



SPS Newsletter

What's Inside?

- 01** Welcome
- 02** Life in a Motorhome ... the Ultimate freedom on the Open Road
By Elizabeth Smith
- 03** Through the Lens ... Changes In Photography
By Jenny Ladbrooke
- 04** Sunday, 8th June 2025
- 05** Welcome to 2026
- 06** My Photographic Journey
By Mark Taft
- 07** Guidance on the Rules for Panel Competition
By Phil Moorhouse
- 08** Panel Construction Using Photoshop
By Phil Moorhouse
- 09** Behind the Scenes
- 10** Out and About
By Ray Manning
- 11** Competition Corner
- 12** Photography Podium
- 13** External Recognition

Welcome

Well only a few more sleeps until the Big Man in the Red Suit comes to visit so I hope you are all prepared and ready for the festivities. Did you know Father Christmas always used to be in a green suit, until Coca Cola changed his suit to red in their marketing adverts and it's been red ever since. In case you are planning on having a quiet moment relaxing, I hope this Newsletter gives you a good little read, reflecting on all things photographic and inspiring you for photography in 2026. We have got some interesting articles which I hope you enjoy and thank you to all the contributors.

Hasn't it been a great start to the season with some stunning images being submitted in the competitions. It never ceases to amaze me how everyone keeps coming up with such different images. I particularly liked the entries for the President's competition 'Leading Lines' – some very clever and striking images there. Congratulations to everyone who has been successful so far in the competitions and for those of you who never ever or very rarely enter images why not make your New Year Resolution to dip your toe in the water and have a go in the competitions in 2026.

I was reading an interesting article recently about the well-known photographer, Martin Parr, who has passed away and was described as 'our greatest chronicler of contemporary life' and named as an influential British photographer of the past 50 years. He captured the changing state of our nation, our idiosyncrasies, passions and flaws. However, he sometimes got himself into hot water as many of his works focused on the British working class and sometimes an underclass which led to accusations of class tourism. If you are not familiar with Parr's work check him out on the internet, there are some interesting images.

All that remains for me to do is to wish you all a very enjoyable Christmas and happy and healthy 2026. However and whomever you spend the festive period with enjoy yourself and don't forget Twelfth Night is on 5th January 2026. And fingers crossed we will have a dry few days, I have webbed feet after all this rain we have been having (and it has been playing havoc with my golf – the course keeps being closed due to being waterlogged – so inconsiderate!).



Don't forget you can send me your contributions to my email address
172elizabeth@gmail.com

With my very best wishes

Liz xx



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02

Life in a Motorhome ... the ultimate freedom on the Open Road

By *Elizabeth Smith*

Visit us
On-Line!

<https://www.shirleyphoto.org>



Previously I have mentioned 'Monty' my motorhome and promised some articles about my adventures in him. So, here's a little something to kick the series off and set the scene of life in a motorhome.

So what's the appeal of owning a motorhome? Well the big draw is it offers both the freedom to go where you want while still having the comforts of home, combining the thrill of road trips with the convenience of having your accommodation right alongside. It provides the perfect blend of exploration and relaxation and can transform your holiday into an unforgettable experience. From scenic coastal routes to winding mountain roads, and even city breaks, motorhomes allow you to immerse yourself in nature without the stress of constant packing and unpacking at hotels or rental properties.

Perhaps the biggest attraction of a motorhome is the flexibility they offer. You're not bound to one location or dependent on public transport. The road is yours to explore, whether that means driving through remote countryside, stopping at off-the-beaten-path attractions, or simply choosing a beautiful spot to park and take in the view. And what's more you can brew a cup of tea or coffee (or have something stronger!) and just sit and take in a view for as long as you want. If you get tired whilst driving you can always pull in and go and have a little snooze on your bed all snuggly and warm in your duvet – how cool is that! And if you are caught short you always have a toilet to use on hand which is very useful! Motorhomes provide a unique opportunity to stay closer to nature, whether you're parked by a tranquil lake, in the heart of a forest, or overlooking a mountain range. You can wake up to the sounds of birds and enjoy sunsets from the comfort of your own mobile living room. As I have experienced nothing beats lying in your bed at night and hearing the hoot of the owls and bats. What's more if you use one of the apps on your phone you can record the bird and animal sounds to find out what creatures are outside. It's lovely then to imagine them moving around outside in their own nocturnal environments imagining what they are doing. It is also a great vehicle to go 'star gazing' in. Often the campsites are in more remote places where there is little light pollution and dark skies the order of the night. Looking up at the night sky is incredible seeing the multitude of stars, looking for the constellations, the Plough, the Bear etc. You realise how much light pollution we have here in the Midlands!

While the initial cost of renting or buying a motorhome can seem steep, it's often a more budget-friendly option compared to hotels, dining out, and transportation over the course of a longer trip. You have your accommodation and kitchen on the go, saving money on lodging and meals. Plus, you can tailor your trip to your budget, staying in campsites, wild camping, or free spots along the way.



Some think being in a motorhome is uncomfortable and a bit basic, but believe me it is not. Monty is self-contained and has all the amenities you could want - comfortable beds, a fully equipped kitchen, bathroom facilities including a shower, entertainment options like TVs, Wi-Fi, and air conditioning, mood lighting and central heating. We have plenty of storage both inside and within the 'garage' and a bicycle rack on the back. Mind you I have not yet mastered the art of 'smart packing' and literally take everything but the kitchen sink with me! I suppose part of that is because when holidaying in the UK you never know what the weather is going to do so have to be prepared for all eventualities!

There are different sizes and styles of motorhomes to choose from, depending on your needs and the number of people travelling. Monty is 6.74 metres long and can sleep 3 people. He is made by a German manufacturer and is 'winterised' which means he can survive happily in temperatures up to -30 so can be used all year round. On the campsites we have electric power hook-ups and water and waste disposal.

Most motorhome owners 'name' their motorhomes and you may see them with their names on their sides or people referring to their name when talking about them. So how did 'Monty' get his name? Well it is short for the mountains and rural countryside as that's where he is happiest going. There is also an unwritten etiquette rule on the road whereby Motorhome owners always wave at each other. We don't wave at campervans or caravans just other motorhomes. It's our little, friendly community and is a nice touch. Depending on where you are travelling you can be doing an awful lot of waving! When I was in Scotland earlier this year in Monty we touched on the North Coast 500 route (a very popular route for motorhomes) and spent most days when we were travelling waving our hands off – I now know how it feels to be a member of the Royal Family ...!

Well that's a little introduction to Motorhomes and my 'Monty'. In future newsletters there will be more news of Monty's adventures and fingers crossed some other news of other adventures undertaken by members who also have motorhomes and campervans. So watch this space.



What do you call a penguin in the Sahara Desert?

Lost!

03

Through the Lens ...

Changes in Photography

By Jenny Ladbrooke

I was very interested in Elizabeth's excellent article in the last Newsletter about the death of the holiday photo. I suspect we all remember the excitement of taking our films to be developed at the end of a holiday and then in my case being deeply disappointed by the results! But it didn't take away from the fact that our holiday images had significance and when they were good and hit the spot it was for me at least a huge achievement and meant a great deal.



Elizabeth was making the point that with digital images so easy to take, particularly now all of us have a very capable camera in our pockets in the form of our mobile phones, that potentially diminishes the importance that we used to place on holiday photographs in the past. In a sense more is less. In many ways, I agree. Please don't tell me I'm the only one who goes away captures hundreds of photographs if not thousands and then takes weeks, even months, to get round to going through them all. There are sometimes just so many to review that far from the huge excitement of the past when we would open those paper packages with great anticipation now it becomes a huge chore!

But as with everything there are pluses and minuses. Obviously it's hugely cheaper and of course that facilitates a lot of experimentation with the ability to snap away and try different angles/approaches/styles. It's date stamped so you can recall exactly when and where in many cases an image was taken. And of course, they're very accessible if you move your images over to your phone at least. I don't usually do that with the images I take on my big camera but I try when I'm out and about to take plenty on my iPhone as a reminder of where we've been and what we've done.

They are also easier to share I would argue. Especially when you compare sharing slides which required a whole evening to set up the projector and then invite people round. I remember an annual event when we would go and see friends of my parents to go through this couple's holiday slides. It was deathly dull. Anyone else remember the projector equipment of yesteryear as below?



But now it's easy enough when you're out and about to be able to quickly show friends a taster of some of the highlights of your travels which even if you'd put prints in a photograph album wouldn't be as convenient as using your phone. And of course you can send personal postcards so to speak to friends as you travel. This is one I snapped and sent to a keen motorcycling friend of mine of a group of mature bikers waiting for the early ferry on the Isle of Harris.



And another is an image one of my children sent us on his travels in Canada, sent in the moment to make all at home very jealous - which it did!





This ease of sharing was a huge benefit to this particular son who got accosted by three armed airport security personnel while waiting for his flight in Vancouver Airport back to the UK. He was questioned quite aggressively about what he'd been doing in Canada, why he was there and why he was traveling on his own. And after he showed them his itinerary (thank heavens for the travel agent's app which has everything on it about your trip) he was then asked to prove it! So out comes his phone, they're shown images of everything he had done, they were even shown his Instagram posts and his WhatsApp messages to friends and family! Eventually they backed off. Now that's something you couldn't do with four reels of film yet to be developed! But maybe at that time security issues were not what they are today. And to be fair to the Canadian police, I think my son must have a very dodgy looking face because he always, but always, gets picked on by Customs to show the contents of his carry on, to-date not revealing anything that shouldn't be there mercifully. You can judge for yourselves whether you think he's got dodgy face.....



But I do agree with Elizabeth that as convenient as it is to have images on our phones and frankly as organised as they are because of being date stamped it does become more casual. And I agree having them printed in some form as a lasting memento is a good thing to do. One I must make a priority..... although how I choose from those thousands of photos is quite another matter!!

What song do you sing at a snowman's birthday party?



Freeze a jolly good fellow!

04

Sunday 8th June 2025

This year's President's Picnic was held at Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve, near Coventry. Over 20 of our members enjoyed a super day out. The weather was kind to us and we enjoyed the opportunity to photograph lots of different species including Herons, Kingfishers, Woodpeckers, frogs, Damselflies, and many more.

Many thanks to John Leighton for researching and suggesting this excellent location. Well worth a visit if you missed it. We look forward to finding out where the 2026's picnic will be. Do try and make it if you can.





05

Welcome to 2026

As we welcome in the New Year here's some things happening in January that might catch your eye.

Did you know...?

- 6th January 1838, Samuel Morse first demonstrated the telegraph.
- 6th January 2007, Steve Jobs debuts the iPhone.
- 10th January 1863, the world's first underground passenger railway system 'The Tube' opens in London.
- 15th January 1559, Queen Elizabeth I was crowned.
- 23rd January 1556, the deadliest earthquake in history strikes Shansi, China, killing 830,000 people.
- 24th January 1935, Beer was first sold in cans.
- 28th January 1986, the U.S. space shuttle Challenger explodes 72 seconds after lift-off, killing the seven crew members, including school teacher Christa McAuliffe.
- January 1999, the Euro came into currency.
- 31st January 1606, Guy Fawkes jumps to his death. He managed to avoid being hung, drawn and quartered by leaping to his death as he awaited the gallows and subsequently died of a broken neck.

And here's some DAYS to REMEMBER:

11th January is 'Burning the Clavie'. Taking place at Burghead in North East Scotland, a second New Year's celebration, where they celebrate the old date of the New Year by burning the 'clavie', a half barrel nailed to a long pole used for salmon fishing.

11th January is 'No Trousers Tube Ride' in London. It's exactly what it sounds like - join hundreds of people in London as they ride the tube without their trousers!

13th January is St Hilary's Day (traditionally known as the coldest day of the year). Also at Hen Galan/Cwm Gwaun (a village near Fishguard, Wales) they still remember the Julian calendar (instead of our current Gregorian calendar) so celebrate New Year's Day.

18th January is Winnie the Pooh Day.

25th January is Burn's Night in Scotland and St Dwynwen's Day, (Dydd Santes Dwynwen), the Welsh St. Valentine's Day.

23rd–25th January is the Big Garden Bird Watch. Organised by the RSPB, spend an hour watching the birds in your garden or local park, and tell them what you've seen.

25th January 'Beat the Streets' in Nottingham, an all-day music festival to raise money to help homelessness.

27th January is the 'Fire Festival' in Lerwick, Shetland. Held every year to celebrate the end of Yule with a squad of Vikings and a long-ship. And fire, lots of fire.

29th January is International Puzzle Day.



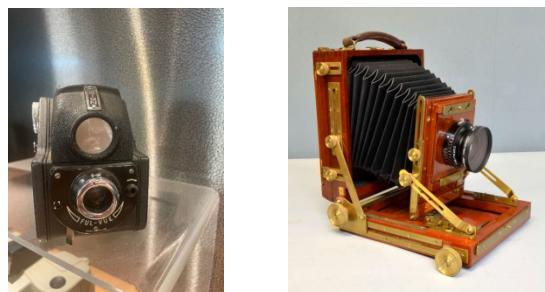
06

My Photographic Journey

By Mark Taft

My photographic journey started in 1960, aged 5. My first camera was a Ensig (see image below) with a viewfinder on top and lovely leather strap. My Dad had been interested in photography and taught me the basics of developing films and printing in a dark room which we had in the loft. When I was slightly older, aged 7-8, I used to go out with the Girling Photographic Society with Dad taking pictures of places like Ludlow Castle. Then later we went out with a walking group of people to places in the Peak District. At this time we were using Fuji colour slide film and Ilford HP4 Film.

Like most of us, when I left school at 16 I didn't know what I wanted to do and saw a job at the College of Food in Birmingham as an "audio visual" technician. I worked there for 2 years while attending Wednesbury College, Kendrick Street. The audio visual course I was doing was half photography and half electronics, both of which I'm passionate about. On the photography course I was taught how to use a wonderful Gandolfi 5 x 4 inch plate field camera, learning how to develop and print these to a high-quality.



The course taught me all the basics of photography including complex things like reciprocity failure. At work I was taking pictures and eating vast quantities of cakes, having taken pictures of them using an MPP technical camera and Pentax.



For video we had some of the very early Sony black and white video cameras. I have a fond recollection of recording a home economics student doing a cookery demonstration, toast in a toaster behind us setting on fire and black smoke billowing out of the cooker. Being black and white it did not show up too well. But we all fell about laughing after the shoot, as we struggled in the shooting process to constrain ourselves!





Quite often things went wrong and one time after eating all the cakes, we realised that the camera had failed. Aged 19, despondent with the pay for an audio visual technician, I moved into computing and spent the rest of my life designing computer systems and doing "business intelligence" consultancy with stock market companies in Europe. My only claim to fame is that I was the first Ambulance Service computer systems designer in the West Midlands and helped to computerise the 999 Service to get ambulances to people's houses in the fastest time.

When I was around 20, I got engaged and my in-laws, Alan and Bunty Smith, who some of you may have known, encouraged me to do more photography. At the time we were in the Hall Green and possibly Shirley, photography societies. I used Nikon cameras then, A Nikkormat and then a Nikon FT2 film camera. I am now struggling to get to grips with a Nikon Z6, OM-3 and Lightroom. I upgraded my OM e-M5 to the OM-3 which is my take it anywhere travel camera with the tiny 14-42 mm pancake lens. I also use the Apple iphone camera, which takes pictures with a huge depth of field!



With my extra knowledge of photography, I later built up a colour dark room and used to print exhibition prints despite the difficulties in getting the colours right. I have supported the "Midphot" exhibition since it was in Sutton Coldfield Town Hall many moons ago, getting one picture accepted in the 1980's. I have also enjoyed going on the photography trips which Shirley put on a few years ago, particularly the one to Bruges. Following this, I had a 22 year break as we had our family. Now that I'm retired, I am focusing on photography again. Every week I go out with friends and we go to different locations to take pictures while my other friend sketches out watercolours. It's our way to keep active and do some exercise, but we do usually end up having a coffee or an all-day breakfast in a café. Feel free to join us if you wish.

I come from the old photography school not the new digital one. Despite being a computer whiz I still find it hard with the different permutations of all the software and camera menu's. This last year has been my journey into the new digital age. Personally, I don't particularly like it as I like to take pictures straight from the camera and apart from very little editing, that's what I want. However, I'm now starting to use Lightroom. The one disappointing thing I note is that a lot of the judges seem to be assuming that everybody will be using the latest cameras with image stacking and all the latest software. Twiddling the pictures to something that they weren't really containing. An example of this is that Bob Brind-such was telling me that Topaz noise reduction software is actually an AI system which corrects the picture so the picture is actually not what you have taken, but looks good!

I wish you all well in your photographic journey.



A Journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

A photographic journey begins with your first picture.!



07

Guidance on the Rules for Panels Competition

By *Phil Moorhouse*

In order to accommodate the presentation of 'Triptychs' our entry rules for Panels is a little different this year.



'Built by Roberts' - A Triptych by Phil Moorhouse

A **Panel** is defined as a matched panel, of three or four prints or digital images, that will be displayed together, and will be judged as a set. Entries in the panel competition may be representative of any branch of photography. **You may enter up to 4 panels, including up to 2 digital panels and 2 print panels (or Triptychs).**

The digital images should be presented as one composite image of 1600x1200 pixels (width x height). It is worth noting that when a digital panel is presented with a faded photographic background, this does **not** count as one of the four images, but when entering panels into external exhibitions, do check their local rules.

The print section of this Competition now has two elements a print panel and/or a printed triptych. These will be judged separately, but an overall winner will be chosen from both the print panel and triptychs for the print trophy.

More specifically a print panel comprises of three or four prints matched as above and each print is presented mounted to the usual size of mount board. When entering these prints the layout you wish them to be presented in should be written on the back of each print. To prevent confusion label them as they will be seen from the front, ie. an image to appear on the left of your panel as the judge looks at should be labelled as "Left".

A triptych print panel is where three (and only three) related images are presented on one mounted print on the usual size mount board.

You can enter up to 2 print panels or two triptych panels or one of each so therefore a maximum of two print style panels.

The Panel Competition will be judged as one section for all members. However, there will be two trophies presented one for the best digital and another for the best print or triptych panel.



'Abstract'

A Tryptych by *Dave Venables*

I thought you might find it useful to reproduce Tony Dyson's great article on Panels to inspire you for this year's competition.



08

Panel Construction Using Photoshop

By Tony Dyson



After deciding on your panel layout and the images that you are going to use create and name a new folder on the desktop or drive. Copy and paste photos both raw and .jpg into the folder (the jpg file is useful as a visual aid even if you don't use it).

Now open your images in Photoshop. If you are using raw images press the auto button in the raw editor and then open. Save all the open images as .PSD files into your folder, you should now have three or four files ready to use, also use 'Save as a copy' for each as a jpg file if you are using raw files.



Any image that is altered should be saved under a modified title just in case you want to return to the original or any other version as when closed the history will be lost. Each file at the moment will probably be around 6400 x 4000 pixels which is the size of a 26Mb full frame image, which means that if we put all the images together we will have a very large file that some computers might struggle with.

Now is time to crop any image to a size or shape that you are going to use, cropping will help to reduce the file sizes and you can also reduce the image sizes if this helps. Calculate the size of the background for your panel from the image sizes and layout you are planning, for example if using four 6400x4000 pixel images in a rectangle plus 200 pixel borders open a new file sized at 13400x8600 pixels or larger, and save, as it is useful for trying other backgrounds without affecting the panel. You now have a canvas to work with. Duplicate the layer at least twice. Select the top layer and paste your images into it. You should now have two transparent layers plus a layer for each of your images which can now be moved and sized with the move tool if this wasn't done when the images were first pasted into the file.

Now, hide all layers but one empty one and fill with your preferred colour or background image. If you are using an image and are planning to lower its opacity put a solid colour layer underneath usually white or another sympathetic colour. This is the point when you decide if any of the layers need any separate adjustments with colour, exposure or positioning. If an image needs cropping either drop in a cropped version before any adjustment or select the area to be removed and use 'Cut' in the Edit menu. The outer of the background can be cropped anytime.



Features such as Strokes, Bevels etc can be applied now. If the size of any edging looks right now it will look correct when resizing. If you are happy with your results remove any unwanted layers and save it now. Having saved a copy with the separate layers you can now flatten all layers saving this version and then processing it the same as any other image to 1600x1200 ready to send.

What do you get if you cross a bell with a skunk?



Jingle Smells!

09

Behind the Scenes

This Newsletter's image and 'Backstory' features my Monochrome entry 'Le Touquet Marche' which was awarded second place in the competition.



I was wandering around the streets of Le Touquet in Northern France in the early evening in early September when I stumbled across the empty market area. I believe Le Touquet market is very well-known and extremely busy on market days with vibrant stalls, activity and bustling groups of people. I suppose a photographer would normally be attracted to a busy market for its colour and activity and would be able to get some good images and portraiture style images. However, I was struck how empty the spaces are when the market is not on but they clearly signify what normally happens there. It provides an opportunity to appreciate the architecture of the spaces which would not be easily visible or noticeable when the market is in full flow. The large marble slabs that take the food – meat, fish and vegetables, the high roof lines to keep the area well ventilated and cool. The impact of the structural lines of the roof I found had impact despite their simplicity. I also thought the image worked better as a monochrome than in colour. The simple palette really emphasized the space but let you imagine life happening there. I was thrilled the image was awarded second place as it was a spur of the moment, unplanned subject matter that I just took a quick picture of. It was literally a point and click moment.



What's an elf's favourite sport?.

North-Pole Vaulting!

10

Out and About Stanway House and Fountain

By Ray Manning



This summer I visited Stanway House in the Cotswolds, a Jacobean manor house open to the public which has a spectacular fountain. The house is still lived in, which can be seen from some of the modern items in certain rooms. There is also a working Water Mill on the site where you can see grinding being done and you can buy freshly ground flour.

The Fountain in the Canal was opened in June 2004 and can reach a height of 300 feet. It is claimed to be the tallest gravity fed fountain in the world, the tallest fountain in Britain and the second highest in Europe. It is also the only major gravity fountain to have been built since the 19th Century. The fountain is fed from a reservoir at the top of an adjacent hill. The fountain can only be run for two sessions per day between the opening times of 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm and is well worth a visit.

Stanway House and Fountain is only open on Tuesdays and Thursdays in June, July and August each year. If visiting get there when it opens and choose a good spot to photograph the fountain so not to have too many people in your shot. It is also important to check wind direction because of the spray from such a tall fountain.

To get there go to Broadway and take the B4362 Cheltenham Road. Turn left at the island in Toddington onto the B4077. Turn left at the sign to Stanway House and Fountain. Car park is on the left a short distance up this road.



If anyone knows of any other interesting places to visit do please send me a note about them so we can share them with our members.



11

Competition Corner

December Competition

Here's this month's little teaser.

What Am I?

Like Father Christmas I travel around the corners of the world, to help deliver gifts for the day of Jesus' birth. However, unlike jolly old St Nick, my only movement occurs when you give me a lick.

So get your thinking caps on and send me your answer by email to:
172elizabeth@gmail.com

Closing Date for Entries: 20th January 2026.

12

Photography Podium

We have had a great start to our competitions so far this year with a healthy number of entries and some superb images being submitted. So, looking forward to seeing the rest of the entries for the competitions in 2026. Don't forget all the results can be found on the Society's website along with the remaining competitions, their rules and closing dates.

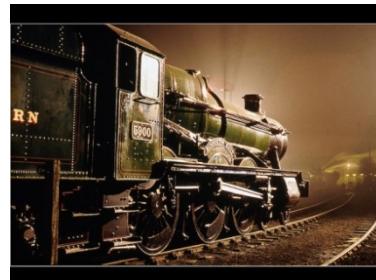


Christmas Knockout

As ever what a great evening to get everyone into the Christmas spirit with our traditional Christmas Knockout. 560 images, a great money-spinner for our Club funds, enabling us to cover the cost of hiring the hall and booking interesting speakers. After much left or right side, door or window, huge congratulations to Jolanta and Dave Venables who took the credits on the night, (well a bottle of sparkling wine, at least!) very well-deserved.



First 'A Small Blue Butterfly'
Jolanta Buljalska Axon



Second 'Night Train'
Dave Venables



Runners-Up



'Icelandic Horses at Waterfall'
Jenny Ladbrooke



'Nuthatch'
Dave Ward



'Family Unit'
Mick Schilling



'Pin Mill'
Ann Ashford



'Galloping Horses'
Chris Mallett



'Frozen Lake'
Tony Dyson

President's Assignment

Don't forget our President Elect, Jane Roby, has set her assignment **'Seize the Moment'** for next season. So here's a reminder to give you plenty of time to think about your images and get snapping!

'Seize the Moment'

For my President's assignment, I am looking for images that contain movement where the button has been pressed at that perfect moment in time to tell a story. Tonal editing and cropping are fine, but combining images is not. This should be about choosing that moment in a single image. I have no problem with removing distracting objects or marks that are not part of the story. Long exposure is acceptable, but must still show that moment, rather than an overall misty appearance. Adding motion blur, or changing depth of field in PS is not what I am after. Think about the light and time of day, or how to light if using flash or adding lights. Think about the best angle, is it from a low level, a high level, head on etc. Think laterally and use your imagination and above all have some fun.



My Dalmatian Pelican image is well known to most of you. It was taken from a small boat, so close to water level. It was a misty morning where the sky and lake seemed to melt together. When the Pelican dragged one toe on the water it was the perfect moment for me to take this image. The only things taken out were some small dots which were actually distant birds, but looked like dirty marks. Dave Venables' image of a dandelion head dispersing in the wind depicted the perfect moment.

I am looking forward to seeing how you interpret this assignment. You have a whole year to think about it and up to three images will be accepted.

Jane Roby

13

External Recognition

If any of you enter any competitions and get any external recognition then please drop me a line so that I can add it into the Newsletter. It's great to see what everyone is up to and the accolades they receive.



See you next in February 2026!