless. A new DG DN Optically Stabilised Sport for Sony FE and Sigma/Panasonic L-mount has the benefit of best in class close focus to 58cm at 150mm (1:2.9 scale) though the same 2.8m at 600mm. This costs around £1,084 with recent cash-back. While it is 270g heavier than this SLR Contemporary model, it cuts 760g off the old Sport version and has a 95mm filter fit rather than 105mm.

So, while older system owners have a choice of C or S series versions mirrorless owners have only one option, designated Sport but size, weight and price more in line with Contemporary.

So why is that £925 deal worth considering for Sony owners? You can add to it a Sigma MC-11 mount converter which costs £199 or about half that used. Many owners may also have this already. The MC-11 turns the 150-600mm Canon EF mount Contemporary into a highly functional lens for Sony EF – and Sigma's teleconverters offer usable autofocus functions with it. When used with on DLRS, AF is disabled, as they just can't do AF with an f9 lens. Current mirrorless bodies can, but Sony prevents prevents Sigma or Tamron (or others) making any 1.4X or 2X E-mount converters.

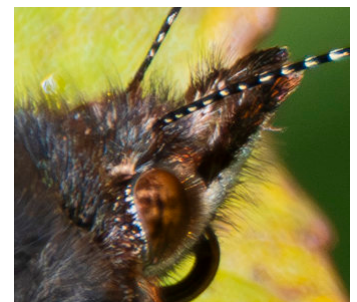
This means £925 plus an MC-11 gets you a 210-840mm f7.1-9 which tests on Sony A7RV showed will focus in good light with speed and accuracy, plus Bird or Animal Eye AF and tracking. L-mount owners, if they buy the new Sport model, can get native 1.4X and 2X Sigma converters which also autofocus – even at 1200mm f12.5. The MC-11 plus Canon EF mount lens option is an affordable way to achieve super-



tele zoom AF.

AF stopped being reliable on A7RV below to 1/50s at f9 at ISO 6400. The MC-11 + TC-1401 combination can't be used below EV7 (outdoor dusk, or room lighting) on this body but might be better on an A7SIII, A1 or A9. Even the lens on its own, with just MC-11, will hunt and miss the subject if it's low contrast and this seems to be mostly down to the AF being too fast and overshooting. The AF range limiter settings (2.8-10m and 10m-∞) did not prevent hunting and it was best left set to Full, in any light. Trying different AF area settings it seemed best with wide area AF and Bird Eye recognition, which also worked for insects and animals (as Sony users have found, bird eye recognition just seems to look for a smaller eye!).

The sharpness of the 1.4X and lens combo is impressive, with just a tweak down from wide open f9 at 840mm to f10 cutting any hint of softness, and f11 optimal. On full frame, the left hand side was slightly soft wide open, not unusual with an OS zoom at maximum focal length.



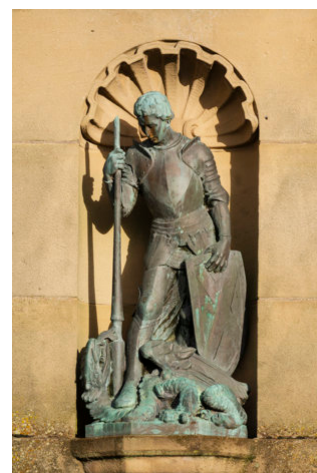
The APS-C 26MP crop, a 1260mm equivalent view, was sharp corner to corner and framed the butterfly above from 2.8m. The converter holds sharpness well over the full range. We didn't try the 2X converter as experience says there is always a penalty. For lengths up to 600mm, the lens on its own is better.

Given the limitations of AF performance, this is a good buy if you need 840mm and don't want to spend £2,080 on the Sony 200-600mm and 1.4X – more so if you use Canon EF lenses and already own an MC-11... or a Canon! The lens + 1.4X combo was £949 on Amazon in December.

<https://www.sigmauk.com>
<https://amzn.to/3D2XxRy>



Bird Eye AF in an APS-C 840mm shot taken at f10, which is enough to render all the plumage very sharp. 1/500s, ISO 3200, Adobe AI Noise Reduction.



At a distance of 2km, Floors Castle, 840mm, f9, full frame. The very left end of the shot loses focus slightly, some similar shots do not – is probably due to the effective optical stabilisation. George and Dragon statue – first of 840mm, then at 568mm, in theory would have been better without the converter but in fact is very sharp. Below, at 840mm, APS-C crop, Animal Eye AF at f9. 1/500s at ISO 1000, with Adobe AI Noise Reduction from raw.



Playing the BIG game versus playing the smart game – full frame bulk or small sensor?

So here I was, preparing to lead a photo safari in Africa, when your illustrious editor sends me a message: "I'm going to write an article about a 150-600mm Sigma EF lens with converter, and adapting this Canon fit kit to Sony", he says. "Good timing", I said, "I'm going to be testing two 600mm lenses while in Africa. Why don't we do a comparison?"

So we started planning. I arranged for a loan of two additional lenses for testing, making a total of five lenses we could compare across the pond. The five lenses were:

1. The **Sigma 60-600mm f4.5-6.3 DG DN OS Sports Lens** (Sony mount) – the 10x range appealed to me, since it meant I wouldn't have to change lenses much and risk getting dirt on the sensor.

2. The **Sony RX10 IV**, my favorite travel camera since it has an incredible 24-600mm equivalent lens permanently attached to the lightweight body. It achieves this portability by employing a small, 1"-type sensor.

3. The **Sony FE 200-600mm f5.6-6.3 G OSS** lens.

4. **Sony FE 600mm f4 GM OSS** lens, at a mere \$13K USD.

5. **Tamron's 150-500mm** as covered in three *Cameracraft* tests, in Sony E, Nikon Z and Fujifilm X fit, since July/August 2021. In that issue we also included an extensive round-up of all long teles and zooms, over 400mm, then available. Since then the Tamron 50-400mm and now the Sigma 60-600mm have joined the choice.

You can read the edition with the fullest report on the Tamron by downloading a PDF from:

<https://bit.ly/ccJulAug2021>

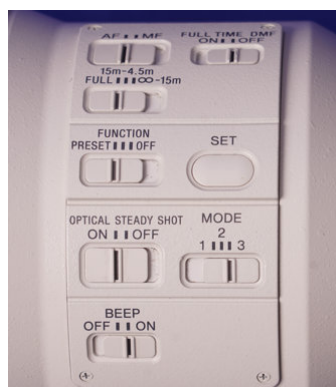
Ultimately, only the Sigma 60-600mm made it to me in time to fly to Africa. Delivery problems prevented me from testing the first four lenses all at once, so separate tests of the Sony lenses were conducted. The 600mm f4 might not have been practical to take, especially with two other large zooms, as you can see from the first photograph here.



Associate Editor Gary Friedman set out to compare three choices of very large zoom and telephoto with his favourite daily RX10 IV camera and its 600mm equivalent capture



The 600mm f4 and Gary with the RX10 IV, above. Below, Gary on safari with the Sigma 60-600mm lens zoomed to 600mm



200-600mm (left) and 600mm f4 Sony AF and OSS switches. Below left, Sigma switches, with C1/C2/Off acting as Mode 1, 2 and 3. Below right: the 600mm f4 takes rear 40.5mm filters in a slot-in carrier.



Sigma impressions

10x zooms that go to 600mm are some of the most challenging optical designs, and to make them affordable is just as challenging. At USD \$2,000 it's a great value. But I wasn't prepared for the weight.

Hand-holding such a large lens for long periods while waiting for something interesting to happen can cause your arms to shake and you have to take a break. And forget about shooting video if you don't have a tripod or a bean bag to rest on the edge of the jeep. My video footage was so erratic that even the warp stabilizer feature of Adobe *Premiere Pro* couldn't smooth it out.

Optically, the lens is outstanding – especially when stopped down to about f6.7 or so. In spite of this, my yield of critically sharp images was low – perhaps in the 5% range. I had not set *Focus Priority AF* and instead was using *Balanced Emphasis* assuming it would work well. I was in *Shutter Priority* mode at 1/1000s most of the time, with AF-C, Tracking on, and the Sony A7R V's *Animal Eye AF* enabled. But when compared to equivalent shots taken with the oh-so-much-easier-to-handle RX10 IV, the sharp full frame Sigma shots are like professional wildlife shots, whereas the RX shots are like amateur 'not quite there' versions. There's a reason wildlife professionals go for the big guns.

But the Sigma had a flaw which resulted in the photo safari participants hearing me swear loudly about eight times a day – the lens would lock focus with a noise from its motor still trying to operate even though the AF had locked on. The camera wouldn't take a picture and often I'd have to remove and reinsert the battery.

This was my first safari and my first time using such a lens. Now that I've experienced shooting with such heavy gear I'll be more prepared for next year – I'll work out a system using either a bean bag, a monopod – or both – to increase my yield and enjoy the journey more.



Above and below you see two images both 20 megapixels (which would be enough for a double page spread or A3 print). The top one is the entire frame from the Sony RX10MkIV at its longest setting of 220mm actual focal length, which is equivalent to 600mm on full frame. It was taken at $f6.3$, $1/125$ at ISO 100, though Gary believes the maximum tele aperture of $f4$ could well be sharper, with little need to stop down to improve this. The bottom shot is a section of a similar composition with the Sony A7RV and Sigma 60-600mm at 600mm – the 61 megapixel image has been cropped to 20 megapixels, showing the effective real telephoto power. If this shot had been taken on an A9 or original A7/A7II, with a 24 megapixel sensor, the crop would be closer to the framing above. Extra megapixels give extra reach for what used to be called selective enlargement. This shot was taken at $1/500$, $f6.3$, ISO 200.



This is the real thing – 600mm f4 bokeh and 61 megapixels, sharp enough for a metre high print you could study with a magnifier. But the retouched 20MP RX10 IV shot, with Gaussian Blur where bokeh was missing, would make a fine 20 x 16"/A2.



The Sony options

The other two lenses finally arrived from Sony – the monstrous 600mm f4 (no zoom) and the more moderate 200-600 f5.6-6.3. You expect lenses in this price range to be painfully sharp, and once I dialed up the shutter speed to 1/250s while handholding they finally were. Below that hand shakiness will blur your images.

Let's start with the 600mm f4. OMG what wonderful bokeh! But on a safari you really have to control your distance from the animals because this lens can't zoom. Yes, you have lots of room to crop if you use a 61MP camera, but if you're paying that much for a lens you really want to eke out every last detail your equipment is capable of capturing. The other problem I encountered (again, while handholding) is that it's too easy to accidentally touch the giant focusing ring, putting the camera into Direct Manual Focus mode even if that feature has been disabled on the lens and on the

camera. Clearly this lens is best used on a tripod or monopod. Just for fun I tried photoshopping two similar images of a patient dog model – one taken with the 600mm f4, and the other taken with the RX10 IV at "600mm". Initially the difference in bokeh is night and day, but by doing some careful Gaussian blur I was able to make the two images pretty close. That saved me USD \$11,400, allowing me to send one of the grandkids to college in the US for a week...

After using the Sigma and the Sony 600mm f4, the Sony 200-600mm f5.6-6.3 was a relative joy. Slightly lighter than the Sigma (and slightly cheaper, too!) it's real handling benefit is the internal zoom mechanism, versus the Sigma's extending zoom which requires more force and more torque – fatiguing the hands quite a bit. And there were very few times on safari when I needed the 60-200mm range of the Sigma, something I thought would be the lens' great advantage. Live and learn.

One mystery I had difficulty uncovering is the "Image Stabilization Mode" switch on all three lenses. I was very familiar with the first two – Mode 1 is the equivalent to turning the SteadyShot image stabilization function from the camera's menu. Once you press the shutter release button halfway, the image is stabilized in the viewfinder, and primed for you take the picture. Mode 2 is designed for sports photographers who like to pan with their subjects at shutter speeds that would yield a moving background. It corrects only for up and down shakiness, not for left and right shakiness, so that the lens doesn't try to correct for the panning movement.

Mode three on the Sony lenses was the mystery, and none of the documentation I sought offered a clear explanation. Here's what I figured out: It is identical to Mode 1, except that the image stabilization does NOT engage with the half-press of the shutter. Rather, it activates at the moment

of exposure. Sony says this is ideal for trying to frame erratically-moving subjects, although I don't see how that would help.

Finally, let's talk about the Sony RX10 IV, one of the best travel cameras ever made and by far the easiest to handhold for long periods. Its 24-600mm range is achieved by using the same 20MP 1" sensor as their famous RX100 point-and shoot. The actual focal length (from 8.8 to 220mm) is marked, and shown in EXIF, as its 35mm equivalent. If you are a fan of pixel peeping you might be disappointed that the detail on the fur or the eyelashes of an animal aren't as spectacular; but I've learned over the years that printing is the great equalizer. When enlarged to poster size, few photographers could tell which camera took which picture (see blog reference below). Another unexpected quality of the RX10 IV is the close focusing distance – at 600mm, it can achieve focus at 1m, which is closer than it can at "200mm"! Finally, it has one of the



Left, the 600mm f4's AF captures movement fast and close towards the camera at 1/5000s. Above, the 200-600mm at f6.3 and below the RX10 IV at f4. both at 1/2500s. A third picture was taken with white dog using the 600mm f4 at 1/2500s, but we liked the shot of the retriever in mid-air. Sony's Eye AF or Animal Eye AF has simply worked well and did for many shots.



few lenses I've ever tested that is actually the sharpest wide open! Most lenses aren't at their peak unless shooting in the middle of their *f*-stop range.

Given that all three full frame lenses are wonderful optically, I will say that next time I go on safari the Sony 200-600mm lens will be my lens of choice. It is a perfect balance between weight, usability, image quality, and bokeh.

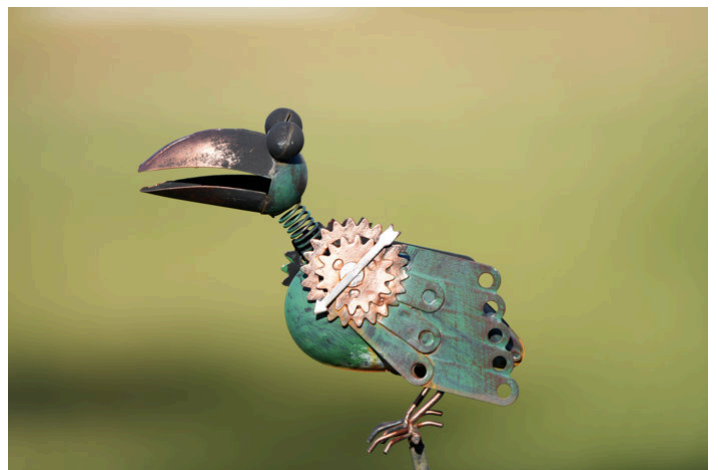
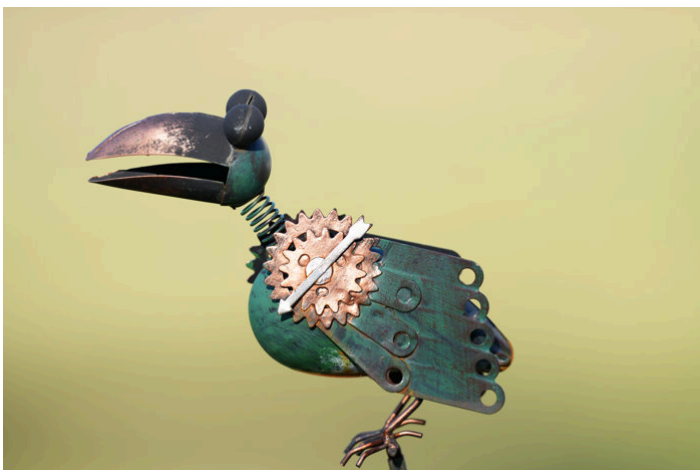
See Friedmanarchives blog:

<https://bit.ly/FriedmanRX10IV>



Testing close focus and bokeh on the three Sony options, with the RX10 IV at its longest tele setting of 220mm (600mm equivalent) shown left, at f4 full aperture at maximum telephoto in this zoom's f2.8-4 range.

Below left, the exceptionally smooth bokeh of the big 600mm f4 wide open. Although this lens has internal focusing, it does not have focus breathing and gives a true 600mm view when focused close. Below right, the 200-600mm at 600mm and f6.3 full aperture. The internal zoom design means that at very close focus it's not a true 600mm.



CAMERACRAFT

REARVIEW



Left, a superb street photo which deserves to be studied for a few minutes, not just taken in briefly. *Business as Usual* from **Ryan Hutton**, a Guild Bronze winner. Ryan used a Leica Q3 with its fixed Summilux f1.7 28mm, capturing the moment with 1/500s at f5.6, ISO 160.

Below, an interesting lighting and composition concept from **Rachel Green**, taking at ISO 1000 using the Sony A7RV with 24-70mm f2.8 Sony GMII lens wide open at 70mm, 1/80s. A Bronze winner.

Right, they go so well together as a pair that we feature here two images by **Scott Williams**. Both were given Silver awards in the Guild of Photographers monthly competition. Neither has any technical metadata





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Friday 31st January 2025 SPEAKER DAY PASS PRICE – £25

Times: 09:00-16:00 (last entry 14:00)

This gives you access to listen to the Speaker Presentations on Day One, as listed below and to Book a Photography Mentoring Session (subject to availability)

DAY ONE – SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

10:00 **Lee Frost** – “Beginner to Award Winner – The micro-world beneath our feet”. See the main feature in this issue! Join him in his macro world and get insights into how he captures his images.

<https://www.facebook.com/LeefrostsCOL/>

11:30 **Glyn Dewis** – “The NEW Photoshop (and Lightroom) for Photographers Workflow”. Glyn gives us a look at some of the latest enhancements that help to increase creativity PLUS a look at a new approach to retouching.

<https://glyndewis.com/>

13:15 **Simon Burfoot** – “Making your light shapers work for you”

In this short talk Simon will demonstrate the different ways to use your light shapers to get the most out of them.

<https://www.facebook.com/TheLightDr/>

14.30 **Jo Bradley** – “Little Things Matter” – Balancing impact with attention for the little details, especially when entering competitions. Jo will show you some images for you to critique and decide on which could be elevated – and how as well.

<http://www.jobradley.co.uk/>

Saturday 1st February 2025 SPEAKER DAY PASS PRICE – £25

Times: 09:00-16:00 (last entry 14:00)

This gives you access to listen to the Speaker Presentations on Day Two, as listed below, enter our Print Competition, meet Trade friends, and Book a Photography Mentoring Session (subject to availability).

DAY TWO – SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

10:00 **Gavin Prest** – “I want to tell you a story (and maybe in black and white)” Gavin will be discussing how to create a narrative in your photography and how to best process and convert your images into black and white.

<https://www.gavinprest.com/>

11:30 **Natasha Ince** – “For the Female Gaze- Photographing Portraits of Women” A master of light & styling, a skilled editor and an experienced director of posing. In this session find out how to get the best images of your female subjects.

<https://www.photographybynatasha.co.uk/>

13:15 **Katie Hughes** – “A Cosmic Journey through Time and Space”

Star tracker Katie will talk about the different types of Astrophotography (from Lunar to Solar and Deep Space) and what you can take even with just a DSLR and tripod, as well as other Astro equipment.

http://www.facebook.com/alba_astro

14.30 **Print Competition Judging** – Join us for the LIVE Judging of the Print Competition. An exciting session packed with learning! This is a great opportunity to learn from Judges and a great prize awaits the winner! Included in the Day Pass for Saturday is the option to enter an image into the competition FREE of charge! People can enter even if not attending and you can enter more than once at a cost of £10 per image.

TWO DAY SPEAKER, COMPETITION & TRADE PASS – £45

Friday 31st January – Saturday 1st February 2025

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Free to read online – <https://tinyurl.com/guildCL>

Creative Light

Issue 64
magazine



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