

Ross Hoddinott

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As a child, Ross Hoddinott could often be found exploring the ponds and fields of North Devon, satisfying his childhood fascination for all creatures great and small. Twenty years on and you will still find Ross down at the water’s edge searching for frogs, insects and other life forms, although these days, the rewards for finding that elusive creature or insect are much higher.

Ross is one of the UK’s best outdoor photographers of the moment, with a huge award-winning portfolio of stunning macro, landscape and wildlife work. His latest accomplishment was scooping the first place title for the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award 2009 – a prestigious accolade among wildlife and outdoors photographers alike.

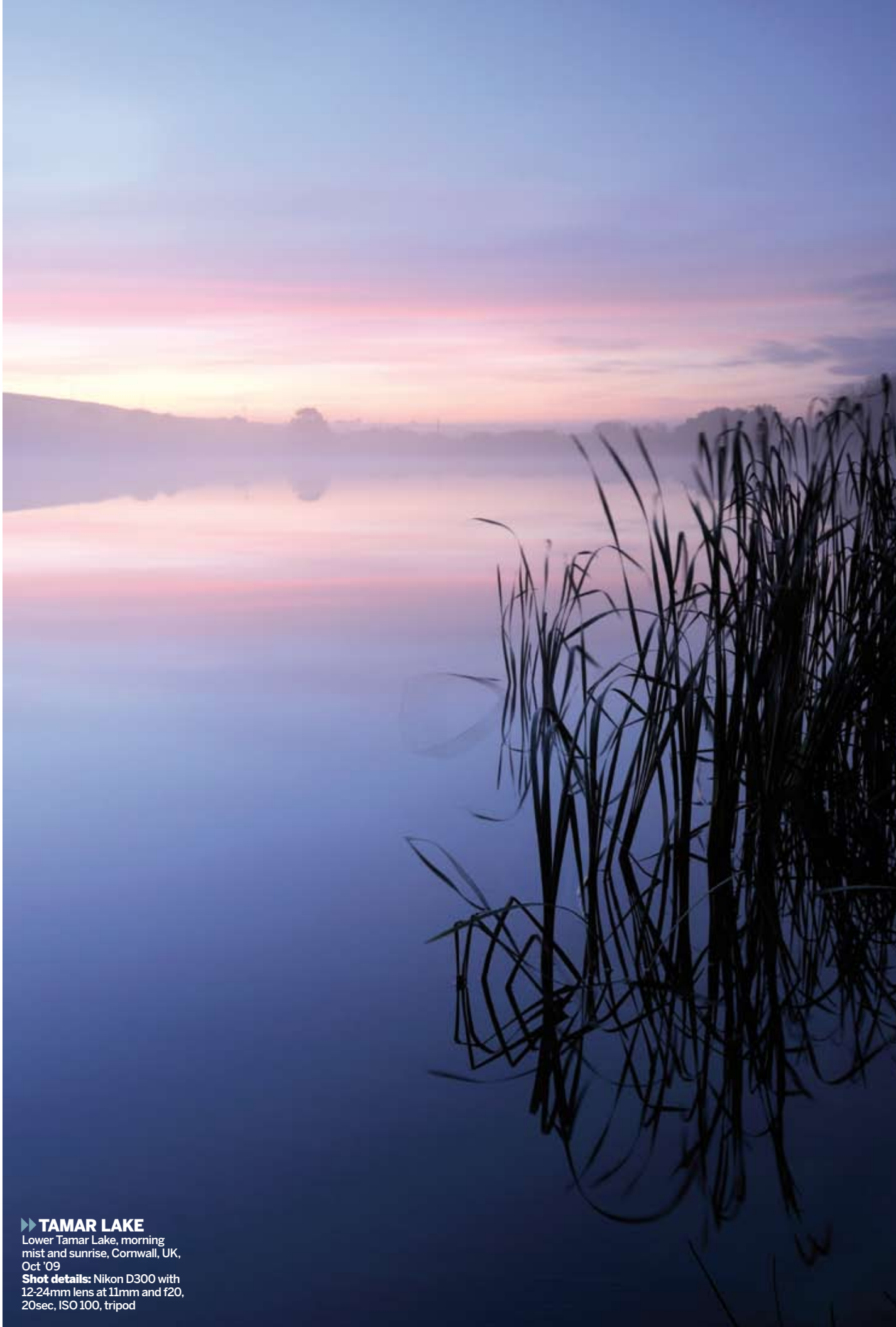
Ross made an early start on his career, getting a taste for photography at the tender age of ten. “My parents gave me a little compact film camera and I’d always had a passion for nature,” he comments. “It wasn’t long until I entered a picture into Countryfile’s Photographic Competition and I won an SLR in the under 18’s category. That was the encouragement and motivation I needed at that age, I think.”

With no formal training, Ross relied upon his love for nature and home schooling from his parents to improve his

photography skills: “I was educated at home and that allowed me the time to generate my interest in photography. My parents lived in the middle of nowhere in North Cornwall, so when I wasn’t studying there was the opportunity to get out there, explore, find wildlife and photograph it.”

With a family interest in natural history and a love for the great outdoors, it was easy for Ross to build a portfolio of work that focused mainly on landscapes, wildlife and nature-based macros. “The two aspects of my work are landscape photography and macro. With the landscapes, I live in a very beautiful part of the world in the south west, with dramatic coastlines, great weather and great light, so it’s a logical thing to develop an interest in it I think.”

It’s Ross’s macro work, however, that he is most recognised for. Kitted out with his trusty 150mm and 105mm lenses, he will often head out in search for rare and beautiful insects to photograph. Being attuned to the natural world has an affect on his photographic practices, “I tend not to use flash photography, I much prefer to manipulate natural lighting, so the only specialist equipment I use is a small reflector to bounce light onto the subject.” The remainder of Ross’s kit list includes merely a tripod and a remote release – a simple list that’s testament to the skill of this photographer. ▶▶



▶▶ TAMAR LAKE

Lower Tamar Lake, morning mist and sunrise, Cornwall, UK, Oct '09
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 12-24mm lens at 11mm and f18, 20sec, ISO 100, tripod

GETTING TO KNOW...



Ross Hoddinott

Website: www.dawn2duskphotography.co.uk/www.rosshoddinott.co.uk

It’s all about creatures great and small for natural history photographer Ross Hoddinott. Here he shares the techniques and tips behind his award-winning body of work.

Camera: Nikon D700 and D300

Lenses: Nikkor 12-24mm, Nikkor 17-35mm, Nikkor 18-70mm, Nikkor 24-85mm, Sigma EX 28mm, Sigma EX 105mm macro, Sigma EX 120-400mm, Sigma EX 150mm macro, Sigma EX 1.4x teleconverter.

Tripod: Gitzo Systematic GT3541LS legs and Manfrotto 406 geared head.

Speedlight: Nikon SB800 AF DX.

Backpack: Lowepro Photo Trekker AW 11 and Lowepro Vertex 200 AW.

Accessories: Lee filter system x 2, graduated ND (hard and soft) filters, 0.9 ND filter, Heliopan 105mm circular polariser, Nikon PK-13 extension tube, dome hide, remote release, Lastolite reflector and Wimberley Plamp.

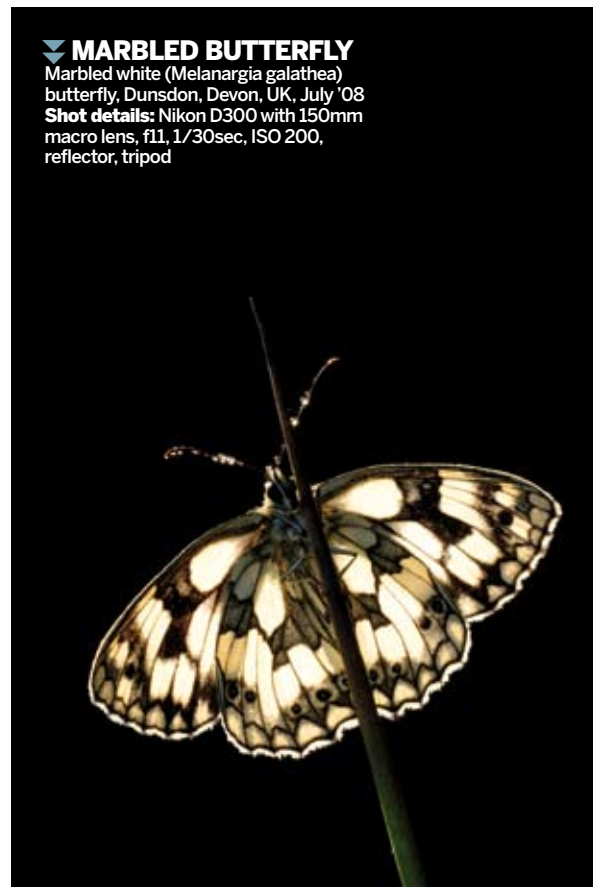
Preferred genre: Ross is one of the country’s best outdoor photographers, specialising in natural history. He is famed for his macro photography.

Best shoot ever: Ross recently scooped first place prize in the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition.

Big break: Aged ten, Ross began using his parents’ SLR – a Zenit 11 – and a year later, in 1990, he won the BBC Countryfile’s junior flora and fauna category in their annual photo competition.

▼ MARBLED BUTTERFLY

Marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*) butterfly, Dunsdon, Devon, UK, July '08
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 150mm macro lens, f11, 1/30sec, ISO 200, reflector, tripod



▲ BLUE-TAILED DAMSELFLY

Blue-tailed damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*), silhouetted, Tamar lakes, Cornwall, UK, June '08
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 150mm macro lens and f11, 1/100sec, ISO 200, tripod



▲ WINDY POST

The 'Windy Post', near Feather tor, Dartmoor, Devon, UK, Feb '09
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 10-24mm lens at 11mm and f18, 20sec, ISO 100, tripod

“The only specialist equipment I use is a reflector to bounce light onto the subject”

▶▶ For landscape work, Ross tends to up his kitbag essentials, choosing to shoot with wide lenses such as a 17-35mm lens. “I do like to shoot ultra wide, but it’s so dictated by the scene, once you get to your location you start to visualise the picture you want to take and this obviously affects the focal length you choose.”

Ross’s vast experience has led him to write a book dedicated to the art of lenses: “It covers different focal lengths, lens technology and how to make the most of them,” he says. So what advice can the photographer give when it comes to lens choice? “It’s simple – buy the best quality lens you can afford. It’s better to buy one quality bit of glass than perhaps two lower-spec lenses. It’s very easy for photographers to become obsessed by the cameras we buy and leave no budget to buy good-quality glass. The camera can only do so much. There’s no point having a high resolution sensor unless you’ve got a lens in front of it to realise its potential.”

Ross’s lenses were certainly in tip-top condition when he captured the image of a damsel fly that landed him first place in the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year. “I don’t enter many competitions, but this was a new competition to promote British

wildlife photography,” he explains. “It’s a very simple image – just a silhouette of a damsel fly on a reed – but it’s covered in dew, which really gives the image some scale. It is a very stark, simple image, but the judges thankfully saw something.”

Ross credits the ability to track down his macro subjects down to a mixture of luck and skill, “With any kind of outdoor photography there is an amount of luck involved because you never know what you’re going to see, you have no control over what your subjects are and you have no control over the light,” he says. “I think as a photographer you try and create your own luck by ensuring you’re there at the right time. I have to get up very early and utilise the best lighting, and natural history photographers need to do their research to find out where’s a good place to find certain species – where to look.”

To get good macro shots depends entirely upon what species you want to photograph. “For damselflies and dragonflies you want to be visiting lakes, ponds and canals. If you’re more into insects and flowers, perhaps joining your local wildlife trust is a good start. That will help you to find the species you want to photograph.” ▶▶

◀ SWANAGE BAY

Groyne and view looking out to sea, Swanage bay, Dorset, UK, April '09
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 10-24mm lens at 24mm and f13, 3min, ISO 100

▶ ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT

St. Michael's Mount at sunrise, from Marazion beach, Cornwall, UK, Nov '08
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 12-24mm lens at 14mm and f20, 25sec, ISO 100, tripod



“The camera can only do so much. There’s no point having a high resolution sensor unless you’ve got a lens in front of it to realise its potential”



▲ **FROG PORTRAIT**

Common frog (*Rana temporaria*) portrait with red background. Broxwater, Cornwall, UK, Jan '08
Shot details: Nikon D300 with 150mm macro lens and f4, 1/320sec, ISO 200, reflector, handheld

▶▶ **SOAR MILL COVE**

Soar Mill Cove, late evening light, nr. Salcombe, South Devon, UK, Sept '09
Shot details: Nikon D700 with 17-35mm lens at 18mm and f20, 15sec, ISO 100, tripod

▶▶ When it comes to photographing landscapes, Ross fully admits he’s biased to the south west of the UK: “I love places like St. Michael’s Mount in West Cornwall and also a little beach called Porth Nanven, which is near Cape Cornwall. Both are very photogenic places, which you can return to again and again and always shoot something different according to the light and conditions.”

Ross is a traditionalist when it comes to getting his pictures right in-camera: “I use a lot of filtration as I don’t want to spend any more time in front of a computer than I have to,” he says. “I use a Lee filter system and a variety of neutral density filters to help me balance the exposure. I also use a polariser and enjoy using solid neutral density filters to create very long exposures and moody arty images.”

With so much experience under his belt, it’s no surprise that aspiring photographers hang on his every word. Thankfully Ross and his business partner Mark Bauer have a company called Dawn to Dusk photography, which specialises in photographic workshops in the South West. “Between us we have a good knowledge of Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, and because of that intimate knowledge we know where to take groups depending on the light.”

Now in its third year, Ross and Mark offer one-day, two-day and three-day workshops, which are extremely popular among photographers of all levels, “We try and appeal to real beginners through to people who have been taking pictures for forty or fifty years. We try and spend time with everyone individually so we can cater for people’s requirements, their level of expertise.”



Expect to come away from a Dawn to Dusk course with a better knowledge of exposure, filtration, use of natural lighting and composition – all courtesy of Ross and Mark’s own personal experience.

So what’s next for the photographer who seems to have it all? “The next step is to start doing print sales – something I’ve never done before. So next year I will concentrate on exhibitions and running limited-edition prints. Aside from that, my biggest thing is to improve as a photographer and get out there and enjoy my photography as much as possible.”

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