**In the Garden 13 February 2023**

**1 Acer** This is a pleasing and restful photo. The composition is balanced carefully and the foreground and subject are beautifully sharp. The colours contrast the rich bronze and greens. The depth of field differentiates the sharp tree from its background. A couple of details catch the eye: at the right the edge could be tidied, so that the plants aren’t cut in half. Always difficult with the natural world, where things just won't behave themselves by forming neat groups. The curve on the decking may be a realistic capture and it does match the line of the path in the background. Or might it be that the wide angle lens has added this distortion unnecessarily. A final thought - when we place our subject to one side of centre, can we think about what we can see in the rest of the image. Here the two plant pots in the background, naturally blurred by the d.o.f. don't add much. Maybe try a square crop and keep the tree as the central subject of interest.

**2 Bad Hare Day** Nice title to enjoy - but is this hare is really wicked? Perhaps he's looking up at someone who is telling him off? I'm not sure if he's repentant or defiant. We can see different possible stories developing here. I like that in a photo. Titles are seen by some judges as mostly irrelevant. I certainly agree that the photograph should stand by itself. However, I do like to see a touch of humour: The Buck Stops Here, or Here Today Gone Tomorrow. Sorry! Don’t encourage me. We may come back to titles later on, but now let's look at the other features of this image. On the other hand the brightest light and colour here are on the head rather than the body. A small adjustment would lift what is generally a rather dark image and make the hare stand out more. A lower camera position also could help by placing the head against that plain part of the background. But I do like the snake of bright green moss that winds us through from left to right and from front to back. Generally an appealing idea.

**3 Blackbird** I had a problem when viewing this on screen. The original resolution is limited but the image is quite sharp when projected at that size. So I'm sorry to miss the chance of seeing this blackbird full screen and also sharp. It's a lovely pose and a good shot of the bird and its head. The eye is compelling and the bird shows energetic observation. The dof makes the bird stand out from its background.

**4 Blue Damsel** Beautifully sharp and well lit. However the delicate transparency of the damsel fly is disguised against the foliage. See how dominant that is in colour and brilliance. Nature defies us, you might say, and I would’ve loved to see this exquisite creature head on. I'm hopeless with the identification of creatures, but this damsel fly seems more green than blue. That shouldn't affect our judgement, however, in this competition. The management of lighting, colour and sharpness is very well done.

**5 Budding Sisters** Such beautiful flowers at a perfect moment of their bloom. The composition is well balanced side to side and front to back. Crisp detail on the backlit flowers, whose colours are well captured and complementary. The management of light and shade allow us to see the water drops as well as the detail in the petals. This is a good example of using dof to blur the background.

**6 Bumble Bee** Wow! Don't the colours of the flower and its contrasting visitor really capture our attention! The petals form a good radiating fan that provides a stunning background to the main subject. Some over-exposure here distracts from the subject in the title. The bee’s wings are lustrous and glossy, but the texture of the bee’s body is less sharp, which reduces its impact.

**7 Bursting into Life C** The title is so right! These poppies stand proud in a beautiful field of other flowers, they certainly claim pride of place. Seeming to reach out towards us, the spiky green covering of these flowers is almost menacing. Probably I'm too sensitive, because this is a striking image, busy with detail and colour throughout the frame. The line of the hillside behind and good management of dof set those background colours and shapes at an appropriate distance, giving the emphasis to the two poppy heads, which are skilfully handled.

**8 Butterfly** We have a delicate creature in the foreground here, with sharp focus. Its pose and its flower are well separated from the rest of the scene. The colours are rich and the butterfly’s pose gives full value to its beautiful colours and shapes. I think there is an imbalance in the positioning of the subject – a little too high and too far to the left, and rather smaller than we might wish. That means there’s an emptiness in the centre that could be filled. I tried cropping to different sizes and shapes, which can sometimes help when you are deciding on the final shape.

**9 Butterfly Bush** **C** This is a very striking image. The golden butterfly is highlighted from the front left, giving full rein to the flower as well, making for a very striking image. I think the butterfly holds its own against such opulence in the hibiscus. There is, unfortunately, some blow-out in highlights of the flower. You handle the dof effectively so these two stand out against their background, while the focus has included the stamen which reaches a long way forward. This is well handled.

**10 Camellia** A delicious capture, with the lighting well managed. This is especially hard with a white flower. The centre of the flower is inviting and has enough light and details to satisfy, though the very heart of it isn't quite in such sharp focus. The backlighting gives a welcome transparency to the petals. Isn't it difficult to decide on what to include or to leave out?! First there are some tiny black marks on these pure white petals. Original and absolutely there at the time, but I’ld be tempted to remove them. The two budding flowers here – one on the left and the other further back on the right do make a triangle with the flower’s centre. On the other hand they may seem to be a distraction.

**11 Childhood Memory HC** The title sets the scene and doesn't this picture give us a story?! The swing seems not have been used for some time, given the lichen or fungus growing on it. That gives us a feeling of nostalgia for time past and some sadness that there is no-one around now to play on it. Technically just take a look at the diagonal line of fence receding into the background. We can see how it takes the eye from the main subject – the swing tyre – along to the tree and down to the corner of the fencing. The scene closes with a glimpse of more trees in the background and an evening(?) sky with clouds. A small aperture allows us to see it all in focus from front to back. There is a challenge here from the shade which the author has processed vigorously to allow us to see more. You will have your own view on the amount of dodging and sharpening here. In the end I do find it a little unnatural, but overall this is a wonderful photo, carefully planned and generally executed so well.

**12 Circle Walk** There are different spaces – rooms - in this composition and all is sharp front to back. The flowering bush at the front is glorious and indeed forms a sphere, which is echoed by the shape of the flower bed in the second room. This framing gives me a feeling of being cramped. The greenery on either side hems us in, so the 'walk' in the title becomes difficult to recognise.

**13 Conkers** Placing these in the context of the legs and feet is imaginative and does provide a sense of scale, but also for me presents a problem. Conkers have such satisfying and beautiful shapes that they can make a delightful subject. Because the focus here is on the centre and background, the larger conker in the foreground has suffered in sharpness. As a result we miss the details of the prickles and detail as well as the brilliant reflective surface of the conker. This gives me more shoes and trousers than conkers. Could it be titled differently to accommodate the dominance of what is in the background?

**14 Cowslip** **C** The little bells of these flowers remind me of book illustrators like Kate Greenaway. They could be seen as faces – some hopefully looking upwards while others are downcast. Wistful. It’s a mistake of course to think like this. What we do have is a delightfully minimalist photo of the single stem, placed classically and - almost - across the intersecting thirds of the frame, while the matching background is tastefully blurred. There’s a softness to the photo, and subdued lighting, but in this case they both contribute to the success of this photo. I can see overall this evening's entries show different approaches. Some of them hint at a story while others aim to capture the essential beauty of the subject. This is where personal taste enters the competition. I like this image very much, but I’m left wanting something more.

**15 Dahlia** A substantial flower in a commanding position, sharp and colourful, with a dark background that’s almost flat. A suggestion of more detail here could be effective. The flowerhead is lit evenly, but I think stronger lighting, perhaps from the side, could bring out a more three-dimensional study.

**16 Fairy Lantern** The close-up of this lantern is captured very well, sharp and textured, with a wide aperture that once again gives the subject prominence against its background. You have caught excellent contrasting and complementary colours. When you look closely you can see the natural markings include that black circle in the centre, while there are other smaller ones once you start to investigate. Of course these are natural and so the author’s giving us an authentic account of this particular flower. Would it be better not to see that? I don't know which is right. However I would suggest that the close crop on the right hand side has trimmed too closely the minute hairs on the lantern. They would love to have a little more space. The framing of the composition has also chopped off half of another lantern, which is put out of sharp focus by the dof. The choice is hard – maybe a crop tighter to the main lantern? Well that would give you more headaches in the cropping of the back ground leaves. Overall however it's a satisfying image with impact.

**17 Flower Head** Your entries this evening have such a variety of flowers and I’m glad this isn’t a competition about identifying them. I would certainly struggle. But I'm glad to see here the dramatic lighting and the use of depth of field to give prominence to the central part of this flower. It also gives the photo a three dimensional feel. I wasn't sure about the slightly off-centre placement Then I looked at the stalk faintly visible beneath the flower head, which is at an angle that seems to thrust the flower head up and to the left. The extra space on that side could be seen as thrusting upwards and moving out of the frame, a welcome suggestion of movement. The background is textured and has shapes that float faintly and frame the flower well, while the green is a good match for the flower. A striking image: and this one is bold and says ‘Make no mistake: I’m here’.

**18 Flower Head Double** These two flower heads have beautiful features – are they anthers and stamens? The delicate shapes are detailed and sharp. The stems and foliage are well handled by a wide aperture, while the background has an abstract set of shapes and colours that complete the frame. We can see that a shallow dof means that the petals on the right hand flower – the nearest to the camera – have dipped out of the focal range, like those at the rear of the left hand flower. I think that must’ve been difficult, but I really would’ve liked to see the whole of the two flowers in sharp focus.

**19 Garden Guardian** Here we have a gentleman who’s both military and beaming. He may have held weapons originally, but now he has two bamboo canes. So is his smile in anticipation of giving us a guardian’s whack? Whatever the story, my point is this photo invites us to imagine. Now let's look at the details here. The weathered metal stands out well against the background and the colours are in harmony. The detail of the armour as well as the face are well captured. However he’s in the shade, apart from some splashes of sunlight on his right flank. These show how much more he would stand out if some additional light could have been found to lift him. The sunlight in the background gives depth and another room to the composition, but overall, this warrior seems a bit lost in the jungle!

**20 Glowing Mushroom 2**  Now that’s exactly the right word for this beautifully back lit fungus – whose variety and name are beyond me. But I think we can all appreciate the capture and the clever handling of the light. Not only the luminous yellows of the gills underneath the dark cap, we also have the reflective surfaces in different parts of the photo. The textures are sumptuous and dof allows us to enjoy the other mushrooms. Their warty heads are sharp from the front left across diagonally to the lower right. There are contrasting areas of dark and light here, which gives us plenty to appreciate. The darker areas carry some mystery, and I don't find these a problem. But I do think the tip of green leaf on the left might’ve been removed. Good composition otherwise and exposure have made a fine image out of this otherwise inconspicuous group in the dim woodland.

**21 Gunby Estate** A colourful and detailed capture, with strong contrasting colours and sharp detail of this spiky flowerhead. Overall a gorgeous and rich image. The difference in size between this ball of light and the background blue flowers adds to its significance and is well thought through. The change of colour and background - at about one third of course – adds to the sense of space and gives a quiet green background. The title tells us where this garden is, in Lincolnshire I believe, maybe a useful fact. Perhaps an additional phrase would focus us on the plant, or an imaginative one.

**22 Hidden Corner** These sculptural fountain basins, like a group of exotic mushrooms, cascade down a slope, sheltered by different plants. All is in perfect focus from front to back and the exposure captures a difficult variation from light at the front to shade at the back. The framing allows the plants to balance on each side leading the eye on a journey upwards into the shadows. This is helped by the reflections in the two central bowls of the fountain – impressive and the touches of red. A hidden corner, but now one that’s shared for all to see.

**23 Hillsborough Castle and Gardens C** In the 18th Century the owner, Wills Hill might’ve shared this viewpoint with his famous visitor Benjamin Franklin. What a garden indeed! Our eye travels from the front right along the diagonal of trees in varying shades of green back to the temple and beyond to the colourful flowers (azaleas?) and the solid shapes of great trees. The stone balcony that seems to edge a small lake invites us to rest our elbows and gaze upon what lies beyond. An overcast day and no direct sunlight anywhere means we miss the magic of a shaft of sun to spotlight the temple. But we can’t have it all and we already have such a lot here. Geometrical shapes and straight lines combine well with the swags and curves of the trees, but would you remove the black framework and red life belt at the left, as well as the posts and chain links near the temple? Always a difficult question.

**24 Honey Bee** A beautiful flower and the bee is a prominent and well detailed visitor. We know it is darker in the centre of the flower, but could you’ve given a touch more light here - perhaps highlighting the head of the bee? The heart of the flower is delicately revealed, while the bee’s wing is beautiful. However the lighting overall is a bit flat and so we don't see everything in sharp brilliance.

**25 Honey to the Bee** Great set up of camera position to show us the bee sideways on. The light comes from the same left hand side and we can see both face and body clearly. The same is true of the flowers and so we have a combination of light and shade that’s well handled. The bee and its flower are classically placed in the crosshairs of 1/3 position. This also give a balance in size to the larger flower head above and diagonally to the left. So far so good. Perhaps the central upper flower takes more importance than is desirable – it’s very handsome and the individual flower heads are so clear and sharp; while the bee’s flower looks more like the remains of a jumble sale after everyone has rummaged through it. The depth of field provides sharpness across the main subjects and a pleasing blur in the background. If it was possible to shift the whole flower stalk across to the left, so the larger flower wasn’t so central, that would help. Perhaps a crop as well would bring the bee closer to us without too much loss of sharpness. I find trying a different framing – square perhaps - can help you choose what is best.

**26 Honey Bee** This has immediate impact in the high key brilliance of the colours and the strong and complementary match of these between the bee and the flower head. The detail of the flower and the sharpness of the bee’s hairs are impressive. I love the right eye of the bee and its catchlight – this guy really concentrates on his work – and his plumpness matches that of the flower – very satisfying. In getting so close to the subject part of the flower has been cropped in the foreground, while at the left it is a little tight and at the right there is the presence of another flower in the background. These make a price to pay for the sumptuous central glory. Placing one light source directly behind the subjects as well as having more lighting from the right-foreground gives a terrific punch. I think you've been generous and enthusiastic here with the sharpening, while the highlights on the stamens and the wing of the bee seem to me overdone. You’ll have your own views.

**27 I’m Not Really Prickly** The title gives a humorous introduction to this beautiful flower, though personally I’ld be cautious in going anywhere near the green leaves underneath - they look really lethal. Closer inspection reveals - I think - a spider’s web that has caught a bit of the light. It's very delicate and so you have to decide if this is a bonus or an unnecessary feature. I think it’s less of a problem than this strong diagonal edge in the background, which is a little distracting. Overall well-lit and sharp - but I would love to see a midway point between the vivid colours and lighting of the previous image and the more modest features here.

**28 Imitating 1** The title invites us to match the beak of this greater spotted woodpecker with the open jaws of its perch – nicely titled and well captured. The composition gives us both a clear and sharp view of the bird and the very fine and rugged chunk of tree on which she stands. (With no red markings on the nape that seems right to me, but I defer to anyone else’s authority.) There’s much of interest to study here and your eye can revel in the intricacies of the wood and its various growths, while the woodpecker nevertheless holds its own very well. Confident exposure with natural colours that are very detailed – well done!

**29 Insy Wincy** The well known nursery rhyme has a spider climbing up a water pipe and suffering the shock of being washed down again. This specimen looks strong enough to wrench the pipe from its fixings, although showing no sign of interest in mountaineering at the moment. It’s beautifully observed from very close underneath. Well done to find this angle. The spider is well lit and sharply detailed, while the background is suitably dimmed with a wide aperture and resulting dof. The colours are complementary and this gives a very good effect overall. The story of the rhyme emphasises the persistence and industry of the spider and so provides us with a precept to apply in our own photography – keep trying. This image reflects that moral.

**30 Large Skipper** A good pairing here, in shape and size and their colours are vivid, while the capture is sharp - just enjoy the detail on the thistle , while the Skipper itself is truly impressive. The grip of the Skipper as it leans backwards is like a mountaineer’s daring – doesn’t this make us feel real dynamic tension. That long proboscis is reaching deep into the flower and we can see the detail of every part. The catchlight in the eye is well captured, and includes reflections of the antenna. There are distractions in the thistle head at the front left and the trace of a gossamer thread hanging vertically between the two flowers. You could try a portrait crop that brings the Skipper itself to prominence. While you might have to lose part of the thistle, it might be worth it.

**31 Lollypop Lily C**  A beautiful flower and it’s well lit, so looking down from above we can enjoy all the details. The viewpoint means we don’t get as much of the vertical stamens as we do of the petals, but that isn't really a problem. The water spray has been generously applied, while a shallow depth of field means the foliage and the background don't intrude.

**32 Monte Palace Gardens 3** I’ve never been to Madeira, but this scene makes me keen to visit. The diagonal lines from each side here lead us through the scene to the curve of the water below the geometric shapes of the house. This combination of uniform shapes complements the natural variation in the plants and trees. Such a balance is pleasing, while the light that falls from the upper left, where we find an interesting sky, down to the right foreground, adds another interest. The scale of these gardens is illustrated by the people standing outside the house, while the dof gives us sharp detail throughout the scene. While this starts as a record shot, the pov chosen by the author takes us on a journey, in which the angle of light picks out shapes and textures. The jets of water from the right hand wall create the pools below where they fall: such good observation.

**33 Moth** The twin shapes of the plant stem and the long body of the moth echo each other. The composition places the subject neatly across the vertical thirds. The texture of the moth’s body is clearly detailed and the moth is picked out sharply enough, though the tip of its left hand antenna has softened as it extends backwards out of focus. The most outstanding feature is the head and in particular the eye. Not exactly pretty, but it is a faithful portrait. Is it resting, or poised to launch itself? We don’t know if insects have such intentions, but it makes for some interest. This is otherwise a good record of the insect, whose colouring is quiet and unobtrusive – a key element in its survival strategy. The background is suitably blurred, but perhaps the intensity of the green could be softened to reduce its dominance.

**34 Mount Stewart** I was lucky to visit here last June and like this shot. These formal gardens are seen here in full bloom and what lovely contrasts between the rich greens and vermilions, with a sprinkling of other colours. The garden is the main subject, while the house provides a sufficient and solid backdrop. The eye is led by the diagonals from left to right to the single tree in the background. The day was overcast, but we can see everything clearly and there is no danger of blown sky. There is some softness in the foreground flowers - reds can be difficult to capture, and I would love to see them as sharply captured as the topiary trees in the middle ground.

**35 My Garden** Such an entrance which this composition captures well. We can enjoy the opulence of the hanging baskets, while through the gate we can see the bird house – dovecote perhaps. Well exposed and with vibrant colours. I have some concern that this competition is called ‘In the Garden’, whereas here we are outside, just looking in. However this acts as an invitation, the viewer is being welcomed to what will we see inside So no problem, and we can enjoy that the author not only takes such photos, but is clearly an expert and dedicated gardener. However in order to see all of the hanging basket to the right of the entrance, the edge of the shuttered door just behind has also been included. A tricky choice to make here, but perhaps try a crop to the edge of the bracket while still showing us the majority of the basket. The white wall echoes the white dovecote inside and is a good feature.

**36 Parterre** Some early examples of parterre gardens are found in France, so if you’ve been to Fontainebleau or Versailles for example, you will have seen them. Set on flat ground, the patterns are the key feature and best seen from above, as in this photo, perhaps from the window of a stately home. I think that may be one reason I don’t have a parterre. This is seen on a bright sunny day with interesting shadows, while the trees are in full summer growth. So far so good, but my eye is distracted by the need to make this shot level, instead of leaning down slightly to the right. In addition the pov wasn’t absolutely central, so the spacing left and right isn’t balanced. The problem with such small discrepancies is even clearer when the subject is one that relies on perfect patterning in its design. I don’t know where this is, but if it’s not too far away, it could be worth a return visit to have another go.

**37 Pergola with Aroma** The rose here in full bloom and the strong shape of the pergola rises above this profusion. We can’t enjoy the aroma just now, but I think we can imagine the heady perfume. It was an overcast day which makes for a flat image and the colours are less dynamic than they would be in the sunshine. That’s what it is, however and beyond the control of the author. Some things could be done though, both while taking the photo and afterwards in processing. Look closely at the foreground from left to right and we see the curve of the paved area isn’t balanced, while the camera position isn’t central, so the stone ornament in the background is offset to the left. I think if you are going to make a point of being off centre then really go for it! In editing this the horizontal line of the pagoda is shouting at us to make a shift of just 0.8 of a degree and make it level.

**38 Rolling Home HC** A delightful capture providing us with a tasty morsel. The effort to get this home is praiseworthy. Though to judge by the grip of the mouth on what remains, this strawberry may have been eaten before getting there. So we have a story, with both charm and interest. The lighting gives prominence the main subject, while highlighting the contrast between the background stone and the plants. The composition shows a set of roughly circular shapes, including bare areas on the wall, where the clinging creeper surrounds the two shapes in the stone, making a trio with the strawberry. The placing of the creature - is it a mouse or a vole - sorry? - against this background and the effect of light give a pleasing shape to the photo. The mouse (Let's say) is in sharp focus and our eyes are drawn to the detail of the fur and the catchlight in the eye. It also catches the lustre of the strawberry. A shallow depth of focus captures the scene from the main subject through to the background, while leaving the foreground blurred. I can see an alternative might have been at least f8 to provide a crystal sharp view of the whole scene. I quite enjoy the softness we have in places here, as that seems to suit the softness of the mouse. All a matter of tase.

**39 Shag** You’ve captured this bird in a beautiful moment as it spreads its wings to dry off and enjoy the sunshine. Seen at its native resolution this is a sharp image, though when I look at it full screen it loses that. Some birds, the kingfisher for example, are particularly difficult to capture with a catchlight in the eye. I would like to see one here, but clearly the lighting here doesn’t fall on the head and beak. The more often we practise taking shots of bird life I think, the more we can improve our results. You’ve caught the shape and the spread of the wings here, which is pleasing. I’m intrigued to think that to meet the challenge of the competition title, this shot must have been taken in a very grand garden indeed. Thank you!

**40 Snowdrop HC** Just look at the perfect shape of this snowdrop and appreciate the care with which it has been photographed. Simple and minimalist, there’s a real focus on the flower itself as it rises above the glistening mound of snow beneath. Sometimes less is more and I think you have achieved this well! The curve of the flower straddles the centre point of the frame, while the length of the stem puts it a perfect height, so we have thirds all round! Handling whites is always difficult, and here we have not just the flower head, but the snow as well. The brilliant sparkle of the snow is well captured, while the softness of the snowdrop is given a little texture in the emerging folds of the petals. The background provides softly varied colours.

**41 Summerhill C** You can feel the breath of summer here as the flowers turn their faces to the sun. We’re looking down a slope which must be the hill of the title. There’s a variety of plants here and a mix of colours. Shallow depth of field brings the foreground white flower into sharp focus and it catches a sidelight that makes its petals shine. But our eyes are drawn from the left foreground on a diagonal leading to the magenta flowers in the background. But we also see this little red flower that is peeping in from the left in the foreground. Yes it was there and you’re being faithful to the location, but would you perhaps try removing it, so we’re not distracted? The gradient of the focus moves quickly from the flower at the front, and a change of aperture could bring those crowns of flowers (cow parsley?) in to share the same sharpness, leaving the final third blurred as it is now? It’s the author’s choice and should be respected. Sometimes it’s good to try the alternatives that post-processing allows.

**42 Sungold** So this does what it says on the tin – both in terms of the strong light, and because the flowers themselves glow like mini suns themselves, filling the picture with gold. Isn't it just gorgeous?! The three flowers at the front are champions of light and colour. They are well captured with details right down to the tiny specks of gold sitting on the glistening black centres. Dof provides a subdued group of further gold, while the sky in the background fades away into the distance, providing a welcome and complementary blue. A couple of thoughts – notice that we can see only part of the left hand flower at the front of the trio, but by contrast the right hand side takes up nearly a third of this landscape format while the flowers fall out of focus. That seems a lack of balance. You might see what happens if you put this into a square format, keeping the left-hand part of the photo. The edges will then match the clipping of petals on both sides, and also give you two rows of three from foreground to the back. But we must remember this is your choice again and you have created a vibrant and glowing image.

**43 Sunrise C** Well balanced lighting here gives us the brightness of the sun and the reflected light below the horizon, which gives us more of the silhouetted pampas grass (forgive my ignorance, these may be something else of course). You were in luck this morning with the clouds in the sky. I might argue that this is a view from rather than in the garden. But you can put me in my place by saying you and your camera were definitely in the garden at the time! There are patches of blues to set off the richness of the many different golds. Taken from a low position – difficult for me nowadays - this shows the value of changing the camera height. It gives us these fine silhouettes of the grasses, which lean sympathetically to the left where the sun is rising. So the composition is good here and the handling of exposure a success. I’m not sure what the silvery rectangle is in the foreground – could it be a bus? It doesn’t matter, because what it does is to capture a reflection and so shows us the grasses. In terms of balance it’s pretty well central, which is another bonus. I’m not sure the smaller shape at the right – perhaps the corner of a building - adds anything. However it is balanced by the two lighter patches in the right foreground. Overall a dramatic and pleasing landscape.

**44 Swan Lake** A neat title. The composition is careful with the main part indeed filled with swans. The two geese provide a contrast and also blend in with the ground. What you might do is just remove the tiny patch of white in the front left corner. This is another image that is perfectly sharp when seen in its native format, of low resolution. On the full screen I couldn't see these birds as sharply as you would have done when standing there. Perhaps an opportunity for further research. And I'm sorry in case I’m not seeing this image properly.

**45 That Was a Nice Shower** **C** The winged insect that has just enjoyed this shower may not be obvious at first, but there we are – at just about 4.00o'clock on the flower. The flower of course may be expressing the same opinion – it certainly looks fresh and bright, with lovely colours and very sharp. The lighting has been used well here, from above giving us full sight of the flower and its water drops, also giving an aura of radiance as the image blurs into the distance. The subsidiary flower is sharp as well, because the plane of distance from the lens has given us both. The other flowers behind , especially the yellows, complement the range contained within the flower itself. The framing includes everything we want to see, while at the edges there is nothing obtruding. Well captured!

**46 The Pollinator** The bee is hard at work and the head of the flower should yield well. Viewed at 50% the image is sharp enough, but on the full screen it is clear that the only object in perfect focus is the half leaf intruding at the left-hand side. I understand the leaf is tricky to remove, especially as it is so close to the main subject. It underlines the value of preparing the shot before. It’s a shame because this would be a lovely image if we had the same sharpness on the bee as well as the flower head. I don’t know if a single point of focus was used here, but if not it could have done the business – providing of course that it is settled on the bee itself. We can see the light has caught the transparency of the wings and there is a similar reflection on the bee’s head – great potential here.

**47 Unwinding** The growth process of ferns is wonderful to observe, and here we have an interesting variety of details to please the eye. The lighting from the side ensures we know what the main subject is, but there’s so much to enjoy as well , like in the twigs with buds at the right. The lighting on these might benefit from some attention when you edit, however, specially the second one further back. On the left we have the cones of the tree that stands above the fern. It would be good to have more light here to appreciate its detail. Dodge and burn could both be put to good use here. Back to the main subject whose focus has been set on the brightest part of its uncurling frond. That is good, but perhaps a narrower aperture would have given us the same sharpness on more of the curl in front, which is soft by comparison.

**48 What Time is It? C** The title is suggestive and what fun there is here. The shape of the blackened tree provides a perfect base for this squirrel – perhaps like the captain of some fantasy submarine that is just surfacing. The composition is balanced by the flowering heather, while the gaze of the squirrel takes our eyes nicely from left to right. Would this be better if the heather had the same sharpness? It is the squirrel and its immediate surrounding cockpit that we want to see most of all. So to the squirrel itself. We can see the detail of its fur and individual hairs, the eye has a pleasing catchlight and it is clearly concentrating hard. I am a bit worried about what has happened to the right paw – maybe tucked behind his back - is this in recognition of Admiral Nelson? The left paw and claws are nicely captured, but overall, I think the size of the chunk of wood rather dwarfs the squirrel. It is what it is and this has caught a decisive and entertaining moment in the life of a creature that so often is moving at speed. Or so my dog tells me after another failed attempt.

**49 Wonderful Wynyard Gardens** Here is another view of the colonnade we saw earlier. This time from the opposite side and we can appreciate the wealth of blossoms on the framework of the colonnade itself, as well as having a frame of the same roses at our entrance to this scene. Fine and sharp from front to back. Some of the same comments might apply here, but there are differences. We can say that where geometric shapes are concerned it is good to be absolutely central, and that principle applies here also. However the camera has been placed more deliberately set to one side, so we have the edge of the right hand upright, a bit more of the left hand of the circular bed and we can see that the stone sculpture is actually central here as we look diagonally across the view. The main rambling roses lean to the left, all of which encourages our eye to move across the scene. I can live with that. Here the sculpture is close enough to us to appreciate the echo of the spherical bush – is it box? – in the middle. The natural light is quite bright (notice the shadow of the colonnade across the foreground) and picks out details of the plants, with the impression that it’s coming from the right. It’s busy with all these plants and flowers and in the far background the paved area which has what looks like a bench or chair and a table. Is this a problem – I don’t think so, but each of us will have an opinion.

**50 Young Cucumber** This cucumber has definitely the shape of an embryo, which gives us plenty to think about. Lit from above and to the left, we have a sharp view of the main elements here. The tendrils of this creeping plant are not sharp, but more significant perhaps is the softness along the back of the cucumber’s curve. One way of looking at this is to see the adult cucumber as a parent behind this child. As a still life this has mileage. But that’s the point at which I feel uncomfortable, because of the pin and the tip of another sharp object – presumably holding it upright against the other cucumber, while the first is standing in as an eye. Ok I’m being squeamish and this is a bit of fun, yes?

**51 Yucca Blooms** Well captured and the flowers are sharp and colourful. Light from the right gives them a structure with the shadows. The edge of the grass across the background might just be levelled by 0.5 of a degree I think. The composition gives us two main elements – the bush on the left and the yucca in the centre, while to the right there is space. I can live with this in that the yucca is leaning towards the light and is at a pleasing angle. I tried a square crop on this, to include the top half of the yucca and reduce the space on the right, to balance the bush on the left. It could still be sharp because you captured this well, and have the capacity in your chosen resolution. That’s a matter of personal choice and the author’s decision is the important one.