



## The emergence

*Stumbling upon a dew-covered great green bush-cricket easing out of its larval case, Andrew McCarthy captured every little detail of this once-in-a-lifetime natural history event. Anyone for breakfast?*

Ever since I was a child, I have been fascinated by insects and this has translated into my photography.

At least 70% of my images are of bugs of one kind or another, most of which are photographed around my home in Devon.

The UK's insects can be unspectacular, but there is one creature I come across from time to time that would do justice to the tropics and that is the great green bush-cricket, *Tettigonia viridissima*, the body and antennae of which can be several inches long.

South-west England is something of a stronghold for this spectacular beast. While they are fairly easy to find in their rough grassland and scrub habitat, I find them very difficult to photograph well, in part because their peak season is late June to August. On a warm summer day, they can move surprisingly fast and I have spent many a fruitless hour chasing them, hoping they will at some point pose for my camera.

Great green bush-cricket photography is made more difficult because of their extremely long antennae: these create a very wide subject that can be impossible to get fully into focus. Focus stacking is rarely an option since the antennae tend to move slightly in the gentlest of breezes – even the ultra-fast in-camera focus stacking capability of my Olympus E-M1X (my camera system of choice for bug hunting) can't often keep up.

Early July is a great time for photographing roosting butterflies, so one morning in 2019 found me

up before dawn searching for dew-covered marbled whites in a local grassland. After half an hour of searching, I was walking between patches of likely habitat when I very nearly walked into a great green bush-cricket sitting on a grass stem that had fallen across the path.

My quest for butterflies was quickly abandoned when I realised that not only was this insect fairly motionless in the cool dawn air, it was also dew-covered, beautifully lit by the rising sun and, amazingly, was emerging from its larval case. This was a natural history event I had never witnessed before and it was something I had never even seen a photograph of. So, with adrenaline flowing, I set my equipment up in an attempt to record the event, which I knew would be a one-off.

Because this insect is so large, I opted for Olympus' 40-150mm f/2.8 Pro lens rather than my macro, and set up for a small image stack of four frames to be combined later in post-processing. I watched and photographed the emergence for a good half an hour and was spellbound by this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The image that accompanies this article was taken towards the end of the emergence and just before the cricket warmed up enough to move off into cover. It is eating the remnants of its larval case – in other words, it is having its first breakfast as an adult! I don't suppose I'll witness such an event again and it will remain with me as one of the most memorable wildlife episodes I have had the privilege of watching.