Macro Photography

"As a lifelong naturalist and photographer I have never lost my wonder for the natural world nor my early interest in wildlife and wildlife behaviour. This started as a child in the late 50's when I was fortunate to spend 3 years living in Kenya and I have always held a fascination with the country and its wildlife.

For most of my adult life I have had 4 main interests' wildlife, photography, travel and technology/computers. In today's digital age these conveniently all combine into one. In an ideal world I would spend all my time travelling, photographing wildlife and exploring new techniques and opportunities. The need to earn a living and support a growing family have previously forced me to spend too much time working but a redundancy 3 years ago and the resulting change in working life have allowed me to explore other options. As part of this new found freedom I have started to offer talks to camera clubs, workshops in wildlife photography and am planning to run a few more trips initially to East Africa but maybe further afield in the future.

I was lucky to be given my first real camera, a Leica rangefinder model, when a teenager and with this started to explore wildlife through the camera lens. As soon as I could I saved up for a SLR and some lenses. The first SLR I bought for the massive sum of £47/10s (£47.50 for the younger reader) was a Pentax Spotmatic which I really treasured and on which I learnt much of my early craft. It was with this camera that I took my first published photos and made my first foray into macro with some photos that were used to illustrate a booklet on Lichens. Photography has changed markedly since these early days and digital photography in particular has brought many opportunities including many advances in kit and key the option to post process photos. I however remain a photographer who prefers to get the photo as right as possible 'in camera' rather than spend hours with a computer. I believe that it is the careful observation of wildlife behaviour which leads to distinctive photos that truly capture the spirit of an animal. The power of modern digital photography coupled with advanced cameras and modern lenses do however permit the capture of images that simply wouldn't have been possible even 10 years ago.

Over the years I have changed my primary reason for taking photos. It began as a simple means of producing images, transparencies, to illustrate talks I gave on Natural History and has progressed to an all absorbing hobby; a hobby where developing and perfecting the art and techniques have become as important to me as the subject matter itself. I have been the member of a thriving local camera club for a number of years and chairman for the last 4. This has encouraged and enabled me to experiment and explore other photographic genres supported and often challenged by fellow club members.

Macro work is a fascinating field of photography which can however seem very baffling and very expensive ! My task this evening is to try and dispel both of these and to get you to realise just how easy and fun it is and can be.
One of my earliest inspirations in this field was Heather Angel who wrote

> "Nature has an unlimited capacity to intrigue and delight – from the delicate whorls of a seashell, the spiral tendrils of climbing plants, the hairs on a stinging nettle or the hexagonal facets of an insect's eye.
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> Taking macro photographs is a means not just of recording details but also conveying this beauty and fascination to other people by opening their eyes to details that would otherwise pass unnoticed."

This, coupled with my wish to explore the limits of the natural world, is why Close-Up and Macro Photography has always been something of fascination to me. Macro quite simply enables me to get "up close and personal" to the natural world.

In this talk I want to try to explore the options available to the amateur photographer who wishes to experiment with macro as well as share some photos. The examples I use will largely be taken from the natural world as that is my interest but the techniques carry over to any other subject matter. I will explore very basic, hybrid camera options but spend most of the time looking at the options available to SLR owners including some of the possibilities brought about by very advanced lenses and specialist software.