



SPS Newsletter

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Goodness me, we are nearly at the end of the first quarter of 2025, that's unbelievable, it doesn't seem two minutes ago we were getting ready to celebrate Christmas and welcome in the New Year. And now we have Easter galloping up on us with all those yummy chocolate eggs and treats ...! And sadly it will all too soon be the end of our formal Club season.

I put my head above the parapet in January and entered some images into MidPhot 2025 and was thrilled when one of them was accepted in the Open Projected Image category. My accepted image was 'Cold Water' which coincidentally did quite well in the Club competition! I was also pleased with the scores I received for my other submitted images. So if I can do it I am sure you can so if you have never entered MidPhot before put it into your diary to enter next year and see how you do.

This month we have a great article by Jolanta all about 'Still Life Photography' and David gives us an interesting read on his 'Behind the Scenes'. I was sorry I missed Mick's evening recently, I am sure it was very good. And what is keeping me busy at the moment ... getting my AV entry done of course!

And what historical events are we marking this month? Well here you go ...

2nd March 1969 – 'Concorde', the Anglo-French supersonic airline, roared into the skies on its maiden flight, where it reached speeds of twice the speed of sound.

2nd March 1904 - Britain's first mainline electric train ran from Liverpool to Southport.

5th March 1936 - The 'Spitfire' fighter made its first test flight from Eastleigh, Southampton, powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine.

15th March 44 BC - "Beware the Ides of March" – Marcus Brutus stabbed Julius Caesar.

24th March 1603 - The Crowns of England and Scotland were united when King James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English throne.

28th March 1912 - Both the Oxford and the Cambridge boats sank in the annual Varsity boat race.

And as for Awareness Days we have St David's Day on the 1st, World Book Day on 6th March, International Women's Day on 8th March, St Patrick's Day on 17th March and Red Nose Day on 21st March. And my favourite, Pi Day (3.14) on 14th March and Near Miss Day on 23rd March – that one could be a close call!

We have the clocks springing forward on 30th March as well as celebrating Mother's Day that day too. It's all happening in March! Did any of you see the recent 'Blood Moon'? It was the first total lunar eclipse in 2.5 years. The Full Worm Moon as it is known coincided with Pi Day. Like a fool I got up at 4 am to see it as they said that was the best time of the morning to do so but, it was so cloudy I didn't see a thing except for a slight pink tinge to the clouds! And there was me thinking I might be able to take a good photograph of it ...! Mind you I did get to hear the lovely dawn chorus.



All is not lost though as my good friend Professor Google shared his images of it with me! If like me you are a bit of an astronomy buff I thought you might like to see the big events happening this year. I have been transfixed recently looking into the night sky and trying to see all the planets in alignment. I couldn't get over how bright Venus was. It never ceases to amaze me when you look into the night sky how many stars etc. there are and how far away they are. I know we live in a light polluted area but if you ever get the chance find some time to have a look up into the night sky and see what you can identify. I also have on my list of places to go the National Space Museum near Leicester as I think that would be an interesting day out.



I was reading an interesting 'Which' article recently which listed the top products that defined the past decade. So here you go How many of you remember these products and have purchased them?

- 2024 – Year of the Robot Vacuum
- 2023 – Year of the Air Fryer
- 2022 – Year of the Solar Panel
- 2021 – Year of the Face Mask
- 2020 – Year of the Laptop
- 2019 – Year of the Tumble Dryer Recall – 800,000 Whirlpool models were recalled.
- 2018 – Year of the Fitness Tracker – Fitbit
- 2017 – Year of the Coffee Machine
- 2016 – Year of the Vacuum Cleaner – battery operated cordless, Dyson, GTec and Shark.
- 2015 – Year of the SUV
- 2014 – Year of the Tablet (the first iPad launched in 2010 and revolutionised portable computing).



Why is March the most popular month to use a trampoline?

Because it's Spring time!

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

Through the Lens ...

Photoshop and Lightroom Subscription

Jane Roby has alerted us to the following, many thanks Jane.

Those of you who have the Photography Plan (20Gb) subscription paid monthly, need to be aware that subscriptions are going up by around 50% when your subscription is due for renewal. You will receive an email 30 days before the increase is due. What it doesn't make clear is that the prepaid annual subscription remains the same. The links to change your subscription through the website don't appear as shown, and after a frustrating time with virtual assist etc., I eventually phoned the UK helpline, after finding their number independently of the email. I was put through to the right person within a minute (after going through the inevitable menu) and it was all sorted, using my registered payment details. The cost was slightly more than the website showed, which I put down to exchange rates, but substantially less than staying on the monthly plan. This plan is not now available to new subscribers, but Adobe are honouring it for existing customers. We'll see what happens next year.

The number that I used is 0800 028 0148, and the annual fee is now £124.42 (inc VAT)

03

Still Life Photography

By Jolanta Bujalska Axon

'A still life is a **work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter**, typically commonplace objects which are either natural (food, flowers, dead animals, plants, rocks, shells, etc.) or human-made (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewellery, coins, pipes, etc.).'

Still life, especially of flowers, has always been one of my favourite subjects or genres in art and photography. I've always loved flowers and most types of plants.

Other forms of still life also interest me but I'm drawn to flowers the most. Inspirations have come from artists and photographers, as well my own appreciation of the beauty of flora. I studied History of Art at 'A' level and my interest in art/artists still remains with me. Impressionist artists like Van Gogh, Monet, Renoir, Matisse, Manet, all inspire me to want to create my own still life images. Also, Rembrandt, from the Dutch golden age, produced wonderful lighting and his style appealed to me as well as other Dutch artists.

To achieve a painterly style or artistic take on an image is what I aim for. Creating that in camera or post-processing gives a photographer a lot of techniques they can use. That's the beauty of photography, one can take a straight picture or 'mess' around in-camera with exposures, ICM, filters, lighting and how you even set it up. Playing at photography is what I do. Experiment, then see what it can achieve. I have many failures, for sure! Photoshop and Lightroom is the art studio for photographers.

My initial photographic attempts of flowers were taken in the garden or in nature reserves but then I considered how else I could photograph them. To vase or not to vase? That was the question, so I started trying them in vases. Vases can be the vessel of artistic expression.



One of my more successful images was 'Simply Wild Garlic'. I used to photograph this variety of wild garlic (better known as a three-cornered leek) each year down the Dingles where I saw it growing. I just loved it. My images were okay but nothing to catch one's eye. As I thought it was a beautiful wild flower I wanted to show its beauty so I decided to put it into a smooth, white vase and placed it in front of some voile. Immediately it became far more elegant and beautiful in my eyes. However, I didn't take just one shot...I took a selection of arrangements and viewpoints to analyse on screen later.



A little editing in Photoshop was then done to blend the creases and shadows which helped to make it better. Then adding a border made it look a bit more like a picture when framed. Sometimes I will add a texture to a still life image but it's very discreetly combined in layers. 'Simply Wild Garlic' was a quite pale and white image that was very simple with some detail in the flowers. A square format seemed to suit this type of image.

In contrast, I also wanted to try Rembrandt lighting style images and my first attempt was a still life I took in my second year at the Club (with grapes, wine and a glass).



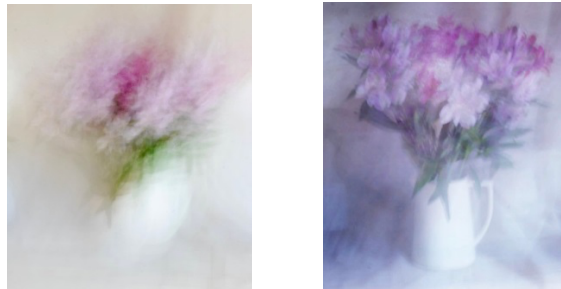
Placed on a side board on a builder's wooden board/beam and taken with natural light. A simple attempt which I quite liked. My next attempt was with pomegranates and grapes and again I used the builder's board.



I then tried some sunflowers, which I grew in my garden but had to pick them quickly when the squirrel started climbing up and nibbling them. They were then placed in a vase from a charity shop that looked old and handmade. That was positioned on my old piano that I learned to play on as a child (and I still have it!). However, it lacked something, so I grabbed a cotton silver/grey scarf with shiny sparkly bits in it and draped it behind the vase on a board. Hey presto it looked better. I did however painstakingly remove each sparkle from the scarf in Photoshop. Then it looked more like a nicely draped curtain of sorts or gave it an old-fashioned look.



Again, I tried different shots, positions and arrangements to analyse later. This was the image I decided to edit. Three apples gave it an autumnal feel though a judge said he would have preferred it without them. Was it a distraction taking your eye away from the sunflowers? The image did well for me and ultimately, I liked it. Another method I like to 'play' with in my photography is ICM (Intentional Camera Movement). I recall Tim Hutchin's talk to the Club on this method a few years' ago and it inspired me to have a go. I'm totally hooked on it now. Thanks Tim!



I often try ICM on any subject and like to experiment. There can be a lot of waste, or images that don't make the mark, but if lucky, there are a few that I like. So, I've used it with flowers in vases and these images shows some that I like, with the effect it produces. I won't go into all the details on how I move my camera as that varies from a mini jerk to a controlled upward movement, or a longer exposure with a pause when I hold the camera still, then follow that by a quick movement. One has to experiment and see which results are pleasing to the eye, like with these four:



One may not like them or decide that straight photography is preferred. Do you have a preference? Don't worry if you don't like them, we all vary in our tastes. These four of sunflowers in the vase are really to show you how different each one can be from the same photo-shoot.

My tips for photographing a still life or how I create mine?

- I usually use a tripod, except when playing with ICM.
- The lens I tend to use the most is my 50mm but have used a 35mm or 100mm as well.
- I usually set the aperture to f/8 to f/11 as I want most parts of the flower or objects to be in focus and sharp.



- I set the ISO at 100-400 and allow the shutter speed to be as long as required to achieve the correct exposure.
- Mostly, it is set-up in my kitchen on a sideboard where there is a good amount of natural light.
- I often use a Godox R1 RGB LED Mini Creative Light. This is set onto a stand and I can direct it to fill in the shadows or wave it around during the exposure. The remote shutter release is very handy to use whilst doing this.
- I have a selection of backdrops as in voile and other fabrics and also have purchased some paper or vinyl covered sheets from Black Velvet Styling and they do have offers on, so that's when I buy. They come in A1 size or if you want bigger, they also do A0 or XL. They have an assortment of designs as to imitate wood, grungy surfaces, paint effect, stone, concrete, brick, metal, etc.
- Some still life one can place on a suitable piece of furniture.
- Vases are a big feature in most flower still life images. It is key to have the right vase, be it old or new, plain or patterned, smooth or textured, white or coloured. I wonder who has the most vases at our Club? I suspect it's Jenny or me so here's a question for you. Who has the most vases and how many? Jenny is a master of flower/still life images, creates a wonderful feel and tells a story too.

To summarise: In **creative still-life photography**, photographers try to use their **artistic** eye to arrange inanimate objects in ways that draw the viewer's attention and evoke emotion.



I was the photographer at a vegan wedding last week.

They kept getting mad when I told them to say cheese!

04



Behind the Scenes

This month's image and 'Backstory' is from Dave Venables, *DPAGB CPAGB BPE4**, and is titled 'The Board-Walkers'.



One of my favourite images, 'The Board-Walkers' came about by complete happenstance. It is, in fact, a composite of two images both taken in Yellowstone National Park, some years ago. The first shows tourists walking across a boardwalk near to the hot springs, hence the atmospheric, steamy conditions. The second is a photograph of the area known as *Tangle Creek*, not so much a forest, but a few trees not far from the roadside.



The composite came about while creating an Audio Visual (AV) sequence documenting the trip to Yellowstone. While editing the AV and selecting transitions between frames, I happened to stop the video just at the point where the two images overlapped. I really liked the result and consequently decided to make a print. With *Tangle Creek* as the background layer and the *Board-Walkers* introduced as a separate layer in Photoshop Elements, the blending mode 'Hard Light' was selected to create the required effect. A conversion to monochrome completed this moody, atmospheric picture.

I was delighted to know I wasn't the only person who enjoyed the image, when it was picked up and published in the Practical Photography magazine.



What's the best thing about Icelandic Winters?

Their Hot Springs!

Dinosaurs used hot springs to take baths.

But as time moved on they moved onto meteor showers!

05

What's to Eat?

Dandelion has a long folklore and is widely used in herbal medicine. The name derives from the French, 'dent de lion' or 'lion's tooth', due to the plant's jagged leaves. In France the plant is also known as 'pissenlit' or 'wet the bed', due to its diuretic qualities. All parts of the dandelion are edible, whether raw or cooked. It can be used in a variety of foods and also makes a very good wine. Found almost everywhere, dandelions first appear in February, providing a valuable early source of nectar and pollen for bees.

Gorse is an evergreen shrub that has highly scented vivid yellow flowers with a distinctive coconut smell and flavour. It can be used in salads or steeped in boiling water to make a delicious tea or infused in milk to make an indulgent ice cream.

Hawthorn is edible and was once known as 'bread and cheese', the leaf acting as the bread and the unopened flower the cheese. It has a pleasant, nutty taste and is best picked in March and April. It can be eaten straight from the hedgerow or added to salads, potato salad or sandwiches.

Another abundant plant found in the Spring is the Nettle. The leaves are rich in vitamins and minerals and the young tops are good to make tea or soup with, or as a substitute for spinach in recipes. Nettles have a delicious flavour somewhere between cabbage and spinach and are best picked between February and early June.



Wild Garlic, also known as Ramsons, has leaves giving a strong garlic scent and flavour and can be used in a variety of dishes such as soups, omelettes, pesto and salads.



What do you call a well-dressed cat?

A DandyLion!

If you want to do some wild foraging you can find out more from The Woodland Trust who do an excellent field guide. Or how about trying some of the following:

Dandelion 'Honey'

115 g dandelion flowers (do not use leaves as the sap can cause dermatitis)

1 Lemon sliced

550 ml water

500g sugar

1. Once picked leave the dandelion flowers on a piece of kitchen roll or a clean tea towel for c.1 hr to allow any insects to escape.
2. Soak the dandelions for c.10 minutes, then drain and put them into a pan.
3. Add the water and sliced lemon to the pan, bring to the boil and simmer for c.20 minutes.
4. Remove from the heat, cover and leave to infuse overnight.
5. Strain the mixture through a muslin or jelly bag into a clean bowl or measuring jug.
6. Check the volume of liquid you are left with and add an equal amount of sugar.
7. Bring to the boil and simmer for c.1 hour, checking every 10 minutes using the 'plate test' – put a plate in the freezer for 10 minutes, then take it out and dollop a spoonful of 'honey' onto the plate. If it is viscous and thick then the honey is ready.
8. Transfer the dandelion honey into dry, sterilised jars and keep in the cupboard.
9. It may crystallise with age but you can warm the jars to return it to the original consistency.
- 10.



Who is the nettle's favourite popstar?

'Sting'!



06

Birds of a Feather

Spring brings migratory birds such as Swallows and Swifts back to our shores. If like me you sometimes have trouble distinguishing which bird is which here's a little handy guide:

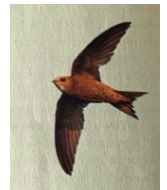
Swallow

Swallows are often seen flying low to the ground or perching on telephone wires. They have glossy blue-black upper parts, a red throat, a white underside and a distinctive long forked tail with feather streamers.



Swift

Swifts live on the wing and, as their name suggests, they fly fast and high. They are a dark, sooty brown, with a short, forked tail and crescent-shaped wings in flight. They also dart and dive a lot in flight.



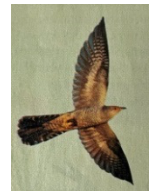
House Martin

House Martins usually zoom around in flocks. They have a short, forked tail, a white rump, blue-black upper parts and a pure white throat and belly.



Cuckoo

Cuckoos have long tails and pointed wings that make them look a bit like a small bird of prey. Their backs, heads and chest are slate-grey, with a stripy black and white belly.



07

Out and About

I recently visited the National Trust's Charlecote Park and had a very enjoyable time walking around the parkland. The land has been owned by the Lucy family since 1190 and has been an enclosed deer park since the 1600s and comprises over 260 acres. Of particular interest to me was the Charlecote Park Tree Walk. I just love walking where there are well-established trees. Their structures intrigue me and I imagine how they have grown over time and seen landscapes change as man has developed them. The stories I bet they could tell ...

At Charlecote the main avenues were established in the 1600s, together with many parterres and formal gardens, and in the 1760s Lancelot 'Capability' Brown got his hands on the land transforming the formal gardens into parkland and strategically placing clumps of trees to enhance the views. Many of the trees in the Park date from this time. In 1823, Mary Elizabeth married into the family. She was a keen gardener and restored many of the flowerbeds and the woodland garden you see today. As you walk around the Tree Walk you see many varieties of trees such as the Turkey



Oak, Cedar of Lebanon, Alder, Holm Oak, Red Oak and Black Mulberry. As I was looking at them all I thought to myself now there's a good photographic project to come and take the trees through the season, it might also make a good panel for entry into the competition next year ... so watch this space.



Charlecote has a herd of deer freely wandering around so again if you are after some photography material why not visit and practice taking shots of the deer. Here are some images I took on my iPhone, not great quality but they give you a flavour of the deer in their natural setting.



Deer parks gained popularity in Britain after the Norman Conquest in the 11th Century, most parks being created between 1200-1350 AD. It is estimated that there were once over 3,000 deer parks across England, Scotland and Wales. These varied greatly in size, from several to thousands of acres. Today only a handful remain. Deer parks were a prominent feature of the British landscape until the English Civil War, when they were either broken up and converted into agricultural land or incorporated into post-medieval country estates. Creating a park was an elite privilege, and many lords obtained Royal permission in the form of a licence to empark. Enclosing a park was a costly, time-consuming and disruptive process. Designed to keep intruders out and animals in, park boundaries usually comprised inner ditches and outer banks surmounted by a palisade or wall.

While in the earlier Middle Ages parks were often distanced from their associated houses, the later Medieval aristocracy preferred parks that were next to or encompassed their residences. By reserving large areas of land for their own use, elites made conspicuous statements of their lordly privileges to others.

Parks were multi-functional spaces. They were primarily used for hunting, and also provided food and resources for building and fuel. They usually contained a mixture of woodland and grazing pasture, and included features such as fishponds, rabbit warrens and hunting lodges.



What type of bread is a deer's favourite?

Sour doe!



08

Competition Corner

February Competition

Unfortunately maybe February's competition was a bit too much of a test as I didn't receive any answers from anyone! So no winner this month but the answer is given below:

I left my campsite and hiked south for 3 miles. Then I turned east and hiked for 3 miles. I then turned north and hiked for 3 miles, at which time I came upon a bear inside my tent eating my food! What colour was the bear?

Answer: White. The only place you can hike 3 miles south, then east for 3 miles, then north for 3 miles and end up back at your starting point is the North Pole. Polar bears are the only bears that live at the North Pole, and they are white.

March Competition

Here's this month's little teaser.

If you lived in a one storey house made entirely of redwood, what colour would the stairs be?

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

Closing Date for Entries: 31st March 2025.



09

Photography Podium

Monochrome Competition

Another good number of entries for this year's competition. Congratulations to all those who were successful, particularly to Martin Green who bagged both First and Second place in Group 2.



Prints

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
<i>First</i>	<i>Fairground Attraction</i>	Dave Cornish	<i>Thoughtful Moment</i>	Martin Green	<i>Stern*</i>	Jolanta Bujalska Axon
<i>Second</i>	<i>Miss Emily</i>	Mick McShane	<i>Tough Going</i>	Martin Green	<i>Catbells Cloud</i>	Mick Schilling
<i>Third</i>	<i>Swan Portrait</i>	Ann Ashford	<i>Spinning Wheel</i>	Hazel lane	<i>The Dark Horse</i>	Jenny Ladbrooke

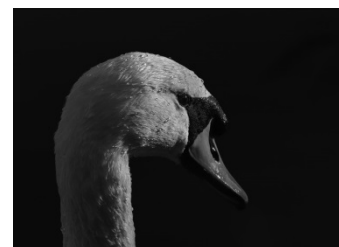
Group 1



Fairground Attraction



Miss Emily



Swan Portrait

Group 2



Thoughtful Moment



Tough



Spinning Wheel

Group 3



*Stern**



Catbells Cloud



The Dark Horse



Digitals

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
<i>First</i>	<i>Winston at Bletchley</i>	Dave Cornish	<i>Egret *</i>	Martin Green	<i>Miners' Shower Room</i>	Chris Mallett
<i>Second</i>	<i>Penmon Lighthouse</i>	Ann Ashford	<i>Vase in Sunbeam</i>	John Leighton	<i>Clinging to Mum</i>	Tim Hutchin
<i>Third</i>	<i>Damselfly</i>	Rosie Thompson	<i>Venice</i>	Martin Thompson	<i>The Doctor's Car</i>	Sue Pearmain

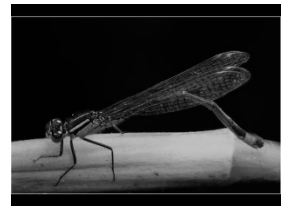
Group 1



Winston at Bletchley



Penmon Lighthouse



Damselfly

Group 2



*Egret**



Vase in Sunbeam

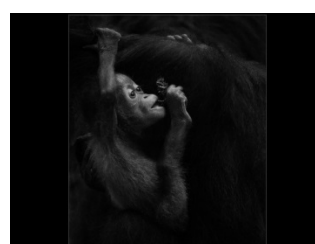


Venice

Group 3



Miners' Shower Room



Clinging to Mum



The Doctor's Car

Annual Digital Projected Image Competition

A superb 96 entries battled it out in this year's competition. They were some stunning photographs and I was thrilled to be awarded First Place in Group 1 for my image in Eyrri National Park. I also thought Jane's image was very interesting and one you really had to look into. And I loved Chris' Miners image – did the miner know he was being photographed I wondered ... Congratulations to everyone who entered the competition and to those of you who were successful.



	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3	
<i>First</i>	<i>Eryi National Park View from Miners' Track</i>	Elizabeth Smith	<i>Leader of the Pack</i>	Martin Green	<i>Miners' Shower Room</i>	Chris Mallett
<i>Second</i>	<i>Putting you Through</i>	Dave Cornish	<i>Look at Me</i>	John Leighton	<i>Bridge over the River Wye</i>	Jane Roby
<i>Third</i>	<i>John</i>	Dave Cornish	<i>Repose in Pink</i>	Martin Green	<i>Cave Dale in Winter</i>	Jolanta Bujalska Axon

Group 1



*Eryi National Park
From the Miners' Track*



Putting You Through



John

Group 2



Leader of the Pack



Look at Me

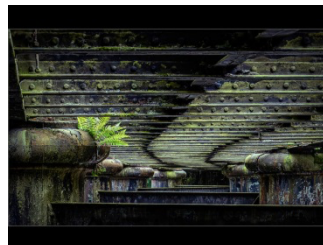


Repose in Pink

Group 3



Miners' Shower Room



Bridge Over the River Wye



Cave Dale in Winter



10

External Recognition

I know many of you entered MidPhot 2025 so congratulations to you if your images were accepted.

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 in April 2025!