



HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

WINTER NEWSLETTER

(January to March 2015)

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Winter Events and Winter Talks

JANUARY

Friday, 09 January 2015, 19:30 hrs
Feral Big Cats in and around Herefordshire - Rick Minter
 Bartestree Village Hall, HR1 4BY. There will be a charge at this event to cover costs.

FEBRUARY

Friday, 06 February 2015, 19:30 hrs
Polecats - Johnny Birks
 Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop, Hereford, HR1 4JR

MARCH

Thursday, 05 March 2015, 19:30 hrs
Bats and Swifts in Churches Project and Church Architecture – Denise Foster and Tim Bridges
 Bunch of Carrots Inn, Hampton Bishop, Hereford, HR1 4JR

Winter Workshops Planned

15th January 2015
Barn Owl pellet analysis workshop
 Location: Lower Farm House, Hereford

11th (and 13th) February 2015
Bat Box Installation Day
 Location: Frith Wood

15th February 2015
Bat Box Construction Workshop
 Location: Ast Wood

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members to HMG:

Mike Bailey, David Dawe, Anthea Murton-Saner, Victoria Worrall, Martin, Sarah & Toby Henton.

MEMBERSHIP

Louise Scott, Membership Secretary.

We currently have 59 paid up members in HMG and 127 followers on Facebook.

May I kindly remind those who need a nudge that last year's membership expired at the end of September 2014. If you wish to continue your Membership please forward your details with £7.50 subscription to me ASAP. Those who do not respond by the end of December will be removed from our current mailing list

NEWS IN BRIEF

Mammal Records – Time to Take Action

We are approaching 2015 and time is getting on! We will soon be planning our spring and summer surveys. This is the time to submit all your 2014 records.

All the bat records from the HMG projects have been typed up in a format in which they can be submitted. This amounts to 455 bat records for 2014; all ready for submitting to the records office. This includes bat activities from the Woodland Bat Project, Herefordshire Mammal Atlas, Bats and Swifts in Churches Project, Bat Box Checks, Roost Visits (personal records) and NBMP surveys (personal records). We have seen, handled or counted a total number of 828 individual bats this summer and out of the 455 records, 291 are bat detector records. Common and soprano pipistrelles are the species which turned up at every event, followed by Brown long-eared bats and Myotis spp (Natterer's and Whiskered).

So please take action and send your records to our new Mammal Recorder Joe Allsopp, contact details on last page.

Chase Wood, Near Ross-on-Wye

The new dormouse box scheme in Chase Wood this year produced four dormouse nests and one male dormouse in one of the new boxes. The last survey was carried out on 10th November which is late in the year. The tube survey in the north of wood produced one dormouse nest, which was exciting, especially as it is in an area where felling is currently being carried out.



HMG had its first meeting with the Diocese of Hereford with positive outcomes.

An initial meeting with the Diocese of Hereford took place in November to discuss the Bats and Swifts in Churches Project. Faculties have been applied for to allow HMG to install bat boxes on two churches where bats are causing issues inside the church. It was also suggested that we hold a workshop next year. A second meeting has been arranged in January 2015. Don't miss the Winter Talk in March where Tim Bridges from the Diocese and Denise Foster will give a joint presentation about the project.

Harvest Mouse Surveys 2014

Well done to Joe Allsopp for finding two harvest mouse nests and a vole nest during his recent surveys in Weobley. Joe followed the Mammal Society's protocol and searched a linear 200m transect.



Photo: Joe Allsopp

This transect is typical of the type of field margin we encounter in our countryside.



Photo: Joe Allsopp

Small mammal trapping project by Dave Smith

This summer we ran two training sessions for people who wanted to learn about small mammal trapping techniques.

Since these training events, six of the attendees have been out in the field using their new found skills to set traps at new sites around the county using our Longworth traps. To date, nine new sites have been surveyed and a total of 75 small mammals have been recorded consisting of wood mice (38), yellow necked mice (13), bank voles (21), common shrews (2) and a pygmy shrew (1). This is a great start to the project and many more trainees are still waiting to use the traps.

I am more than happy to run further training sessions in the future if other members are interested. The hope is that we will apply for a grant at some point to buy more traps and reduce the waiting time for those who want to use them.

This is a great way to get up close to our small mammals and gather records of these under recorded species. Interestingly, since starting

this project we have still not trapped any house mice or field voles, which are supposedly two of our commonest species.



Photo: Denise Foster

If anyone is interested in attending one of our training sessions, then please contact me at davetreesmith@aol.com and I will arrange a date and venue when I have enough people come forward.

Frith Wood Bat Box Scheme

The Forestry Commission has funded a 50+ bat box scheme for this wood and this will be monitored by HMG. We have at least 6 different styles of bat boxes and are hoping to mirror the trends observed in other part of the UK of usage of our boxes by different bat species.

Installation of the boxes will take place in February 2015. If you are interested in helping us erect these boxes, please contact Denise Foster.

Deer in Herefordshire - Review of talk given by Graham Riminton of the Deer Initiative by Martin Hales

The first talk of the HMG winter programme was given by Graham Riminton from the Deer Initiative. Graham worked through slides of the six deer species found wild in the UK, examining their history and distribution patterns (see table).

Deer Species	Origin
Red deer (<i>Cervus elaphus</i>)	Britain's largest native land mammal
Roe Deer (<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>)	Native to Britain, reintroduced to many areas.
Fallow (<i>Dama dama</i>)	Naturalised, re-introduced after Norman conquest
Muntjac (<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>)	Introduced non-native, Java/China, records since 1900
Sika (<i>Cervus nippon</i>)	Introduced non-native, from Japan, 1860 onwards.
Chinese water deer (<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>)	Primitive species from China, and red-listed there as a vulnerable species.

Distribution maps were shown for the three deer species found in Herefordshire: Fallow, Muntjac, and Roe.

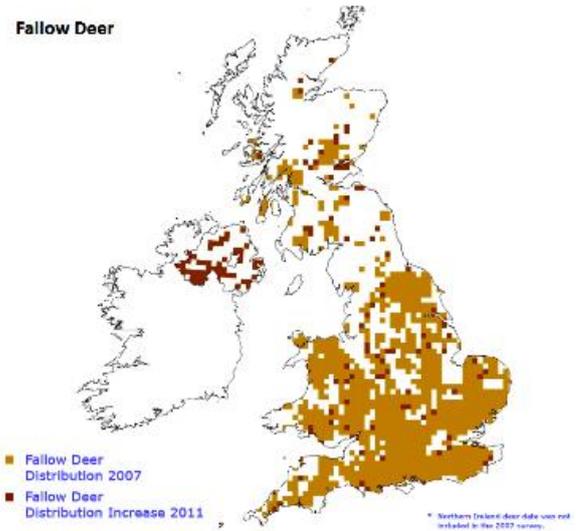
All three species are expanding their range, with an estimated annual population increase of between 25% and 30%.

Fallow Deer



Photo: Jackie Pringle

Photo: Fallow doe. The mature bucks have palmate antlers. Look out for the white rump patch and upside down black horseshoe pattern and black tail stripe as they run away from you.

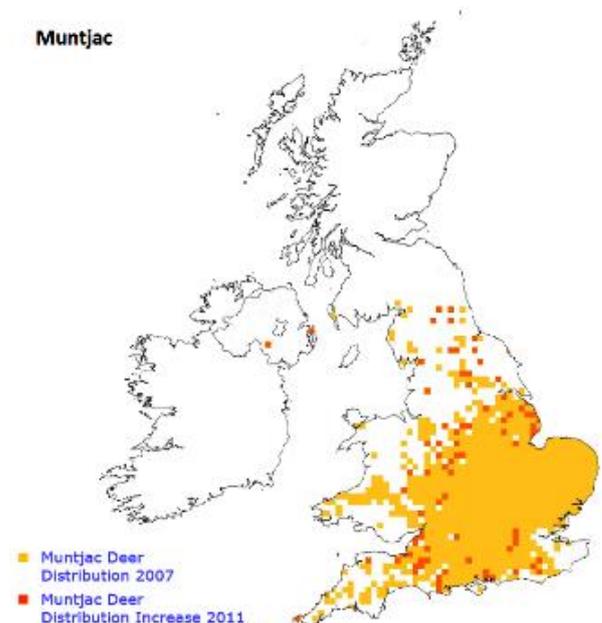


Muntjac Deer



Photo: Jochen Langbein

Photo: Muntjac buck. Males have short antlers and long visible canine tusk teeth. They appear hunchbacked and are slightly smaller than a labrador dog.



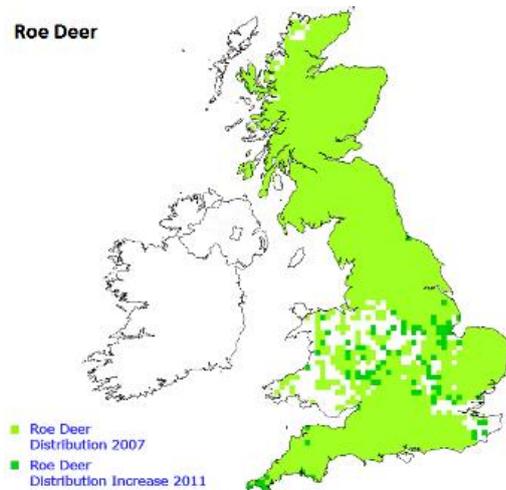
Roe Deer



Photo: Jochen Langbein

Photo: Roe buck. Buck antlers are short, three tined, and visibly rugose (wrinkly). Simple white rump patch seen from behind.

Roe Deer



We often talk of our county's mammals in terms of declining numbers or slowly recovering from historically low numbers but this is not the case with deer species. They are thriving without natural predators to control them. So much so that the effects they are having by grazing and browsing behaviour has been causing significant negative impacts in some of our SSSI habitats. Some of our finest woodland habitats in the county, and elsewhere in the UK, have been classified as being in unfavourable condition largely due to an inability to regenerate young trees and shrubs in the presence of large deer populations. Initially, deer can remove the field

layer of vegetation in the short term, impacting on plants flowering, habitats for dormouse and some nesting bird species. In the long term, deer can prevent woodland trees and shrubs from regrowing after coppice management, or prevent natural regeneration occurring, effectively turning woodland habitat to grassland.

Graham presented an interesting table showing the amounts of vegetation eaten by certain deer species. Fallow deer can eat as much as a sheep in a day. The Deer Initiative provides landowners with advice on how to manage deer populations to acceptable levels. In the past it was the wolf as top predator which would have been instrumental in keeping down numbers and ensuring herds moved from one location to another, relieving the grazing pressure and allowing habitats to regenerate.

Discussing solutions to large deer numbers, Graham explained that fencing deer away from sensitive sites could be achieved but that often only leads to increased pressure on adjacent land. However, the use of small 2m diameter exclosure fences in woodlands can help to show if management is having the desired effect. Within the exclosure fence rings, the vegetation can rejuvenate in the absence of deer browsing. Culling deer by shooting can be an effective way of bringing habitats back to favourable condition, but in the absence of higher predators it is a management tool that needs to be sustained on a long-term basis.

Unfortunately, habitat management is not the only reason we need to control deer numbers. In 2007 it was estimated that some 74,000 deer collisions with vehicles occurs annually on our roads, and have included serious human injury and fatalities. There are also huge insurance costs of some £17m associated with these figures and the Deer Initiative provides mitigation advice to help reduce these.

To help with increasing deer control the Deer Initiative are also actively involved with promoting venison and encourage us to try this as an alternative to our staple meats. They help with local production processing and cooking techniques of this naturally low-fat red meat. So, look out for venison in your local butchers.

The reference list below provides useful links to organisations associated with the ecology and control of UK deer species, and the work the Deer Initiative do with other conservation organisations.

We are very grateful to Graham Riminton for giving such an interesting talk to us and it certainly gave many of us some new facts to go away with.

Message to members: HMG would welcome sightings of deer in Herefordshire so we can monitor their gradual expansion of range in the county. You can [submit a record of deer sightings](#) using this link.

References:

[The Deer Initiative](#)

[National Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project 2007](#)

[The British Deer Society](#)

[Proceedings for the future of deer conference English Nature 2003](#)

Winter Talk Review – Wildlife Filming by Dr. Michael Leach, December 2014

Michael opened the talk by telling us how he began his career and described the difficulties of breaking into wildlife filming, especially with institutions like the BBC, which does not directly employ wildlife cameramen. Zoology qualifications are essential to becoming a wildlife photographer and it is important to have a specialism. Michael explained that his first assignment was to produce an eight second clip about blue tits, which sounded simple until he realised that it had to be something that had never been seen before. He finally came up with the idea of the blue tit stealing cream as seen from inside the milk bottle, which finished up as a full week's work! A series of increasingly demanding short clips led to a commission to produce a 30-minute film about the snow leopard, which took 2 years to make.

Michael explained that wildlife cameramen rarely meet programme presenters like Chris Packham or David Attenborough because such high-salaried presenters will only be called upon

to present pieces to camera and not to take part in the research! Wildlife filming is carried out by a team of researchers, cameramen and editors who put together the footage which gives the impression that the presenters were actually amongst the animals that they describe.



Michael has been given a number of challenges throughout his career; one hilariously recounted example being a sequence of a weasel hunting a wood mouse. This was a difficult challenge as weasels are particularly difficult mammals to track down let alone film – having only two speeds: stationary and Mach 6! Michael explained how he staged the event using an artificial meadow created in his studio and starring a tame weasel and a tame wood mouse, who never actually met each other on set! Michael shot a large number of individual sequences of the animals, which were assembled to make the piece of a Weasel following the urine trail of the wood mouse, making the kill and eating a dead mouse (previously killed by his cat) at the finish. When edited together the final piece gave a very realistic account of a “weasel hunting a wood mouse”.

Michael then went on to explain the history of filming wildlife and the sometimes bizarre techniques used in early 20th century, with cameramen sneaking up on wildlife inside artificial trees and filming from inside pantomime cows! Rather more convenient hides were soon invented and are still in use today to enable close shots of nervous subjects.

Michael now specialises in still photography of birds and mammals and has captured many remarkable close-ups of birds feeding young at nest sites. He gave us some very useful tips on

how to achieve this. A bird on a nest will fly away when approached by a photographer and wait from a safe distance until it sees him go away. However if the photographer simply disappears from view (as he slips into the hide) then the bird will assume he is hiding somewhere and so will never return. Fortunately most birds can't count beyond one so the trick is to take someone with you to the hide so when the bird sees your friend leave it will believe that the coast is clear and return to the nest.

Unfortunately this trick will not work for birds like the higher corvids who CAN count – in fact a bright raven can count up to nine! Michael went on to recount the time he borrowed a coach-load of noisy primary school children as decoys to accompany him across the Snowdonia hillside to his hide in order to photograph a nesting raven.

Michael revealed other tricks of the trade he uses to create those special images – such as using a blue backcloth to provide a blue sky on a dark winter's day and surreptitious placement of feeders just out of shot. Most impressive was an elaborate forest set he created in the garden of a Scottish gamekeeper, which when baited with its favourite flavour of jam resulted in a stunning photograph of a Pine Marten.



Michael has filmed wild animals all over the world but said that his favourite is the polar bear. The polar bear is our largest carnivore and the only animal that will deliberately eat humans – to a hungry polar bear a man is just a vertical seal! They are also capable of running 100m in 6.2 seconds – and we are not – so Michael's final tip was that you should always take a companion for protection when filming polar bears, since if

the bear attacks, you will only have to outrun your friend and not the bear!

This review can only give a flavour of what was a thoroughly entertaining, inspiring and interesting account of what wildlife photography entails.

Biodiversity, landscape and Neighbourhood Plans by Sue Parkinson

Many Parish Councils or groups of Parish Councils in Herefordshire are in the process of preparing Neighbourhood Plans. There are currently (Dec 2014) 87 Neighbourhood Plans in process in Herefordshire. A Neighbourhood Plan is part of the Localism Act, and enables communities to have a mechanism to shape development in their area. Once a Neighbourhood Plan is adopted it carries equal weight to the County Council's Local Development Plan and is a statutory document.

The Neighbourhood Plan can be a very useful mechanism for protecting natural features, habitats and places that are special to a community. My own parish of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal is in the process of developing one. I am lucky to have lived here most of my life, so know much of the parish very well and have a long standing interest in the wildlife here. I was invited to join the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group because they knew that I was relatively knowledgeable about local nature conservation issues. We have populations of dormice, bats and great crested newts in various places in the parish. However habitat has been lost through the removal or neglect of hedgerows, loss of old coppice woodland, neglect and filling in of ponds over a long period of time and the conversion of barns and other outbuildings. All of this can potentially be influenced through the Neighbourhood Plan. Just as importantly we have been able to flag up to potential developers that these protected species are present locally.

Our Neighbourhood Plan has policies for nature conservation, landscape and heritage features. We have also included conditions for planning

new development, which will compensate for loss of features in the present and the past.



Photo: Sue Parkinson

We have had to develop a robust description of the landscape character of various parts of the Parish, which is a useful exercise in itself, but probably the most valuable aspects of the Plan are the opportunities that it presents to potentially re-link habitat and extend it. For example we have included the creation of new hedgerows and woodland, which will re-connect some good dormouse habitats, so enabling the population to disperse over a wider area. We have a number of ancient ponds in the Parish; we have included policies to protect ponds and increase their number by encouraging creation of new ones.

We have included provision in new developments to make nesting and roosting sites for bats, swallows and house martins – so many barns in Herefordshire have been converted to other uses that swallows must struggle to find suitable nest sites. We have even specified car ports in preference to garages as these are more swallow-friendly.



Photo: Sue Parkinson

The development of our Neighbourhood Plan has been by and large very rewarding, and it has been useful to discuss wildlife issues with the rest of the steering group who have different interests and skills. With so many Neighbourhood Plans in progress I would highly recommend getting involved so that you can make sure that habitats can be protected and new ones created to make our wildlife more resilient to changes whether that be through development or a changing climate. The Steering Group might also appreciate the help and advice from someone more knowledgeable than themselves.

There is a full list of all the Neighbourhood Plans in process on the Herefordshire Council website: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/neighbourhood-planning/submitted-neighbourhood-areas-and-plans>

Bat Co-ordinator Update by Denise Foster

Summer has long ended, bats are hibernating and it time of catch up with all the paperwork. Two final bat box checks were carried out with group members this autumn. We performed a final check at Lea and Paget's and the maternity colonies of BLE's and Natterer's had gone. However we were blessed with 5 noctules and everyone who attended the check got an opportunity to handle one. Ast Wood box check in November revealed 2 harems of soprano pipistrelles (1 male to 7 females) and 1 BLE.



Photo: David Lee

HNT's Brilley Green Dingle was visited, as we were told that there was a bat box scheme in place which was not being routinely monitored.

Not knowing what to expect, we were surprised to find that very little maintenance was required to the boxes and we were even more surprised to find 5 noctule bats on site.

Dormouse Co-ordinator Update – Dormouse Meeting November 2014 by Anne Bowker

I would like to thank each and every one of the 37 people who came to the meeting on November 19th and those who expressed interest in taking part in a survey next year.

Sue Holland talked about the early days when she and Felicity were among the volunteers for Paul Bright. She brought the original maps of their findings. An amazing 238 woodlands were surveyed. I know Paul (now Dr Bright) was working full time, but it is a staggering total. In his 2004 book 'Dormice' (Whittet Books) Dr Pat Morris suggests that this means there were dormice in approximately one third of Herefordshire woodlands.

When I took over as coordinator at the beginning of 2014 I started by producing a dormouse conservation strategy for the County as requested by Natural England. I then spent a most productive morning at HBRC where I was given a print-out of all dormouse records since 1976 and a map derived from the figures. I was then introduced to the mysteries of the West Midlands computer recording system, which your committee is not entirely happy with. I was impressed by the spread of records on the map, but decided to use my school geography skills to plot the records for the last five years. The result was a little worrying, so I added those for the five years previous to that. There was little change. It showed that the areas around Golden Valley & the western boundary, Wigmore Rolls, Aymestrey & Leominster to the north and Bromyard in the east have very few recent records. James Bissett then offered to print a map for me showing all the ancient woodlands which will be invaluable.

Our job in the next year or two, therefore, will be to find out whether dormice are still living where records were collected in the 1990s. Sue Holland has suggested we start around Golden Valley and

an encouraging number of people at the meeting indicated they would like to help.

Dave Smith talked about plans to produce a book of Herefordshire Mammals. It had become obvious that an actual Atlas would be too big a project for our group, so the committee decided to concentrate on just one or two species each year. Dormice could be included in 2015. Work on bats, small mammals and hedgehogs is already underway.

In order to get the ball rolling I should like to build up a list of helpers and whether they have a dormouse licence. Some have already contacted me – thank you. If interested, please send me an e-mail at mike.bowker@clara.net and I will keep you advised of developments.

Animal Rescue – A Mouse's Tale Sue Parkinson

At the end of one day in September, I noticed one of our kittens playing with something small outside. She seemed particularly absorbed with the plaything. It took a little while to go out and investigate, but when I did, I saw that it was a tiny mouse and that it was still alive. I brought it indoors for a closer look and found that it did look more like a baby vole, with its eyes still closed. It was not obviously seriously injured but did seem to have a damaged tail. I passed it to my 15 year old daughter to look after and keep warm while we decided what to do with it. At this stage we were not hopeful that such a tiny mouse would survive the trauma of being played with by a kitten, or if we would be able to keep it alive.

My daughter Helen posted an emergency appeal for help on Facebook to see if anyone might know what we should feed it on, and Denise Foster was the first to respond. We should give it kitten milk, or live mealworms, but on a Saturday evening, where were we going to get these from? Helen reminded me that one of our neighbours rescues hedgehogs so they might have powdered kitten replacement milk. We got in touch with them, and their daughter brought over some powdered kitten milk. The next problem was how to administer the warm kitten milk to such a tiny creature. We could not find a

syringe in the house, then someone suggested loading a small paintbrush with the kitten milk, and the tiny mouse seemed to know just what to do with this. More research on-line suggested that we should gently massage the baby mouse after each feed to encourage it to defecate and urinate to mimic the licking of the parent.

The little mouse survived the first night inside a woolly hat on a hot water bottle, which was all placed inside a shoe box. Kitten milk and water was provided from the small paintbrush every hour or so during the day, but not frequently at night, and the baby mouse seemed to be reviving and beginning to move around. On the second morning it was nowhere to be seen in its box – it had escaped! It had been living in my small office as this is the only room in the house with a secure door, but it is full of open boxes, files, paperwork and general untidiness. Emptying boxes and moving things around risked squashing the little creature, but it had to be done!



Photo: Sue Parkinson

Eventually it was found behind a box, happily cleaning itself. A deeper box was evidently called for, once the mouse had been fed. We were encouraged that it was getting more lively, so we decided to handle it less, holding it in a tea towel for feeding. On the third day its eyes opened and we were pleased to see that it was more reluctant to be caught for feeding, though it was still interested in being fed kitten milk and water. We provided it with sunflower seed hearts, nuts and sultanas, which it stored in a

cache inside the woolly hat, and there was some evidence that it was eating these solid foods. It also seemed to be toileting independently. As day 5 approached we felt that the mouse should be released, particularly as we would be unable to feed it kitten milk or water as we would all be out for a whole day. We made sure that it was offered plenty of food and milk, and some honey to build up reserves in case it struggled to find enough food in the wild just after it was released, and we also removed the hot water bottle to provide a more natural temperature.

We released the mouse in the late afternoon, at the bottom of my mother's field, where there is ample ground cover provided by thick brambles along the hedge-line. The forecast was dry, and not too cold. It seemed quite happy to be released and ran for the cover of the brambles. We should recognise it if it is caught a second time as the damage to its tail was obviously terminal!



Photo: Sue Parkinson

Editorial: *Small juvenile rodents can be very challenging to identify. This small rodent has characteristics of both a mouse and a vole but because of the very long tail and prominent ears it is most probably a young wood mouse (but yellow-necked mouse cannot ruled out). Also the way it is holding its forepaws is very mouse-like behaviour.*

THE PROS AND CONS ABOUT BEING A BAT CARER by Denise Foster

Being a bat carer is a great opportunity to gain experience to another side of bat work and to develop new skills, especially valuable for

trainees. These skills include learning about bat behaviour, injuries and how to deal with them, species identification, carrying out biometrics, perfecting handling skills and as bat ambassadors, being able to educate the public. All these skills are required as part of the training for a bat licence. It also gives opportunities for individual bats to get the care that they need, because not all bats that are grounded are broken! There is great satisfaction of releasing a rehabilitated bat back into the wild, which otherwise would have died.

Anyone who wants to become a bat carer needs to be vaccinated against rabies and be able to provide evidence of vaccination (a Doctor's Declaration Form is available from the Bat Conservation Trust website) as well as requiring a mentor. Mentoring is an important role because caring for bats requires some basic knowledge and experience.



Photo Mike Glyde

My first bat care experience was getting bats, which had recovered from their injuries, ready for release. Bat flight cages are a luxury item and only the serious bat carer will invest in such an item. My 2m³ internal flight cage was specially made and overall was not a cheap item. Outdoor flight cages are more suitable for bat carers who run hospital type facilities and are fully committed to bat care. However most bat carers will exercise bats in a furnished room but this requires two people to monitor the animals because if you divert your attention even for a second there is a high chance that the bat will land and disappear into a gap, crevice or the lining of curtains! Releasing bats back into the wild also requires a skill because they must be warm enough to fly before attempting release.



After initial training with a mentor, registering with the BCT as a bat carer is recommended. Personal time constraints will determine on how much involvement a new bat carer will be able to take on! If time is an issue, then registering as an "ambulance driver" should be considered. Ambulance drivers will still need some basic training because when they arrive at a site they will have to carry out an initial assessment of the bat, and probably rehydrate the bat. A decision will need to be made whether the bat will be taken to a local bat carer or be euthanized. However, it is worth negotiating with the finder to get them to bring the bat to you or meet them half way. Remember that if a bat is releasable the bat carer will need to take the bat back to the area where it was found.

An Initial Assessment is carried out at the address where the bat was found. A full examination of injuries is performed by carefully blowing the fur gently to reveal the skin and gently opening the wings to check for holes, tears and breaks etc. An injured bat should be offered water, a rescue remedy or a mild glucose solution using a dropper/pipette/clean paint brush but not cotton wool buds as the fibres can get caught in a bats mouth causing irritation to an already sick bat.

If the bat is taken into care, then the next step is to weigh the bat and identifying its species and sex. Injuries can often be treated; almost all tears will heal even if they look horrendous and some vets may be able to glue torn wings so the bat can be released earlier. Broken bones can sometimes be treated and veterinary advice should be sought but the carer must be prepared to pay for pinning breaks, which is not

cheap. However, most breaks will require a bat to be euthanized, which needs to be carried out efficiently and quickly so not to prolong suffering.

Antibiotics are essential to prevent infection if it is suspected that a bat has been attacked by a cat and to obtain these you must consult a vet. Baytril is suitable except in pups and pregnant/lactating bats when Synulox can be used. Depending on the injury Metacam for pain relief can be administered but again under direction of a veterinary surgeon. Consultations for wildlife should be free, as should euthanasia, however, treatments, medication and x-rays are all chargeable so it is a good idea to negotiate charges with your vet before turning up with a bat. All bat carers should find a local and sympathetic vet who is happy to provide this kind of assistance prior to registering as a bat carer.

Basic Bat Care Equipment - It is worth investing in a storage box which contains essential items for collecting and treating a bat at the site and at home.

Bat Care Forums – there are a couple of bat care forums which will help provide any bat carer with help from a network of experience so they will never feel alone and afraid to ask a question.

Adult feeding - Mealworms – a mix of both standard and mini mealworms is recommended. Mealworms must be nourished as the substrate they are normally sold in is wheat bran, which contains high levels of phytates which can prevent the body from absorbing calcium. Mealworms should be fed kitten biscuits and morsels of fruit and vegetables with vitamins and added calcium. Do not over feed mealworms and do not allow mealworms to get too wet as they will rot. Small pieces of carrot peel, lettuce leaves, cabbage leaves and apple peel is recommended etc. Wax worms can also be offered, particularly for larger species. Whilst they are not as nutritious as mealworms they are more calorific and so good for helping a very underweight bat.

Baby Bats - Taking on baby bats should not be entered into lightly as they require a lot of time and effort. Depending on their age, baby bats

should be fed on Royal Canin puppy milk formula which is currently considered the best option. You can use other milk in an emergency (e.g full fat goat's milk) but do not use cows' milk. Bloat is a big problem with baby bats which can be fatal.

It baby bats or juveniles are able to be reunited with the rest of the maternity roost, which requires disturbance, then a licensed bat worker must be present. This juvenile Brown long-eared bat which was found grounded in a church was able to be reunited with the maternity colony; it involved entering the roost to place the juvenile in a suitable position so that the mother could locate her pup.



Photo – Denise Foster

Licensing - A bat licence is not required to treat injured bats, however, in the event a bat cannot be released because it is too disabled, and the bat carer wishes to use the bat for scientific and educational purposes, then a Natural England possession licence needs to be applied for and references are required to obtain this licence. A Natural England licence is also required if any dead specimens are retained for science and education purposes.

Bat Carers must always be mindful of why a bat has become grounded, even it is has been injured by a cat or if it not clear why the bat has died. The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency are still testing for bat rabies, under a passive surveillance scheme, which will help to increase knowledge of bat rabies in the UK. All bat species, other than pipistrelles, should be sent to the VLA in approved packaging and with the appropriate

paperwork, which can be obtained by the Bat Conservation Trust.

If you are interested in becoming a bat carer then please contact Denise Foster.

Pest Control – Lesson’s learned?

By Will Watson

Small mammals can be pests when they enter your home! I wanted to recount my experience so that possible lessons can be learnt. In the beginning of September I had problems with mice in the attic and they always turn out to be Yellow-necked mice.

My cat almost “on cue” brought in a dead one a week later followed by field vole. I then decided to put live traps in the attic and surprisingly caught a pygmy shrew unfortunately dead but no mice were trapped.

The mice problem was replaced with rat problem in mid-September. I had heard through the farmer’s grapevine that there many more rats this year and sure enough after harvest they appeared in my attic. They are particularly noisy when excavating holes in the external walls of the house to improve their access from the outdoors, they also took up residence in the cavities of my office and chewed through the electricity cable to office and had entered all the neighbouring properties causing similar issues.

Something had to done. I called in pest control and they put poison bait down outside the office and in the attic in a bait box. It took 3 weeks and 3 visits to control the problem, but I still heard the odd rat in the attic, but I stopped feeding the birds so rats were no longer enticed onto my property. One unfortunate indirect consequence of the poison bait was a dead common shrew found dead haemorrhaging from the mouth in my compost bin.

Grey squirrels on rare occasions have got into my attic, you can tell because they scamper around at great speed creating lots of noise at the same time. They are present here throughout the year, this year they seemed particularly partial to conkers.

Editorial: *The author of this article did not mention which poison bait had been used in this case but it clearly looks like the pest control company used a warfarin based poison. Using any poisons to control rodents needs careful consideration as most poisons will be transferred to higher predators if dying rodents wander into open areas. We must also consider the ethical side to poisoning small mammals and the inhumane suffering it causes. Eradibait is a poison that is approved by the Barn Owl Trust as it does not transfer to higher predators. This product contains no poisonous chemicals and acts by causing dehydration and blood thickening so the animal becomes lethargic and then dies. However to be effective this bait must be a major part of the rodents’ diet so tidiness and food security are very important in pest control.*

The Woodland Bat Symposium, Bat Conservation Trust, November 2014

One day local conferences/symposiums are definitely the way forward. This opinion was shared by many other bat workers and this event in particular was sold out very early on. There were at least 150 attendees (50 on the reserve list) at the Woodland Bat Symposium organised by the BCT. One day conferences are popular on two accounts, firstly, it does not require booking overnight accommodation and secondly, it focuses on one particular area of interest and thirdly it is cost effective. The Woodland Bat Symposium was represented by speakers from Forestry Commission, Conservationists, National Trust, Consultants, researchers and academics. It was nice to see some HMG members attend this informative event.



Photo: Denise Foster

The symposium opened with a talk by Dr. Oliver Rackham about the History of British Woodlands, which was followed by a series of talks focussing on the following Woodland Bat Species.

Barbastelle (Matt Zeale, Bristol University but presented by Ian Davidson-Watts) - The Barbastelle is still considered to be rare but it has a wide distribution and huge home ranges which can extend to about 17 km. Barbastelles are considered to be moth specialists and 80% of their diet comprises moths. It was reported that Barbastelles approach their prey very quietly, which is why it is sometimes difficult to capture both echo-location calls and feeding buzzes on the bat detector. Matt's research has also found that lactating females will generally forage only 2-3km from their roost whilst non-breeding females and males will forage much further at 12-13 km from their roosts. On average Barbastelles will stay in the wood for one hour and after that leave the wood. Barbastelles change roosts regularly and roost sites can be in cluttered or open areas. Trees they use to roost are fragile; exfoliating bark and splits are important so selective timber removal should be considered. *Editorial: It is difficult to determine whether Barbastelles are using woodland to roost or merely passing through, even if the animals are caught late in the night.*

Pipistrelles (Ian Davidson-Watts, IDW Ecology) - Ian's research looked at the importance of woodlands to pipistrelles and other aerial hawking bats like Noctules and Leisler's. Very little is known about Leisler's and tracking them down is difficult. However, Ian found that Noctules, which appear to be in more abundance, were using woodland to forage. Pipistrelles dominated most of his research and he found that soprano pipistrelles preferred riparian woodland habitats whereas common pipistrelles preferred deciduous broadleaved woodland and for the most part preferred edge habitats whether in woodland, valley or even high up in the canopy. Another finding from this research is that male soprano pipistrelles were the first bats to emerge before sunset.

Brown long-eared bats (BLEs) (Stephanie Murphy, Arbeco Ltd) – This 4-5 year research project looked at habitat preferences for BLEs

and how their patterns of habitat use could inform conservation management. During this research, 38 female BLEs were radio-tagged and tracked which showed that this species foraged primarily in woodlands that had a diverse understory layer, including species, such as hazel, hawthorn, and other deciduous based species. The UK is one of the least wooded areas in Europe with just 11.7% remaining; 50% of this woodland is plantation conifer with less than 4% native broadleaved. However, hedgerows were shown to be important foraging areas, especially in late summer and autumn. Roosting behaviour was studied and it was found that 60% of the 38 females roosted in buildings and 40% in trees. All tree roosts were in the same woodland complex and most were more than 50 metres from the woodland edge. Roost switching in trees was common and more frequent than was observed in buildings. Overall, this research highlighted the importance of protecting foraging habitats in woodlands, by maintaining the cover of native species in the understory layer, and hedgerows that provide connectivity between woodland patches.

Bechstein's bats, (Colin Morris, VWT) – In an ancient woodland in Dorset, Colin has been studying Bechstein's bats for 16 years. Schwegler bat boxes (1FW and 2FN boxes) are installed in this wet woodland and a long-term ringing project and subsequent radio tracking studies have been on-going with interesting results. Over 660 animals have been ringed and more than 70% of females return to the boxes to breed each year; conversely males are rarely seen again! Ringing data has shown that the ratio of males to females born during the study is 1:1 and more than 90% of animals have bred by the age of 3 years. Bat boxes were installed between 5-8 mtrs high but low boxes are being utilised too. Radio tracking studies has shown that Bechstein's bats are not mobile like other species – typical range only between 300 - 900m. Habitat preference is for closed canopy with water, and pasture. Bat box switching from 2FNs to 1FW has been encountered with bats choosing 2FNs in May and then switching to the larger 1FWs in June; Bechstein's tend to use 2FNs as a transitional roost. This long term study also shows that rainfall is the biggest influence of juvenile survival.



Photo: Denise Foster

The next series of talks concentrated on Surveying Methods and this was opened by Prof. John Altringham from Leeds University. John introduced a new free, stand-alone, software package which his team have been producing to isolate bat calls from large sound files and identify woodland species with high accuracy. This software is designed for use with the Pettersson Time expansion bat detectors (240X and 500X). John admitted that this software is not good at detecting Bechstein's and Alcahoie but this will improve with time. This software will be rolled out in 2015 through BCT.

Daniel Whitby followed and discussed advanced surveying techniques and the effectiveness of trapping bats using ultrasonic lures. There is a great variation between lures and successful call reproductions are synthesized calls as these are clean and lack the white background noise, which is present of real-time calls. Calls chosen will impact on the success or failure of the trapping event as some calls can act as a deterrent rather than an attractant.

Henry Andrews shared his experiences of reliable tree-roost indicators using some photographic evidence. Henry explained how he has mapped and inspected trees for over 6 years and during that time he has recorded over 500 potential roost features (PRF) in detail and seen inside 136 bat roosts of a number of bat species. His 3 key PRF Indicators are 1. **Bats** (are they present?) 2. **Bat Droppings** (look for signs on foliage and base of tree!) and 3. **Substrate** (look for smooth, waxy, bumpy, bobbly surfaces!).

After lunch the afternoon sessions concentrated on forestry practises and Dr. Keith Kirby from the University of Oxford opened the sessions with a talk on the ecological effects of woodland management, which included changes in tree species composition and the role of trees in woods. In the past, Birch was one the most abundant trees in our woodlands so what are the effects of coniferisation and the implication of ash die-back? Keith also talked about age structure of the woodland, which largely depends on management systems and coppicing to protect one species that may be detrimental to another (Butterfly vs Dormouse). He discussed the implication of grazing versus ungrazing, dead-wood levels and the implications of deer browsing.

Jeremy Evans, Woodland Trust Project Officer for Herefordshire and Worcestershire, talked about his work in restoring ancient woodlands and the need to protect the long-term future of the remaining 2% of ancient woodland that remains in the UK. He discussed his work in Credenhill Park Wood and how the best way to restore these woods is to remove conifers and allow more light through the canopy.

Mike Render from the Forestry Commission discussed the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) that is due to be launched in 2015. This will replace the previous agri-environment and English Woodland Grant Schemes, which are to be amalgamated into the CSS. Biodiversity is the key objective of this new scheme with a habitat-based approach for management of species.

Managing Risk and looking at the impact climate change on our woodland was discussed by John Weir from Forestry Commission. The control of pest and diseases including deer browsing and the need to urgently act upon planning a wider range of tree species for future climatic conditions rather than current climate conditions.

The conference finished with a series of woodland management case studies - including a less-than-tactful presentation by David Bullock, of the National Trust, about the restoration of wood pasture by clear-felling conifers managed by the Forestry Commission, at Croft Castle, due

to the damage they have caused to some veteran oaks, works which are likely to have an impact on bats. Clear-felling of conifers is scheduled for this winter.

The final talk of the day was by Dr. Danielle Linton who gave an account of the long-term ringing study in Wytham Woods, which were gifted to Oxford University in 1942. Daubenton's, Natterer's and Brown long-eared are the 3 key species which have been studied in this semi-natural/mixed-woodland habitat. Schwegler bird boxes, which are free hanging from tree at a height no more than 3 metres, are actively utilised by these three species.

FACEBOOK

HMG also has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present. We currently have 119 followers.

www.facebook.com/groups/222077991279736/

HMG CONTACTS

Chairman - Dave Smith

Email: davetreesmith@aol.co.uk

Treasurer - Mike Coleman

Email: mike.hereford@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary - Louise Scott

Email: lscott330@hotmail.co.uk

Bat Co-ordinator and Newsletter Editor -

Denise Foster

Email: sweetchildofmine@btinternet.com

Deer Co-ordinator - Martin Hales

Email: wildwaysmartin@btinternet.com

Committee Member - David Lee

Email: davidlee@thespis.eclipse.co.uk

County Mammal Recorder (Co-opted)

- Felicity Burge

Email: felicity.burge@mypostoffice.co.uk

County Mammal Recorder (Training – Co-opted)

– Joe Allsop

Email: hfdmammalrecords@gmail.com

Dormouse Co-ordinator (Co-opted)-Ann Bowker

Email: mike.bowker@clara.net

Wildlife and Bridges Co-ordinator (Co-opted) – Nick Underhill-Day

Email: nunderhillday@gmail.com

HMG Main Email:

Email: hmg2013@btinternet.com