



HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

(July to September 2015)

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Saturday, 11 July 2015, All day Event

HMG Annual Outing - Derek Gow's Consultancy, Lifton, West Devon

Derek specialises in ethical wildlife mitigation, breeding, reintroduction and translocation of protected British mammals and reptiles. With a specific interest and 10 years' experience with water voles, Derek is dedicated to reversing their decline through positive action.

The day will comprise an introductory talk about British Mammals followed by a tour round his collection of different mammal species (includes Wild boar, Heck Cattle, Harvest mice) to discuss their history and ecology. Cost is £7.00 per person. HWT has offered to take us to Devon in their Minibus so we may be able to take more people. Please contact Denise direct or through HMG

Summer Events

July

Wednesday, 1 July 2015, 19.30

Churches Project – Weston Beggard

Meet at church at Grid reference: SO 58425 41246, Postcode: HR1 4BN. If you just want to attend the bat evening survey then arrive at 21.00. Contact Denise Foster via HMG if you would like to attend

Thursday, 2 July 2015 at 21.30

NBMP Field Survey Coddington

Park in Coddington church car park
Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Friday, 3 July 2015, 19.30

Churches Project – Eastnor Church

Meet at church at Upper Road, Eastnor, Herefordshire HR8 1RA. If you just want to attend the bat evening survey then arrive at 21.00. Contact Denise Foster via HMG if you would like to attend

Thursday, 16 July 2015, Time TBC

Dormouse Box Checks Ast Wood

Meet in the wood (South corner); access is via field track from Baregains Lane Contact: Dave Smith

Friday, 17 July 2015 at 21.19

NBMP Field Survey Coddington

Park in Coddington church car park
Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Friday 17th July 2015 at 20.00

Bats and Night wildlife walk and BBQ at Putley Church

Following HMG's church survey last year we want to now look at the bats that are using the general area. Lesser Horseshoe bats used to breed nearby.

Please join us to help survey and enjoy a BBQ beforehand. Bring your own drink.

Booking a place is essential

Telephone Kate Wollen – 07786526280

Saturday, 18 July 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet in lay-by at the side of road at approx. SO595346. Contact Denise Foster via HMG

August

Tuesday, 04 August 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Nupend Nature Reserve

Meet at reserve entrance at SO 580355 (room for 2 cars only so car sharing is essential)
Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Saturday, 15 August 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet in lay-by at the side of road at approx. SO595346. Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Thursday, 20 August 2015, Time TBC

Bat and Dormouse Box Checks

Ast Wood (West of Ledbury)
Meet in the wood (South corner); access is via field track from Baregains Lane
Contact: Dave Smith

Friday, 28 August 2015

Bat and Moth Evening (Public Event)

National Trust's Weir
Gardens - Details TBA
Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Sunday, 30 August 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Old Country Wood

Meet at Old Country House (SO726446)
Contact David Lee via HMG

September

Wednesday, 09 September 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check White Rocks and Woodside

White Rocks, meet at gate approx. SO549157
Woodside, meet at Miner's Rest Car Park at approx. SO553158. Contact: Denise Foster

Sunday, 13 September 2015, 10:00

Bat and Dormouse Box Check (two teams required) Frith Wood, Wellington Heath

Meet at wood entrance at SO723405
Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Saturday, 19 September 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet in lay-by at the side of road at approx. SO595346. Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Saturday, 26 September 2015, 10:00

Bat Box Check Old Country Wood

Meet at Old Country House (SO726446)
Contact David Lee via HMG

Saturday, 26 September 2015, Time TBC

Bat and Dormouse Box Checks

Ast Wood (West of Ledbury)
Meet in the wood (South corner); access is via field track from Baregains Lane
Contact: Dave Smith

Herefordshire Woodland Bat Project and Herefordshire Mammal Atlas (Bats)

Trapping sessions will start third week of July until early September. Dates for some of these events will be advertised a week in advance. If you want to be added to the distribution list for all trapping events please contact Denise Foster via HMG.

Bats and Swifts in Churches Project starts in June until early August. Dates will be placed on the website a week in advance. If you are interested in churches and would like to be included in frequent updates, please contact Denise Foster via HMG

NEW MEMBERS

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

John Keene
Philip Lanc
Helen Simmons
Mitchell Jackson
Giles King-Salter
Kate Stallard
Lauren Smith
David Boddington

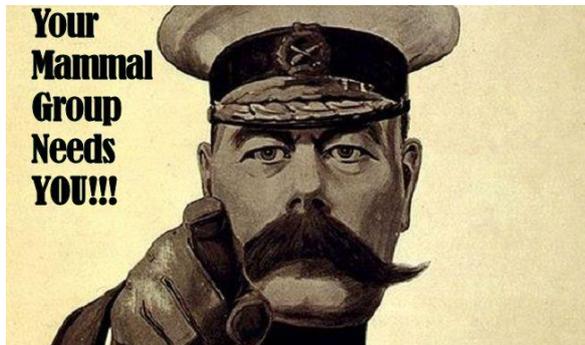
MEMBERSHIP

Louise Scott, Membership Secretary.

We currently have 88 paid up members in HMG and 153 followers on Facebook.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Committee Post Vacancies



In the last few years, the Herefordshire Mammal Group has gone from strength to strength on some of its projects and achievements, especially those which involve bats and dormice. HMG is viewed as a group with a high profile by Natural England, Bat Conservation Trust and our Local Wildlife Trust. In order for us retain this level of credibility we do need to expand our expertise to other species and to recruit more people onto the committee who are able to contribute to this good work.

HMG simply cannot sustain this high level if we do not get more members involved in our good work. The AGM is just three months away and some members are going to step down whilst others are changing direction regarding their individual projects. We are looking for following posts and volunteer effort.

Chairman – due to workload and family commitments, our current chairman cannot commit the effort that is required in this role, especially as the group is getting bigger.

We are looking for a new chairman who will be able to ensure the management of the committee functions properly, to be able to ensure that procedures are in place for the effective management of the organisation, to provide support and supervision and to represent the organisation as a figurehead.

Events Co-ordinator – we are looking for someone who can organise events (winter speakers) as well as co-ordinate the events calendar during the summer months which will be liaising with species co-ordinators so that a

balanced events schedule can be achieved with all species.

Membership Secretary – Louise Scott, our current membership secretary, is standing down as membership secretary this year and we are looking for a replacement who can collect and acknowledge all membership subscriptions, prepare and issue a group welcome pack to new members, keep records of paid up members, liaise with the Treasurer on financial aspects, ensure regular communication with paid up members, help recruit new members and chase up lapsing members.

Secretary – we are looking for someone who can effectively organise meetings, take minutes, maintain effective records, correspondence and provide other administration duties. This role is a good way for members who are new to the group to get involved and get first-hand information about events and new projects planned. This will suit someone who has good organisational and administrative skills and someone who is looking to expand their knowledge about our county's mammals in general.

Species Co-ordinators – if you have an interest or have some experience in certain mammal species and can lead events, especially involving citizen science, then please contact one of the committee members.

Some of these posts are new roles which the committee feels is required to ensure that we maintain our diversity, credibility as a mammal group and its current good reputation.

Herefordshire Bats in the Press

The Hereford Times: 16 April 2015

“Bats hide out in Church” A piece written by Denise Foster about the mitigation which was put in place at Wellington church for the Natterer's maternity colony

Western Daily Press: 22 April 2015

“Protected bats take over village Church” – a biased and fabricated piece based on our original article printed in the Hereford Times (16 April 2015)

BBC News: 26 April 2015: “Wellington church bids to move Natterer's bat colony outdoors”. An unbiased piece based on our original article printed in the Hereford Times (16 April 2015).

Forest Review: 22 May 2015: “Herefordshire confirmed as Batty”. This is a piece about the conservation work we carried out with the Forestry Commission in Frith Wood.

Welsh Borders Magazine: May 2015: A brief piece promoting our Bats and Swift in Churches project and the group with a glossy photo of a long-eared bat.

BBC Hereford and Worcester - Elliot and Tony morning show, 23 June 2015: James Bisset was interviewed on the “Sounds of the Country Phone-in” with his bat recordings of a very unusual country sound - the warble of the Lesser horseshoe.

Herefordshire Badger Vaccination Group

A Herefordshire Badger Vaccination Group has been set up with the aim of protecting some populations of badgers should a cull come to Herefordshire. The group is still in its infancy but it is a very worthwhile cause. Should members want to get involved or would like further information then please contact Melinda Crook at: melindaco@talktalk.net



Photo: Jenny Bailey

NBMP Bat Roost Counts for Herefordshire-Member Reports

June is the time when some members are out counting bats at known roosts for the National Bat Monitoring Programme.

National Trust Weir Gardens north of Hereford - We were very worried about this Soprano pipistrelle roost because the numbers had crashed in recent years. Last August when we were waiting for the Ray Mears production team to film us mist netting, by chance we found the rest of the colony. The colony had obviously split! Dave Smith reported 407 bats in total - 217 at the Lodge and 190 at the NT offices.

Lower Hall, near Ledbury - Kate Wollen reported that her colony of lesser horseshoe bats is stable with a maximum of 84 bats emerging.

Tuck Mill, Ruckhall - Caroline Hanks reported a total of 1148 soprano pips emerged on 16 June. Again, this colony seems to be stable.

Much Marcle - Lesser Horseshoe Count: James Bisset reported that the first count this year was well down on previous years by about 50% (103) but ‘normal service had been resumed’ for the second count with 153 bats exiting the roost – third count, which has historically been the busiest, was 150 so down by 30 from last year.

Greater Horseshoe Record in Much Marcle Greater horseshoe records in Herefordshire tend to be south and east of the county so when James Bisset recorded a clear greater horseshoe pass at 3am on 25th May, this was an exciting moment. This is a significant record but not totally surprising as it is less than 12 miles from a known maternity roost in the Forest of Dean and known hibernation sites in the Doward. However, it does suggest that these bats could be populating other parts of Herefordshire.

Lesser Horseshoes at Holme Lacy House – HMG are no longer allowed to carry out surveys at Holme Lacy House due to the hotel's health and safety policy. Those of you who have attended these surveys will know that to count the bats, we have to place people in and on the roof.

Herefordshire Walking Festival - Go Batty at Bodenham with James Bisset

Friday 19th June saw 16 people join HMG member James Bisset for a bat walk taking place as part of Herefordshire's Walking Festival 2015. Based at the Council's Bodenham Lake Nature Reserve, after the introductory talk complete with dead specimens and bat calls blasting from the 'batmobile' stereo, some of the group took the opportunity to go in search of Otters on the lake.

Everyone met back up in the orchard ready for the Noctules to make their appearance closely followed by common and soprano pipistrelles – the 'walkers' were amazed to see all three species darting about collecting insects attracted by the traditional orchard and the group itself! A leisurely walk through the Reserve and down to the river was accompanied by a small group of pipistrelles that got closer and closer during their hawking. Down to the bridge over the River Lugg and we were treated to a water level ballet by the Daubenton's with the ever-present soprano pips helping keep the mosquitoes at bay. Walking back past the church and through old Bodenham village we picked up some other Myotis species.

Everyone appeared to thoroughly enjoy their encounter with the bats of Bodenham. Leading public/group bat walks is just so satisfying and a great way of interesting and educating people – something we should all look to do more of!

Bechstein's Bats: Monitoring population size, structure and change in Bechstein's Bats using molecular and landscape ecology

The Bechstein's colony at Old Country Wood has been included in this current research funded by the Vincent Wildlife Trust and the University of Exeter, which is looking at inbreeding and the conservation status on this species.

Having now ringed this colony, this will strengthen this current research as bat droppings can be linked to individual bats.



Female Bechstein's bats at Old Country Wood

Woolhope Dome Environmental Trust Fund Application Success

The Herefordshire Mammal Group has been awarded £5,000 to carry out a radio tracking study in the Woolhope Dome. This project will involve radio-tagging bat species that routinely use trees as roosts in managed woodland. Target bat species include long-eared, Barbastelle and all the Myotis species. Trees that contain roosts will be marked, retained and protected.

This funding has also allowed us to purchase two Anabat Express bat detectors to carry out road transects, which will initially take place in the Woolhope Dome. We are hoping to start this project this year but this will be subject to equipment availability. If you are interested in getting involved with this project, please contact Denise Foster.



Photo: Danielle Linton – radio-tracking bats to find tree roosts.

Bromyard Downs Dormouse day By Joe Allsopp

Bromyard Downs is a 114 hectare registered common owned by Herefordshire Council. This

large site boasts an array of habitats, including areas of neutral and acid grassland, old hazel coppice, and even some areas of relict heathland.

In 2014 Herefordshire Wildlife Trust started a project with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund to initiate a 10 year management plan. Local people have reported on many occasions seeing hazel dormice on the common, but no actual targeted surveys have ever been done there, and I couldn't find any existing records. So it was decided that surveying for dormice could achieve 2 things: determine which particular parts of the common were currently being used by them, and perhaps more importantly to give local people a chance to get involved in the conservation of this charming mammal.

A small but enthusiastic group of people of all ages met at Bromyard Downs on the 25th April 2015 - thankfully the weather was good! The cheapest and simplest method for surveying is to look for chewed hazelnuts - the ones opened by dormice being quite distinctive, with a smooth inside edge to the hole. Using nuts I'd found previously on the downs, people got a chance to see and handle ones opened by dormice, and also ones chewed by Wood/Yellow-necked mice, voles (and also the demolition-jobs done on hazelnuts by grey squirrels!)



Hazelnut opened by dormouse, from Bromyard downs. Photo: Hannah Welsh

Next onto the dormouse tubes... When tied to branches in potential habitat, dormice will often make their distinctive woven nests inside these plastic tubes. Dormice are protected by law, but non-licensed people can check tubes up until the first dormouse is found, but only at sites where they've not previously been recorded. Some tubes had been purchased for this project, and

everyone played a blinder on the day by helping to assemble them!

We agreed to place the tubes in the areas of old coppice where we hadn't found dormouse-chewed nuts – this meant that people without a licence could get involved and check the tubes to start with too. It's never very easy to find suitable branches for the tubes, but they were a great team and we found enough eventually! After a quick lunch break, we then moved over to a different area of the common, to put up the final group of tubes - job done, at least until it was time to do the first monthly check of the tubes, in a few weeks' time.

I think everyone enjoyed themselves on the day, I know I certainly did and I'd like to thank everyone for coming and working so hard, particularly Andy and Gwynedd who both offered to check the tubes to start with.



Volunteers assembling dormouse tubes. Photo: Hannah Welsh



Dormouse tube placed in Honeysuckle. An important plant both as nesting material and food source. Photo: Hannah Welsh

Bromyard Downs is a lovely place, and there are opportunities to do everything from wildlife surveys to habitat management work there, and also receive valuable training. Please contact Hannah if you'd like more information h.welsh@herefordshirewt.co.uk. If you'd like to get involved in any of the dormouse conservation work going on in Herefordshire, or get trained, please contact the HMG Dormouse co-ordinator Ann Bowker.

Finding Tree Roosting Bats – A visit to Lea and Paget's with Henry Andrews by Dave Smith

Most British bats have some association with trees & woodlands, and some species are known to roost almost exclusively in trees. Trying to find these tree roosts however can be extremely difficult despite considerable recent research into the subject.

HMG member Nick Underhill-Day was lucky enough to find a solitary pipistrelle roosting in a small hole in a damaged cherry tree a few weeks ago whilst we were checking bat boxes in Lea & Paget's woods.

This photo below was posted on our Facebook page, and soon came to the notice of Henry Andrews who is the author/compiler of the 'Bat Tree Habitat Key (BTHK)', an extensive guide and key to tree roosting bats. Henry got in contact with me to arrange a visit to the woods so that he could record all the roost details for the next edition of the BTHK. We were joined by Nick and spent several hours in the woods searching for other roosts.



Photo Mike Bailey: Soprano pipistrelle found in cherry tree by Nick Underhill-Day

After a few unproductive hours searching, a soprano pip was discovered by Henry tucked in behind a plate of loose bark on a dead oak tree. The area this tree was situated in had a number of other relatively small dead oak trees, all with similar plates of loose bark. Within a few minutes Nick found a second pipistrelle behind a bark plate (this time a common pip). This roost was accessible from above, which was unusual as it meant the bat was exposed to possible rain.



Photo: Nick Underhill-Day – Henry Andrews using an endoscope to search for bats

A few yards from this second roost, a third bat was found (soprano pip), also behind a bark plate on a dead oak. All these trees would probably have been considered as unsuitable for bats to the un-trained eye, due to their relatively small size and lack of holes or cavities. Tree roosts are out there, we just need to look for them. Below is a link to the bat tree habitat key, essential reading for professionals and a good read for the bat and tree enthusiasts.

<http://www.aecol.co.uk/Pages/48/Research-Development---Bat-Tree-Habitat-Key.html>

BCT's Nathusius Pipistrelle Project at Blagdon Lake, North Somerset by Denise Foster

In 2014, through funding from the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the BCT co-ordinated a Nathusius Pipistrelle Pilot study to determine the breeding status and origin of this migratory

species. The protocol and objectives of the project were to choose sites that had a body of water, woodland and had previous records of Nathusius' pipistrelle from echolocation calls or other evidence. The objectives of the study were to train bat groups about the species, take bat droppings, carry out biometrics, take fur clippings to carry out isotope analysis to determine the bats origins, check breeding status and mark by fitting a ring.



Nathusius pipistrelle

Blagdon Lake is one of those chosen sites where Nathusius pipistrelles are present all year round. Since 2010 Daniel Hargreaves has ringed 45 males and 3 females at Blagdon Lake but to date no juveniles have been encountered. One of the ringed bats from Blagdon Lake was discovered in Holland in December 2013, which is the first record of a bat crossing the sea from the UK to mainland Europe – an incredible 595 km journey, which is remarkable for such a tiny animal that weighs between 6-15g.

Bat experts in the Netherlands and the UK are working together to learn more about bat migration and the implications this has for bat conservation and offshore windfarms.

Blagdon Lake has a bat house that is situated next to the lake and this building is currently an advertisement roost site for male Nathusius pipistrelle bats. However, sadly, not many females have been discovered during the past 5 years. The roosting behaviour of females is still a mystery with only 10 roost sites being discovered in the UK, 4 in England and 6 in Northern Ireland.

In 2015, I have been assisting with the project at Blagdon lake providing additional kit and experience where needed. So far this year, I have attended two trapping events and we have caught Nathusius at each visit – however they do turn up very late!



Bat House at Blagdon Lake

In May this year, we caught three male Nathusius pipistrelles; 2 unringed bats and a ringed bat from 2011. In June, we also caught 2 unringed bats and the same ringed bat we caught in May, so this male is clearly a resident of the lake and quite territorial! I have three more visits to Blagdon this year and still hope to catch a female.

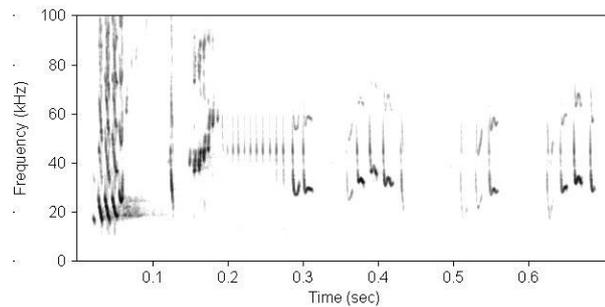
The project is set to continue to enable BCT to find out more about the distribution of these bats, their roost sites and to understand more about the migration to and from mainland Europe.

In Herefordshire we do have some records of Nathusius pipistrelles, so I am optimistic to confirm these records at trapping events we have scheduled at water bodies this season.

Members are able to help us seek out this rare bat when they are out and about with bat detectors. It is possible to identify Nathusius pipistrelle calls by their low frequency echolocation calls and their complex social calls which sound like “rabbit” on a heterodyne bat detector.

Echolocation calls are much more difficult because they are similar in sound and shape to soprano and common pipistrelles. Common pipistrelles echolocate at around 40kHz so any

echolocation call would have to be well under 40kHz for further investigation.



Nathusius Social call – courtesy Jon Russ. This sounds like “rabbit” on a heterodyne bat detector.
(http://www.nathusius.org.uk/ID_social_calls.htm)

Bat Co-ordinator Update

Woodland Bats and Mammal Atlas Trapping

Despite the cold winds and chilly nights in May and June, we did manage to get some trapping done, so we are not far behind the current schedule. Even though I trapped for 13 nights in May and early June, only 7 of those trapping events were carried out in Herefordshire.

Woodland bat numbers were extremely low as indicated on both bat detectors and catch rate so far this year. Woodlands surveyed so far are Nupend Nature Reserve, Lea and Pagets Wood, Coneygree Woods and Devereux Park. The latter site has a water body so the catch rate was much higher, which is to be expected. We also performed a trapping event at Moccas Park; this event was primarily looking for Nathusius and for bat records for the Mammal Atlas.



Photo: This bat was identified as a Brandt's bat but the large feet and light coloured tragus and pelage caused questions from other bat workers.

We were given permission to trap at Devereux Park this year and because this woodland has three large lakes within it, we thought it would

be an interesting site to survey. We caught the normal suspects during the evening but one bat caused some confusion. During the evening we caught a few whiskered bats and one Brandt's bat. However, the Brandt's bat did pose some questions amongst a few experienced bat workers about its identity – was it a small Daubenton's or even an Alcatheo? With this in mind, we are returning to Devereux Park in September.

Ringling Studies



Photo: Denise Foster checking ring condition at Old Country Wood

We have carried out a couple of bat box checks at our ringling sites, Old Country Wood and Lea and Pagets so far this year. We found 39 Bechstein's bats (all ringed) at Old Country Wood in 3 separate boxes in May. In Lea and Paget's wood we found 14 brown long-eared bats; 7 were unringed which suggests this colony may be a larger than we originally anticipated.

Bats and Swifts in Churches Project

Surveying churches for bats started in May. Already we have carried out 17 church preliminary surveys this year. Two of those churches are carrying out repairs but only one falls within the Natural England Roost Visitor System.

The objective is to carry out 10 full surveys this summer and we have 7 on our list already but because we have to monitor two problem churches, Pembridge and Wellington due to the high numbers of Natterer's bats present, these

two churches will have to be included in the quota due to other ongoing projects.



Photo: Castle Frome Church set in good bat habitat with the church building having lots of bat roosting potential.

Churches planned for full surveys, depending on getting the permissions, are Upper Sapey, Eastnor, Stretton Grandison, Weston Beggard Wigmore, Donnington, and Norton Canon.

We have already carried out counts at both Pembridge and Wellington Church. Numbers of bats at Wellington church were very low at our visit in early June and we suspect that this colony may have moved, fragmented into smaller groups, or given up on pregnancy, which is due to the recent cold and windy nights. Only two bats emerged on the first visit so a second count was organised and 61 were encountered.

Reports from churchwardens at Pembridge Church indicated that activity has reduced and there were very few bat droppings. We were not expecting high number of bats at our monitoring visit and on arriving at the church, only a scattering of bat droppings was encountered. However, the Natterer's colony at Pembridge is intact and we counted out 57 bats during the survey. We also heard juvenile calls inside the church.

We also had to consider the four Herefordshire churches (Ewyas Harold, Weston-Under-Penyard, Bromyard and Ledbury Baptist Church) that won funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund under the Roof Repairs Scheme. Unfortunately, none of the churches qualify for a Natural England Roost Visit due to the major works that are involved and this work has to be covered by a professional ecologist.

Dormouse Co-ordinator Update

This has been the busiest Spring I have known and I want to say a warm thank-you to all those who have been in touch and come along to help.

Our group survey in Golden Valley got off to a really good start with twelve happy dormousers getting all the tubes in place by the end of the morning and one hibernation nest being found. Hopefully that should mean we find some dormice during our first check on the 4th July. I am deeply grateful to Sue Holland for acting as our link with the Duchy and also helping to organise the event itself. Two more checks are planned for the 11th September and 31st October and there are places available for members who would like to join us - no expertise necessary and you will be most welcome. You do have to book in with me, however, as we are working on private land, we can only take limited numbers and need to know who will be there.

That is not all, however. Denise and Kate organised a splendid work party to put bat and dormouse boxes in Frith Wood, North of Ledbury, Sue Parkinson has tubes up at Welsh Newton and Kate Wollen has tubes in Coneygree Wood, East of Ledbury. In addition Kate and I have put tubes up as part of a Ledbury Naturalists survey near Much Marcle. Hopefully all this activity will fill a few gaps in our knowledge of where dormice are to be found in Herefordshire these days.

We even have two likely surveys in the planning stage for 2016, one in Hope Mansell and one just North of Bromyard.

All this is not forgetting the thirteen on-going NDMP box surveys in the county and I hope we all have a successful year. I am delighted that last Saturday I found four dormice in my Park Wood site which is right on the County boundary - we have only found them in October in the past.

Do let me know how things are going on your sites.

I thought we might concentrate our efforts around Bromyard and Leominster next year, so if

you live in the area and know of any woods you think might be suitable or would like to get involved, do drop me a line - Ann Bowker (mike.bowker@clara.net)

The National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP), Introductory Workshop by Louise Scott

A talk and practical session was presented by Herefordshire Mammal Group's founder member Rebecca Collins on behalf of The Bat Conservation Trust.

Nineteen enthusiastic individuals, largely comprised of HMG Members, attended an introductory heterodyne bat detector workshop on the National Trust's Brockhampton Estate near Bromyard.

Rebecca commenced the evening with an introduction to The Bat Conservation Trust's National Bat Monitoring Project. The joy of the NBMP is that it is open to both beginners and expert batters alike, and is undertaken during the summer months.

Bats face continued threats to their survival from both man-made and natural causes. Changes to the landscape and housing developments if not executed sympathetically, in addition to weather patterns can all potentially have a negative impact on bat populations. The objective of the NBMP is to monitor the UK bat population via a series of annual surveys following set guidelines for National continuity.

The **Sunset/Sunrise Survey** is ideal for beginners and can even be done without a bat detector. Simply go for a walk at sunset and/or sunrise and look for bats emerging from/returning to a roost. Check out The Bat Conservation Trust's website for more information at www.bats.org.uk/pages/nbmp.html.

There is even a video guide for this and the other surveys to help you along.

Roost Surveys. Do you know of a roost? There is a NBMP Survey to count the bats as they emerge. Again this survey is ideal for beginners and is possible to do without a bat detector. You do need to know what type of bat you have

roosting, but HMG can help with the identification.

Check with BCT to see if there is a **Waterways Survey** that needs doing near you! You will need some basic bat detecting skills to identify Daubenton's bats, but you can pick this up with practice and by following the set guidelines carefully. The survey requires you to walk a 1km stretch of river or canal.

The **Field Survey** involves walking a triangular route within a 1km square and recording passes of Noctules, Serotines, and Pipistrelles. This survey does require some identification skills, but you could always accompany someone who is doing one near you to pick up some experience.

For those with advanced skills and access to a broadband bat detector with a recording facility there is the Nathusius' pipistrelle Survey. This survey involves recording along a 1km stretch of lake and records are verified through sonogram analysis.

The participants at the workshop were then introduced to the sound elements of a bat call that they should pay attention to in order to develop a sonic memory.

The four main elements that combine to set you on your way to good bat detector listening skills are:- The repetition rate of the call (fast/medium/slow); its rhythm (regular/erratic); tonal quality (duration); and pitch (frequency in kHz). Each species of bat exhibits differences with these elements which can aid in identification. For example rhythm alone can be influenced by the shape of the bats wings; the environment it is flying in; the frequency of the wing beat; and its flight pattern.

Daubenton's bats have a regular rhythm which has been likened to the sound of a motorbike while the larger Noctule bat has a mainly steady chip-chop rhythm.

The moat and buildings at Brockhampton provided the ideal setting for some listening skills practice after the sun had set. Participants picked up Pipistrelles and Daubenton's bats on

their heterodyne detectors and this was a fitting end to the interesting workshop.

A recommended book for further information: *The Bat Detector* by Brian Briggs and David King (ISBN: 0953242609) with its accompanying CD of sound recordings.

National Forum for Biological Recorders and British Ecological Society Conference – April 2015

The conference was appropriately held in the greenest city in the UK – Sheffield and it opened with a variety of talks that focussed on Tools and Technology for Collecting and Interpreting Biological Records. These talks ranged from image based and acoustic based systems such as iPhones and iPads, bat detectors, high resolution cameras and geo-referencing systems. However, with all these technical advances many of them have limitations whether it be good or bad images on cameras, objects being targeted are too small for a camera to focus on, poor lighting so images do not show features, interference and reverberations on bat detection equipment, deciphering species which have similar calls and of course those people who have a resistance to new technology. Considering these limitations with equipment and the fact of having too many species, the real issue is that we do not have enough taxonomists/experts to interpret and verify all this data being generated. We also must remember that we are just sampling and what we capture or observe is just a snap-shot in time.

A series of quick fire talks, which lasted no more than 5 minutes, were presented which lead into workshops; this gave participants the opportunity to talk to representatives about their new technology for collecting biological records. The technology ranged from using social media such as Facebook which is a good resource for getting a quick ID and for social networking, knowledge sharing to Twitter which is good for up-to-date information to Flickr/Instagram which is good for archival images. Technology of particular interest to our group was the Quantum GIS TomBio mapping systems which is free to download and is perfect for creating maps for the mammal atlas. Other wildlife recording toolkits included

Indicia which is open source software that can be used to build bio-recording websites and also to build-in existing ones. It can be used to upload photos, maps etc. and used for citizen science – this software is free.

Scatchpads were another piece of software that is open source and free to use. It is a platform that enables groups to work in a collaborative online environment. With a Scratchpad you can easily create your own website to structure, manage, link and publish your biodiversity data. Other resources included the NBN Gateway which we are all familiar with.

TaxonAids was an interesting product; this produces 3D interactive images of insect species. TaxonAid is an online tool dedicated to the improvement of techniques in taxonomic identification. Taxonomy is a dying science and highly trained taxonomists capable of identifying the huge diversity of Earth's species are in short supply.

The Field Network System was interesting too as it is a portable WiFi network which uses mobile devices in the field. This is useful when there are a number of people collecting data in the field and enables websites to collate data and present results instantaneously.

“The Role of LERC in Support Recording and Research” was the chosen workshop which was led by Tom Hunt of ALERC. It was interesting to hear how much support LERCs in other parts of UK support their local wildlife groups in ways of providing the funding, energy and collaboration with other groups to push citizen science and local projects.

Data verification was discussed during the conference. Verification varies between area and species which results in an inconsistency in the quality of records. Questions were put to forward like “How do we recruit verifiers and how do we support existing verifiers”. What about data that is not verified should we use it! However, verified records can sometimes be wrong – can we trust the data?

On the second day of the conference there were a total of 17 talks. One of the talks of interest was a 5 minute talk about how the Derbyshire Mammal Group organized and produced their mammal atlas. The atlas was driven by only 4 people and records were collected from October

2006 to 31 December 2010 so 4 years! In total they had 85,000 records collected; 70,000 were gathered during the project with more than 3,000 recorders, this was very impressive. The group strategy was to start with the most common species – mole hills so this was the target species. Talks were given by the active group members to local wildlife groups, schools, and the Women’s Institute etc. A Mammal Garden survey was set up using post codes and regular updated maps were distributed to encourage more recording. Records were entered into a database at monad level.

Drew Bennellick of HLF gave an account of the difference levels of Heritage Lottery Funding and he informed us that £435 million has been given to biodiversity which amounts to 3100 projects. Drew encouraged more funding applications for Natural Heritage projects but emphasised that their main focus was to develop people skills, and to engage local communities. “Sharing Heritage” starts from £3,000 to £10,000 and it is for small groups, citizen science and engaging local people. “Our Heritage” starts at £10,000 to £100,000 – one of the projects that won funding was the Water vole volunteer projects.

There was a lot of information to absorb at the conference but one thing we took away with us was how much Local Record Centres do to promote recording and how they play a key role in leading some of the initiatives in respect of getting the funding and local people involved and provide regular updates in the form of newsletters to various groups. They also give regular updates on where and how records have been used, so very impressive.

Welsh Bat Conference 2015 - Review

Two HMG members attended the Welsh Bat Conference (WBG) in June. This conference normally runs every two years and it is very different to the National Bat Conference which takes place every year in September. Obviously a lot of talks centre on the Welsh licencing system, initiatives and Welsh bat groups, but the talks are always very engaging. I particularly like how the organisers make good use of having experienced bat workers present (and their kit) by carrying out surveys in areas in and around the conference site so that surveying effort is maximised – a great use of resource!

The conference opened with a great talk by Bob Stebbings titled “Why Bats became Protected”. Bob Stebbings is one of our leading UK bat experts and he gave a potted history of bat populations in the UK from around 1900. In particular, Bob talked about the works of Victorian Naturalist, J.G Millais and his scientific work “The Mammals of Great Britain and Ireland” which was published in 1904. It was interesting to hear about human attitudes and the fact that cats were mentioned at that time as being a known problem to bats but there was no mention that man was an issue!

Bob quoted from old publications he sourced about the large Noctule roosts that were encountered during this time in buildings, churches and old oaks; colonies of up to 200 animals in one roost were normal. Discoveries about species were often made by shooting the individual or by other means of killing bats. This practice occurred in late 1800s to early 1900s.

Timber treatments during the early 20th century were toxic and Bob gave an account which occurred in SW England during the 50/60s where a large roof space was treated for death watch beetle, which resulted in wheel-barrow loads of dead bats being removed. Approximately 18,000 bats were killed during timber treatment at this one site. In the 1900s there was an estimated population of 300,000 greater horseshoe bats present in the UK, however, by 1970 only 6,000 GHS were recorded.

Millais (1904) stated in his book that deliberate killing of bats was normal because they were considered as being a nuisance and records of 700 being killed at Lincoln, 400 in Bedfordshire and 2000 pipistrelles at another UK site was normal.

There was a series of destruction which lead to bat protection including hedgerow clearance that involved felling of large boundary trees that ultimately resulted in the reduction of flying insects; at this time flying insect abundance reduced by half.

Bob recalled that in the 1960s one of his most essential items to include during driving trips were water and a cloth to regularly clean the windscreen of his car due to insects hitting the windscreen and obscuring his view. This reminded me of my childhood as my father did the same. Today we really have no real measure

how our invertebrate population has declined.

The other cause of disturbance that Bob discussed was about us Naturalists. We are one of the worst disturbers and enemies of wildlife! Is our interest in wildlife doing more harm than good?



Photo: Bob Stebbings at the Welsh Bat Conference

During the 1950s and 1960s, bats were considered as bad news and were classed as vermin. However, during these times, attitudes were changing! Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published (1962). This book documented the detrimental effects on the environment (particularly on birds) of the indiscriminate use of pesticides and by 1970s things started to change!

Protection laws started to come into force to make it an offence to kill bats, but not to get rid of them. During this time, Lord Cranbrook said that bats were disliked and unpopular so they could not be protected. However in 1975 the Wild Plants and Creatures Act was passed which made it illegal, except under licence, to kill, injure or take, or to have in your possession wild creatures; two of those wild creatures were bats namely greater horseshoe bat and the mouse-eared bat.

By 1981, all species were covered under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Certainly the numbers of bats in between 1900 and 1950s reflected the abundance which resembles what we currently encounter in countries like Poland and Slovakia but for how long, as both these countries have started to develop!

Bird and bat legislation is currently under attack in the UK. The Development Lobby and some

MPs are trying to water down wildlife legislation in the name of "progress".

We have to remind ourselves of what things were like before bats were protected and how they were under attack by humans with devastating consequences both unintentionally, and deliberate!

Hearing about how bat populations fared 100 years ago in the UK was fascinating even though shocking. It is so important we keep the utmost protection for our bats and we should not be complacent or allow the development lobby to weaken this protection.

Bat numbers in the UK are still very fragile especially compared with numbers 50 to 100 years ago. It only takes a few poor summers to change any perceived growth in numbers which can have a considerable effect on local populations. This year we are finding that some bats are abandoning maternity roosts due to the weather. The strong cold winds together with the exceptionally cold nights are having an effect on some of our bat species.

In the UK, we still have not got the balance right with farming and development and it will not be long before we encounter other UK species becoming extinct in the UK. Sadly, we have lost the impressive greater mouse-eared bat in the UK. This bat was only discovered in 1958 but by 1990 it was officially declared as extinct. These bats are still present elsewhere in Europe, although their numbers there are thought to be declining.

BCT and NRW Updates

Julia Hanmer followed Bob Stebbings fascinating talk and gave an account of BCT's current work and what they are doing to keep bat protection strengthened. This included the Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill regarding sustainable development, NGOs pulling together to create a stronger voice to protect nature, challenging the Permitted Development bill which is currently not in line with current bat protection legislation. Wildlife Crime still continues to be an ongoing battle whether it is unintentional or deliberate.

Jean Matthews from Natural Resources Wales provided an update about their current work towards bat conservation. The EC Habitats Directive requires the UK Government to

maintain bat populations in the UK at favourable conservation status and also to report on progress towards this every 6 years. Since the break-up of the Nature Conservancy Council as one of the UK Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations and the devolution of governments in the UK, obligations relating to bat conservation are now widely spread amongst a range of bodies. Jean provided us with an update about their current work towards bat conservation which included a project using static bat detectors being placed on ferries between wales and Ireland to determine if bats are flying across the channel, Mammals in a Sustainable Environment project, Woodland Rare Bats project and involvement in UK projects such as Bats and Turbines, Bats and Roads etc.

Bat Social Calls

Neil Middleton, author of Social Calls of Bats of Britain and Ireland gave a talk about bat social calls and what they actually meant. It was suggested that these types of calls covered a number of scenarios including, roost chatter, advertisement calls (mating), mother/juvenile calls, distress, threatening calls, co-ordination, group cohesion, food patch defence. Pipistrelle bat social calls are one we are familiar with and this peaks in April/May and then again in September.



Photo: Neil Middleton presenting at the WBC.

Social Calls are an aid to identification of species and it interprets behaviour which can lead to better conservation of the species and consequently mitigation. Neil emphasised how important it is to use your eyes as well as your ears to interpret what is occurring when social calls are taking place; bat workers will not be able to do this just by leaving static bat detectors at a site to interpret later.

One talk which I thoroughly enjoyed as usual was one presented by Maggie Andrews on Ultrasound Social Calls of Greater Horseshoe bats. Maggie explained that when greater horseshoe bats emerge from the nursery roost in Stackpole, they do not disperse immediately but fly in and out of the exit and can sometimes perch on the walls. Video footage and ultrasound recordings gave us some insight into the analysis of bat activity of those social calls. Maggie showed us time expansion video footage of ultrasound social calls both audible and on spectrograms. Interestingly, during the data analysis session in the morning some people actually caught this social calling on their detectors from the night before.

Other Topics

A number of talks followed on the Nathusius pipistrelle project from the Project Officer (Daniel Hargreaves) and from one of the participating groups (see separate article above).

Evening Surveying Event

On Saturday night approximately 10 teams were sent out to specific areas around the Pembrokeshire coast to carry out harp trapping and bat detector surveys. A considerable amount of data in the form of records was collected during the evening. Our site was not that far from the Conference Centre and here we installed 3 harp traps with lures; one in the sand dunes and two in the marshland habitat. Despite the cold temperatures and high winds we caught 8 bats including 2 greater horseshoes and a whiskered bat. The greater horseshoe was no surprise but the whiskered was a good record for this site, as were bat recordings of serotine and Nathusius pipistrelle bats on our patch.



Photo: Greater horseshoe bat caught at the evening trapping event

Second Day of Conference

Sunday morning was spent extracting data and analysing bat calls from Saturday night's bat detector and trapping session around the Pembrokeshire coast. The results were later presented.

We then heard another 6 talks during Sunday which included a University of Exeter study on light pollution and its effects on Greater horseshoe bats and tracking Daubenton's bats in Cardiff.

The Welsh Bat Conference as usual was a very enjoyable event, not only because of the quality of the speakers but also networking with a new set of bat workers and being able to contribute to conservation by participating in the field work. I thoroughly recommend any of our members to attend at least one Welsh Bat Conference. The next one will be in 2017.

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