



NPN Member Profile...



Paula Graham - NPN 0870



Although I always had an affinity with animals, nature and photography, my career as an International Show-Jumper, which involved traveling all over the world, took all my attention for more than thirty years. Any involvement with top-level sport requires 110% dedication and commitment, and there certainly was no time left to pursue any other interests.

Upon retiring from show jumping and after other major upheavals, I was left with a great void to fill. After dabbling in other sports, I realised that my future lay in being involved

with wildlife conservation at its roots.

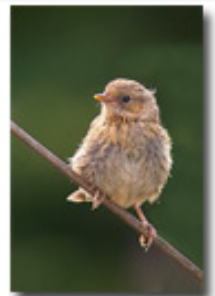
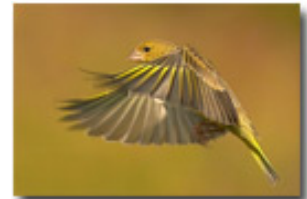
I plunged into realising this concept by buying a little place with a few bare acres with the limited funds at my disposal. I then set about creating a mini nature reserve by planting hundreds of fruit and nut bearing trees and shrubs, digging a pond and creating a wild flower meadow, thereby fulfilling the main requirements of local wildlife: food, water and shelter. As you can imagine, this took a lot of planning and effort.

In the meantime I had been given a computer, and being completely computer-illiterate, I spend my evenings trying to master this marvelous tool. The internet and the virtual world within it were another revelation to me. Hours upon hours were spent getting to grips with the basics of Photoshop with the idea of making interesting birthday cards for my family!

It was suggested to me that I create a website about my wildlife project. Again, after many months learning about HTML (browser language), web hosts, kilobytes and megabytes, uploading and downloading, a website took shape. All this was a steep learning curve and I found that there were not enough hours in the day.

The website also became a major project and it is at this stage that photography entered and is now with me to stay. I had a 30 year old manual Konica camera, with which I had been a happy snapper all my life. With it, I had learned the basics about the relationship between shutter speed and aperture. It was on its last legs by then and the digital age had caught up with me. In 2002 I used a Coolpix 990 to take snaps of the plants, insects and even birds that had been attracted to my wildlife project. How happy I was in my ignorance!

I soon started to realise that the quality of my snaps left a lot to be desired and that I could not get close enough to the birds that appeared as tiny specs in my snaps. It was in December 2002 while I researched on the internet ways on how to improve my photography that I stumbled across NPN. That changed the course of my thinking completely. I was in awe with the quality of photos of wildlife, especially birds, and studied avidly all the articles, posts, technicals and equipment members used. I joined NPN the following month in January 2003, but did not have a single shot that I dared post myself! I just lurked in the background and



agonised over whether I could justify to myself the expense of a digital SLR camera and telephoto lens, just to get better pictures on my website.

In the end of February 2003, I took the plunge; sold my jewels and the family silver and with a little help from my Mum bought the Canon D60 and 100-400L lens, which I subsequently replaced with the 300/4L prime lens and 1.4 converter. A few weeks later the 10D was announced.....who cares! Of course we all know that the camera and lens is only the start of the many other essentials one needs, like a good tripod and head, flash and so on.

From then on things began to happen. I built a portable hide, to be replaced later by permanent small sheds and started to take my photography very seriously. It was a few months later that with great trepidation I posted my first picture on NPN, a Great Spotted Woodpecker. The kind comments encouraged me to put more and more effort into improving my photography. The expert comments and tips I received with subsequent posts from NPN members, especially about composition, have been invaluable to me. At the same time I worked on improving my website (www.wildlifeforever.net) and replacing each and every awful snap by a more acceptable shot when I got it. In addition, I avidly read books on wildlife photography and studied member's posts, which I still do to this day.

Of course, human nature being what it is, I now hanker after a faster camera and am waiting to see what Canon is coming up with as an replacement for the 1D. I would also love to have the 500mm f/4 lens but feel that its weight and price will prevent me from adding that to the equipment I now have. The more knowledge I gain the less easily I am satisfied with the shots I get and want to do better and better. We all know how frustrating photography can be. For the time being there are plenty more elusive creatures to 'shoot' on my own place, like jays, little wrens and thrushes, to keep me occupied. I need to learn more about exposing and composing a good shot to get some consistency and style into my work. Increasing my knowledge about Photoshop is another must and goes hand in hand with shooting digital. I love it!

The future? I would like to go further afield, perhaps to some of the exotic places I read about and shoot larger birds like geese, various herons and cranes. At the moment, it is difficult for me to spend time away from my place because I have to care for my 13 year old pet pig! It is like looking after an elderly relative, except that it is even more difficult to get someone to look after a pig! My dream is, some time in the future, to rent out my house for a year or two and travel, living in a camper van, to some of the photographic hot spots.

Who knows what might still be possible one day.

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