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The Inaugural United Kingdom and Europe Nature Photographers (UKNP) Conference.

Back in the summer of 2006, the moderators of the UK/European Naturephotographers.net regional group were looking for ideas on how to take the forum forward. The idea that we felt would have the biggest appeal to the members was to hold an annual conference. This would serve as a venue for everyone to meet in person and to hold more in-depth discussions on those aspects of nature photography that are harder to communicate on-line. So, on the 7th January 2007, UKNP held its inaugural annual conference. The one day event was an outstanding success, being booked to capacity soon after it was announced. Held in Loughborough in central England, UKNP members and guests travelled from all over the UK, with some members flying in from as far a-field as Denmark and Switzerland. To mark the inauguration, all those who attended received a specially commissioned metal NPN Lapel Badge as a memento.

The agenda of this first conference was designed to deal with a variety of subjects which had often formed topics for discussion on the forums - things such as working with the European photographic agencies; travelling worldwide with your camera; digital workflow; getting close to wild subjects without causing disturbance, and a detailed location report on a European seabird haven (The Isle of May). All of these topics were liberally interspersed with outstanding examples of wildlife photography and helpful advice on how to achieve these pictures. The conference took the format of a series of 45 minute and 1hr presentations from both professional and semi-professional local photographers, with a chance to ask questions during and after each presentation.

The doors opened at 9am and, after a half hour chance for people to grab a coffee, the day kicked off in earnest at 9.30am with a welcome and brief history of UKNP from Nick Unwin and Tom Wylie. First to take to the floor was David Kjaer, a UK based photographer whose work can be seen gracing the pages of many bird and wildlife magazines. David gave everyone a very interesting talk on his experiences working with Photo Agencies and Stock Libraries, and throwing in a few ideas on other areas that photographers could look at to generate income. David's talk included a number of excellent slides which he used to illustrate the points he'd made - giving everyone a chance to see some wonderful close-up shots of Capercaillie and Crossbills in the process.

One of the perennial problems facing photographers is that of how to fit their photography into the restricted time for travelling and shooting that their jobs allow. Veteran traveller Paul Hobson was next to take to the floor, demonstrating how he researched locations and species to ensure the best use of his time and resources when travelling. Paul showed images from recent trips to Africa to watch the Wildebeest migration and to Finland to photograph Brown bears as examples, looking at issues such as seasonal timing, travel inside each country, safety and, that bugbear of a photographers' life, flying with your gear and powering your kit when you're away from mains electricity. Throughout the lecture, Paul continued to show how, even with limited time and resources, with a bit of careful forethought and planning, you could get those shots you'd always wanted.

After the morning presentations, a long recess for lunch allowed the chance for everyone to enjoy some good food and beer at a nearby pub. The break was also put to good use by everyone to put faces to the familiar names from the forum and do some social networking.

Leading us into the afternoon sessions Mike Lane showed how, as a working full-time pro wildlife photographer, he managed his transition from film to digital and had developed his digital workflow using tools like Breezebrower, and Photoshop. Mike pointed out the features of the programs which allowed him to work quickly and efficiently through hundreds of shots - even while on the road. Following on from Mike, Kevin Keatley showed how he used hides and cammo gear to get really close to subjects such as Barn Owls and Kingfishers. For those of you who don't know him, Kevin is the man behind Wildlife Watching Supplies (www.wildlifewatchingsupplies.co.uk), and whose skill in creating Cammo gear for both camera equipment and people has helped many photographers and film crews throughout the world to get that bit closer to wildlife. Kevin had also kindly brought along a selection from his stock of Cammo gear and a number of people made the most of the opportunity to check out the gear and get those essential bits of Cammo gear that you simply can't find or buy from anyone else!



The final speaker of the day was UKNP's Tom Wylie. Tom had spent some time in 2006 on the Isle of May, a small island which lies several miles off the coast of Scotland. The Island has limited public access and facilities, but provides a beautiful location and superb access to its residents - thousands of breeding Atlantic Puffins, Guillemots, Razorbills and gulls. Tom gave a very useful run through on the logistics of getting to, living on, and photographing in the middle of this huge offshore seabird city.



The day was rounded up with a discussion on how UKNP could be improved for its members with some good suggestions being put forward. Then, after a final chance for everyone to browse through (and buy!) some gear Cammo gear from Kevin, the doors finally closed at 5.30pm, having raised a grand sum of £165 (\$300) which will be donated to a Wildlife Charity.

Thanks to all those who made this event an outstanding success - to all the members who supported it, especially those who travelled a significant distance to do so, the UKNP Moderators (Jim, Nick, Phil and Tom) for the organisation of the day and to Advantica (www.advanticagroup.com) for the use their facilities. Finally, a big thanks must also go to David Kjaer, Paul Hobson, Mike Lane, Kevin Keatley and Tom Wylie for a series of inspiring, informative and entertaining talks.

We're already working on the plans for the next conference in 2008 - see you there!

Editors Note:

For any members who would like one of the metal NPN lapel badges, they can be obtained from Jim Erhardt (USA) or Tom Wylie (Europe) for a small fee plus postage & packaging.

Web Sites:

Paul Hobson: <http://www.paulhobson.co.uk>

Mike Lane: <http://www.nature-photography.co.uk>

Kevin Keatley: <http://www.wildlifewatchingsupplies.co.uk>

Nick Unwin & Tom Wylie
