



HEREFORDSHIRE MAMMAL GROUP

SUMMER NEWSLETTER

(July to September 2016)

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SUMMER EVENTS

JULY

Saturday, 2 July 2016, 20.00

Bat and Swift Evening – St. Mary's Church, Staunton-on-Wye

The evening starts with refreshments and a short presentation about the HLF churches project. We will let have a walk around the churchyard learning about swifts and watching them come into their nest sites. Once night falls we will then listen out for bats and have a listen for the brown long-eared bats inside the church. Meet at St. Mary's Church, HR4 7NJ. Please contact Denise Foster via HMG

Wednesday, 13 July 2016, 19.00

Mammal and Bat Walk – Seige Wood

Starting with a walk led by Mark O'Brien looking for signs of mammals including badger, fox, deer, dormouse etc, followed by a led bat walk around the organic Mabley farm and woods. Meet at Siege wood, Woolhope SO 605344 Please contact Dave Smith in case dates are changed at short notice

Saturday, 16 July 2016 at 10:00

Bat and Dormouse Box Check – Frith Wood

Two teams required

Meet at SO723405, wood entrance (near Wellington Heath)

Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Monday, 18 July 2016, 09:30

Dormouse Box Check – Ast Wood

Meet inside wood at approx. SO674379

Please contact Dave Smith in case dates are changed at short notice

Saturday, 24 July 2016 at 10.00

Bat Box Check – Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet at SO595346 (lay-by, Hawkers Lane)

Contact Denise Foster via HMG

AUGUST

11th-15th in August 2016

Woolhope Dome Bat Tracking Project

We will be radio-tracking 5 bats in the Woolhope Dome area. If you are interested in this event and would like to be involved please contact Denise Foster, HMG.

Friday, 12 August 2016 at 10.00

Bat Box Check – Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet at SO595346 (lay-by, Hawkers Lane)

Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Saturday, 20 August 2016, 09:30

Bat Box & Dormouse Box Checks – Ast Wood

Meet inside wood at approx. SO674379

Please contact Dave Smith in case dates are changed at short notice

Monday, 29 August 2016 at 10:00

Bat Box Check – The Doward

White Rocks and Woodside HNT Reserves,

Meet at Miner's Rest Car Park at SO553158

Contact: Denise Foster via HMG

SEPTEMBER

Sunday, 18 September 2016 at 10:00

Bat and Bird Box Check – Buckenhill Wood

Meet in large lay-by at Siege Wood at SO605344

Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Saturday, 24 September 2016, 09:30

Bat box & Dormouse Box Checks – Ast Wood

Meet inside wood at approx. SO674379

Please contact Dave Smith in case dates are changed at short notice

Sunday, 25 September 2016 at 10.00

Bat Box Check – Lea and Paget's Wood

Meet at SO595346 (lay-by, Hawkers Lane)

Contact Denise Foster via HMG

Herefordshire Woodland Bat Project

Herefordshire Mammal Atlas (Bats)

Bat catching events will restart third week of July until the end of September. If you want to be added to the distribution list for all trapping events please contact Denise Foster via HMG. These will not be advertised if we have enough volunteers.

Bats and Swifts in Churches Project

We still would like members to continue our church surveying effort. Some of you have already started carrying out preliminary surveys on churches in Herefordshire. In 2014-2015 we surveyed 61 churches in total; I would like to reach the 100 mark by the end of the summer. Shropshire Bat Group has come on board with the project as they are part of the Diocese of Hereford. They have surveyed a total of 30 churches, which is very commendable. If you are interested in surveying our local churches contact Denise Foster via HMG.

NEW MEMBERS

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

Richard Brennan, Alison Moss-Davies, Aimee Misters, Leigh Russell, Yolande Watson, Camilla Winder, Marixsa Watson, Lottie Horrabin, Anne Crane, Jo Lang and Peter Toon

MEMBERSHIP

Mike Coleman, Membership Secretary

We currently have 75 paid up members in HMG and 216 followers on Facebook. Remember, join the Mammal Society and get HMG subs free!

Facebook - HMG has an active Facebook page where we post all our events past and present.

www.facebook.com/groups/222077991279736/

NEWS IN BRIEF

Herefordshire Bat Atlas

The Herefordshire Bat Atlas is now free to download via the website at www.ham.btck.co.uk/HerefordshireBatAtlas.

Two sets of distribution maps have been created for this bat atlas using records taken from the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC), Herefordshire Mammal Group's (HMG) records and the National Biodiversity Network Gateway (NBN). One set of maps has been produced using 1104 available records from 1960 to 2000 and the second using 12746 records from 2000 to 2015. In total 13850 records were available to create this base-line bat atlas. We would like to thank HBRC for supplying the majority of the bat records and also HMG members and others from outside the county who contributed by helping on bat box checks, trapping sessions and bat surveys. We are also very grateful to landowners for allowing us access to carry out surveys, which include the Forestry Commission, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Diocese of Hereford and individual private landowners.

Distribution maps are still ongoing for all other mammals and will be available in the near future. In the meantime, we ask members to continue to submit as many mammal records as possible to build up our database.

The Making of the British Mammal Guide

Steve Evans, who produced the British Mammal Guides (DVD), spent a lot of time working with us a couple of years ago and filmed some of our dedicated members at box checks, trapping events and surveying at Pembridge church. Our

projects feature prominently in the 20 minute film and it is well worth a watch. The wildlife shots of all mammals in the film are spectacular.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHODwjCsJYU&feature=em-subtitle_digest

Bat Roost Counts for Herefordshire, Member Reports

June is the time when some of our members are out and about counting bats at known roosts for the National Bat Monitoring Programme and for other projects.

National Trust Weir Gardens: The maximum count for soprano pipistrelles this year is **442**. In 2015, Dave Smith reported a total of 407 bats so we have a slight increase.

Lower Hall, near Ledbury: Kate Wollen's maximum count for lesser horseshoe bats this year is **100** bats compared with a maximum of 84 emerging in 2015.

Tuck Mill, Ruckhall: In 2016 the maximum count for soprano pipistrelles is **937**. Caroline Hanks reported a total of 1148 in 2015, so it could mean that the roost have split.

Wellington Church: **55** Natterer's bats were counted out of the main access point, which is 6 less than in 2015. This colony is considered stable.

Pembridge Church: **45** Natterer's bats were counted out of two access points, 12 less than last year. However, we were hindered by a light being left on inside the church and we did not have access to the interior, so we did not know how many bats were still left flying inside the church at the end of the survey. Swift numbers were very low compared to 2015 – just 1 nest.

Wigmore Church: **33** Natterer's were counted out of two access points which is 13 more than in 2015. We also counted 9 swift nests but not all birds had returned to their nest site at dusk.

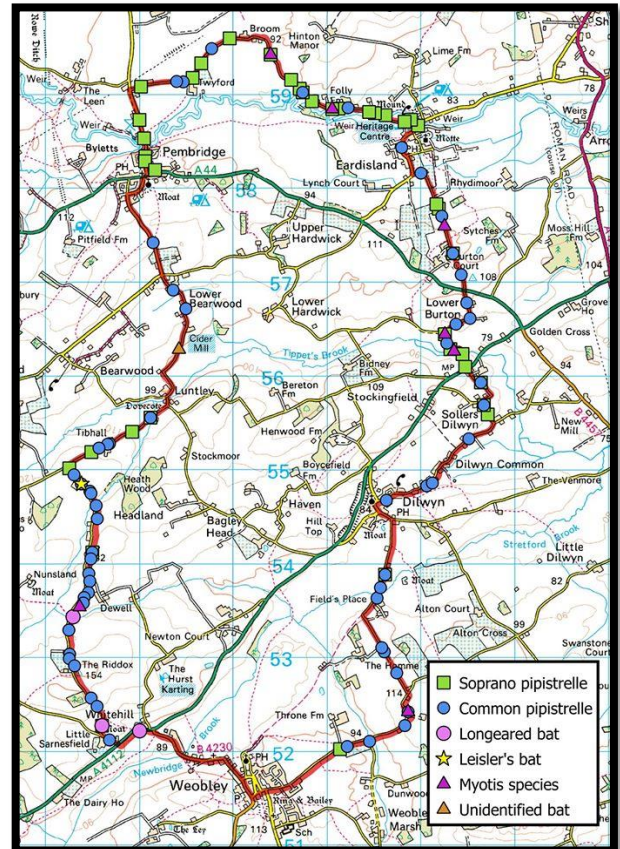
Bats and Roadside Mammals Transect Surveys

We now have two sets of kit ready to go. Please contact David Lee via HMG when you are ready to drive a transect and he will work out a strategy for passing the kit to you.

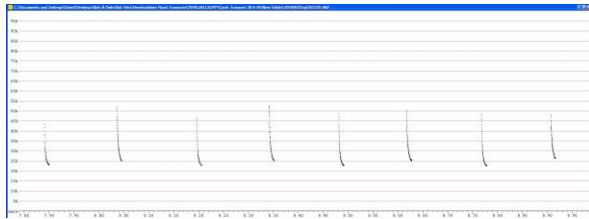
The survey protocol is to drive a pre-planned transect of between 15 and 25 miles at a speed of around 15mph, starting at 30-45 minutes after sunset. The Anabat Express detector will automatically record bat passes and you will need to record any observations of live or dead wildlife encountered en-route (please include owls too). Whilst you have the kit you can also leave the detector out overnight in your garden to gather additional records.

The kit includes a USB memory stick for saving your data and contains a copy of the Anabook software, in case you would like to have a go at analyzing your own results – this is not essential.

Joe Allsopp carried out a cycle transect around Pembridge & Weobley using the Road Transect equipment with the microphone clipped to his helmet. Joe started at Pembridge 30 minutes after sunset and cycled anti-clockwise around the route through Weobley, Dilwyn and Eardisland. Joe cycled a total of 15.5 miles in an hour and a half and 110 bats were recorded - including a Leisler's bat which is an excellent record.



Cycle Transect performed around Pembridge



Leisler's bat recording at 22.25 hrs on Joe's Transect

Chalara Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) by James Bisset

You may wonder what this article is doing in a Mammal Group newsletter. Well much of the work HMG and its members undertake is in or around woodland, which will contain ash.

Chalara is a fungus that is likely to kill 90-98% of ALL main UK ash species (based on data from mainland Europe and already heavily infected UK counties). Chalara is now present across the whole of the County and every county and district in England. There may be a few naturally resistant trees that will survive but the landscape and ecology of this county is going to change dramatically over the next 5-10 years.

Some of you may remember the dramatic effect that Dutch elm disease had on southern Britain in the 1970s, well ash replaced the elm, so what is going to replace the ash? Time will tell!

So what can you do? Practice basic good biosecurity by thoroughly brushing off boots and car tyres if you've driven into the wood and remove all plant material before leaving the woodland. Don't transport twigs, brash and ash leaves (as these hold the spores). Household composting will NOT kill the fungus or its spores, so do not use ash leaves to create leaf mulch to spread on your gardens. Do not plant ash trees or move any ash seedlings. In the end whatever we do, the disease will spread, but we can at least help slow the spread and decrease new infections.

We may have to come to live with the fact that the previously much slated Sycamore along with other 'non-natives' will become the trees of tomorrow! Further information and full details on biosecurity from:

www.forestry.gov.uk/ashdieback

Herefordshire Tree Warden Network

Just for your general interest, the County's Tree Warden Network has been rekindled and is seeking to recruit local volunteers for their Parish or Ward, who have an interest in their local 'Treescape'. Anyone interested can find links and information on this and other tree issues and news on: www.h-trees.net. Remember many mammals rely on trees!



Greater Horseshoe Record at Orcop Hill

Mike Bailey was ecstatic when he saw a recording of a greater horseshoe on a static bat detector left in his garden overnight. This is a new record for the area and shows these bats are pushing northward.

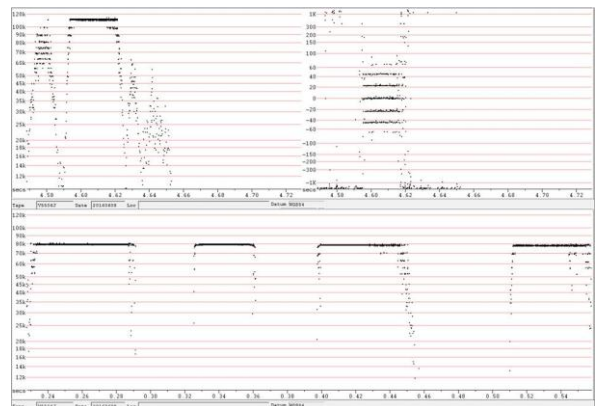


Image: Courtesy of Mike Bailey – lesser and greater horseshoe recordings from Mike's back garden

Dormice show up in Ast Wood Dormouse Boxes for the first time in 5 years!

At the first dormouse box check of the season, members were delighted to find three dormice present! These are the first dormice found in the boxes since they were installed in 2011, so it was well worth the wait! Other encounters were wood mice, yellow necked mice and a bank vole.



Sophie Cowling looking please with her find!

Hedgehog Festival, Ross-on-Wye by Yolande Watson

The Hedgehog Festival in Ross-on-Wye uses the symbol of the hedgehog to educate children and adults of all ages about how they can preserve hedgehogs and hedgehog habitats, which include creating areas with wildflowers and wildlife corridors, promoting wild gardens in urban neighbourhoods, building hedgehog homes, having fresh water sources and maintaining hedgerows.

Over the past three years, they have established a successful education, awareness and fund-raising programme, by working in collaboration with local primary schools, a wide range of community-based groups and local businesses in Ross-on-Wye.

This year, the Hedgehog Festival Team is working in partnership with Wildplay (Herefordshire Wildlife Trust) to create a career path and work opportunities for local parents and young people in Ross-on-Wye who want to work with children in environmental science and conservation. They will be training 12 volunteers in 'Play-Way' and together with our other Herefordshire-based partners, will be creating an awards programme to teach under 25 year olds about identifying, surveying and monitoring of plant, animal, mammal and tree species.

Furthermore, the Hedgehog Festival has expressed an interest to the Herefordshire County Council to involve local people in restoring a site that has a variety of wildlife habitats including a woodland, boggy area and pond. This site also provides a focus to bring

together the knowledge and skill sets of different partners which we can all learn from and replicate in other areas in Ross-on-Wye.

The Hedgehog Festival in Ross-on-Wye is an unincorporated group with an active and talented Committee whose members volunteer their time and expertise.

All donations and money it raises goes towards educating children and adults, of all ages, about preserving hedgehogs and their habitats in the Ross-on-Wye area, as well as raising their awareness about our town's ancient links to the hedgehog.

The committee has robust systems in place and keeps up-to-date records to show how every penny it raises is spent. If you would like to make a donation to the 'Hedgehog Festival' account – you can make a bank transfer or pop into a local Coventry Building Society. Our account number is: 40-63-01 53666824.

Or, if you want to join the team, would like more information about what we do or see the accounts, please get in touch by sending us a message via e-mail: festivalhog@yahoo.co.uk.

To see the events and activities calendar go to: www.playross.com/hedgehog-festival.html and www.facebook.com/Hedgehog-Festival-in-Ross-on-Wye-1425914331039434

A Brave New World – Life as a County Ecologist by James Bisset!

As some of you may be aware when I wasn't out chasing bats or playing around in traditional orchards my day job was being the Parks, Countryside and Leisure Service Manager for Herefordshire Council, based in Queenswood Country Park. However, having successfully managed the Community Asset Transfer of Queenswood & Bodenham Lake to a community partnership, led by the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, and with 'Parks' now being managed and maintained by our public realm contractor Balfour Beatty, the council got me involved with a wide range of work but with little Biodiversity interest!

Luckily, being well known for a wide range of environmental management skills and

knowledge, I've been able to 'reinvent' myself into the Built and Natural Environment Service managed by Juliet Wheatley ☺.

So following a phone interview on a Friday I was duly 'thrown in at the deep end' on the Monday morning as a replacement for Rob Widdicombe, the Senior County Ecologist, who is away from work for an extended period.



I've had some involvement with Planning before and commenting on open space and SuDS design (Sustainable Urban Drainage Design) but didn't appreciate just how much work and pressure specialist officers like Rob are under or just how many applications they have to review and comment on; it's a seemingly never ending stream!

I've grasped the metal and got stuck in with various comments on applications, signing off ecological conditions, providing supporting material for an appeal (ok - just one new build in a woodland!), and a mitigation following a planning enforcement.

Outside of the direct 'planning' ecology I've had several internal requests for information and support on trees and biodiversity, two wildlife crime enquiries and numerous other public enquiries about trees, biodiversity and wildlife as well as continuing my role of representing the Council in both the Wye Valley and Malvern Hills AONBs.

I'm hoping I'll get the chance to undertake some site visits now that I've started to nibble away at the backlog created by Rob being away. Longer term, I need to sort out my CIEEM membership (only been meaning to do it for 20 years!) and I'm there to help the resilience of the Natural Environment team (ecology and trees) and hopefully enable the team to have staff capacity to look at being involved in some broader

outreach and project work in the County as they used to in the past "good old days".

From my perspective traditional orchards and the threat from excess mistletoe; and tree wardens & Chalara ash dieback are high on my agenda. For those of you that know me and those that don't, bats are always going to be closest to my heart!



James and other HMG members at a bat catching event near Ledbury

The main thing I realised very early on is the importance of having up-to-date records logged at the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre. These are essential 'evidence' when reviewing an application and any ecological reports associated with it. **Please, please do submit your records, especially the UK/EU 'protected species' such as Bats, Otters, Bank Voles, Nesting Birds, Great Crested Newts etc.**

The data coming from the Bat Atlas, road and church survey projects and all the other great work being done by HMG is fantastic – so please play **YOUR** part in this and join in with HMG projects and make sure you submit regular record reports to HBRC and the local species record coordinators.

Deer Behaviour, Caught on Camera by Martin Hales

Seeing deer in woodland often means catching a fleeting glimpse of their rumps as they run away from you, having spooked them from their resting place. A more rewarding experience is to sit out before dawn and wait for deer to appear in a foraging area. If they are not aware of your presence then you can be treated to witnessing

the natural behaviour of one of our largest wild land mammals. As memorable as the occasion might be, I have found using wildlife trail cameras to be more useful in recording deer behaviour.

Having a permanent record to scrutinise is very useful, especially as high resolution digital images can be magnified to look at the smallest detail. Identifying deer species is often the first objective and an example is shown in figure 1 where the characteristic white rump surrounded by a black horseshoe shape and a long black tail of the Fallow deer can be clearly seen.

A Fallow buck, shown below, has the 'normal' coat colouring of a summer tan with white spots. Herefordshire Fallow deer can also be seen in different coat colours and patterns and the less common melanistic pattern is shown in figure 2, a Fallow doe. We also have Roe deer and Muntjac deer in increasing populations in the wild in Herefordshire.



Figure 1: Deer species identification, a fallow buck

Identification of individual Fallow deer is also possible using wildlife cameras. It is over 40 years ago that studies in the New Forest, Hampshire, showed that individual Fallow deer retain their unique spot pattern after moulting. These studies were carried out looking at spot patterns on the thighs of deer. Fallow deer have a habit of using the same racks (pathways) through hedgerows and pinch points in woodland rides and I have set up cameras looking vertically down over the racks to capture the dorsal hide spot patterns. Individual deer

can be tracked this way, observing how often an individual uses the same rack, and which individuals are associated together in the same group. Figure 3 shows an example of a Fallow deer unique coat spot pattern.

The presence of deer in woodland habitats can often be seen by looking for the *browse line* created when the deer reach to a certain height and eat all the leaves and young twigs. Ivy is also browsed to a particular height and is a useful tell-tale to look out for in more mature woodland with low shrub cover. Figure 4 shows the creation of a browse line in action by a small group of fallow does.



Figure 2: Melanistic coat of grazing fallow doe

Another advantage of wildlife trail cameras is their use at night. Fallow deer that are regularly disturbed in the day will often revert to nocturnal browsing activity. One aspect of deer behaviour is damage to young trees and shrubs in woodland habitat, behaviour which is often used to indicate deer presence. Deer can thrash young trees with their antlers, fray and bite away strips of bark, and also use small twigs to leave scent trails. Cameras can help find out which species, age group and sex are responsible. Fallow deer have pre-orbital scent glands and Figure 5 shows a young Fallow buck rubbing its head repeatedly up and down a young shrub at night.

Fallow deer can live for 10 years or more but bucks can be put under stress during the rut and this can be exacerbated in colder winters, by disease, or if the deer populations have reached the natural limits of land capacity. During the past winter of 2015/2016 I had two reports of local residents finding a fallow buck dead in their garden. Presumably the animals had entered

the gardens for shelter and/or food. Deer suffering from starvation show their rib patterns and generally lose the fat and muscle from their rump, as shown in this phone camera image of a fallow buck in a Herefordshire garden (Figure 6).



Figure 3 Identification of individual Fallow deer using dorsal spot patterns

If you are unlucky enough to find a deer carcass on your property you can call one of the companies that deal with fallen stock for assistance or perhaps the local council if the carcass is on public land, including highways.



Figure 4: Fallow deer creating the 'browse line'

There are many brands of wildlife cameras on the market today with various facilities. I have

used the Bushnell Trophy Cam XLT for last 5 years and most of the photographs in this article were taken with this camera in Herefordshire woodlands. If any other HMG members have interesting images of deer behaviour in Herefordshire I would be very interested in seeing them.



Figure 5 Young Fallow buck rubbing against shrubs at night



Figure 6 Fallow buck in winter coat showing signs of starvation.

Dormouse Coordinator Update by Ann Bowker

The season is now well underway. I had two male dormice at each of my two sites on the Hills, which was a relief as I was not sure how well they would survive our warm wet winter. It is interesting that it mainly seems to be males in the boxes at first. I wonder if the females prefer natural nest sites for possible breeding!

We have put survey tubes in woodland on the estate north of Bromyard and my thanks go to those who came along to help. Our first check will be on the morning of Saturday 16th July. I have five helpers booked in. I could take one

more, so send me an email if you would like to join us. First come, first served. Our second check will be on the 17th September and I would be happy to have two or three more helpers on that date.



Dormouse box checking in Chase Wood

Ledbury Naturalists are surveying at Broadmoor Common this year and we have some tubes installed there. We have also been approached about a possible survey at Bringsty Common. If anyone knows of or is undertaking other surveys this year, I should be glad to hear about them.

We are in the process of producing atlas pages for dormice in Herefordshire which will be published on our website when edited and approved. This will give some indication as to where we should focus our survey activity in future years in order to confirm dormice still inhabit places where they were found 20 or 30 years ago.

Finally, tickets are available on line for the Dormouse Conference taking place at Reading University on the 9th and 10th September 2016. Friday 9th includes talks for the professional ecologist and Saturday focusses on general interest.

Email Contact for Ann is mike.bowker@clara.net

Bat Co-ordinator Update by Denise Foster

Bat Box Checks - We have carried out at least one bat box check at each of our 10 sites in Herefordshire so far this year. I am really pleased to see the maternity colony of brown long-eared bats back in Titley Pool. They

certainly like the new boxes we installed at the end of 2014. We processed 22 BLE's at the end of May this year.

In Lea and Paget's, our brown long-eared bats have been very slow in returning to the bat boxes but we eventually caught up with 15 of them on the 5th June – 9 males and 6 females. At least 2 of the males have not been seen since September 2014 so it was nice to catch up with them at last.



Brown long-eared bats at Lea and Paget's Wood

We also caught up with 33 female Bechstein's bats at Old Country Wood in June. We found that some of the bats had lumps on their digits, forearms and a few on the wing membrane. It could be caused by mites but we have not seen this before. The bats did not seem to be too bothered them.



At least 7 bats had these lumps on their digits, some worse than others.

Woodland Bat Project – Two new woodlands have so far been surveyed this year,

Queenswood, owned by the Forestry Commission near Dymock, and Moorhouse Wood, near Norton Canon, which is privately owned. No big surprises at either site but we obtained records of between 6-8 species.



Photo: Courtesy Morgan Bowers - Female Bechstein's bat caught in Ast Wood, May 2016

We returned to Ast Wood this year as it has been two years since we carried out our first bat catching survey. In 2014, we found 10 species using the wood and this year we found approximately 7 species but we did trap early in the season. We were really delighted to catch a parous female Bechstein's bat; we caught a juvenile in 2014 and both these bats turned up very late in the evening. We also caught 6 whiskered bats, mostly females which suggest there is a maternity roost in the wood. We had a really good turn-out of members.

Sites planned for trapping this summer is mainly in the Woolhome Dome but we will be revisiting Berrington Hall and Frith Wood. We will also be surveying Lord's Wood in the Doward. If you are interested in any of these events, please contact Denise Foster via HMG.

HLF Funded Bat and Swift Box Installation Project

All project displays, bat and swift boxes are now in place at 8 Herefordshire Churches. We managed to get all boxes in place before the bats and swifts returned to the church. Two more churches, Letton and Norton Canon, have approached us and asked to be included in the project and they have now been accepted by the HLF.



The churches team worked hard to install the boxes by the 1st week of May



Joe Allsopp and Church Wardens at King's Pyon with one of their swift boxes

Both churches have now been surveyed and bat and swift boxes have been ordered. We are in the process of putting together a booklet for general distribution to the church communities about the project and what they can do to alleviate pressures of bats using the church building and also to enhance biodiversity. This will be available on-line as well as in a printed format.

Bats and Roadside Mammal Driven Transects

The Bats and Roadside Mammal Transect training session, held at HWT's office at the end of April, was well represented by members. So far we have 10 teams registered to carry out driven transects and 5 transects have been completed so far (including an experimental bicycle transect by Joe Allsopp). We would like a minimum of 10 transects completed this season but don't stop at one per team, do as many as you like.



Bats and Roadside Mammal Transect Training Session at HWT's offices

National Bats in Churches Workshop May 2016 Review by Denise Foster



In 2011 to 2014, DEFRA funded a research project, carried out by Bristol University, to test the use of light and acoustic deterrents in churches to restrict the movement of Natterer's bats at a small selection of churches in Norfolk. This project also included techniques to measure the response of soprano pipistrelles when excluded from maternity roosts in houses.

A follow up project, supported by English Heritage, was carried out in 2014/2015 to determine a) the impact and effectiveness of deterrents on Natterer's bats in four selected churches during the maternity season, b) to measure the effectiveness of techniques at a church with a large soprano pipistrelle roost, c) to refine and optimise those techniques and produce a "toolkit" to manage large populations of bats in churches.

A Bats and Churches partnership comprising BCT, Natural England, Church of England (Cathedral and Church Buildings Division), Historical England and the Churches Conservation Trust applied to the HLF to fund a national project applying these techniques, and also to work with church communities, bat experts and volunteers to find solutions to the problems faced by churches with large bat populations. The main objective of this workshop was to bring together church and bat communities to discuss the aims and objective of the HLF National Churches project but a few weeks before the workshop, the Bats and Churches Partnership learned that their bid had been unsuccessful. However, it was decided to go ahead with the workshop.

The event was chaired by Jen Heathcote of Historic England and comprised presentations from the main partners in the morning session and case study presentations in the afternoon sessions, followed by group discussions (delegates were seated at tables, each with a 'facilitator').

The first presentation was from Sir Tony Baldry, Chair of the Church Buildings Council, who informed the audience that 6,500 of 16,000 churches in England had bats using the buildings and that large bat colonies were placing a heavy burden on small, often elderly congregations of rural churches, particularly in relation to their cleaning. He talked about the high cost of professional bat surveys and licences in relation to repairs and renovations where bats are using church buildings which in turn created a financial burden on the church. Overall, his talk was very balanced and he did state that bats were part of God's creation and it is important to preserve our natural heritage but we need to find a way to manage large populations of bats using church buildings to satisfy all church users.

David Bullock, Head of Nature Conservation at the National Trust who stood in for Gareth Jones, followed Sir Tony Baldry and he summarised the results of the DEFRA project as follows:

- acoustic deterrents are effective at moving Natterer's bats to less sensitive areas within churches

- lights tend to entomb Natterer's bats preventing their exit, but don't prevent re-entry, and can be used to create 'no-fly zones' within churches
- Soprano pipistrelles tend to abandon churches for nearby alternative roosts following use of acoustic deterrents
- the use of deterrents had no obvious effect on foraging behaviour of Natterer's bats
- heated bat boxes installed in churches in conjunction with deterrent used are ignored in the short term but may be taken up by Natterer's bats over a longer period
- 'boxing in' of areas hosting roosts may be effective in preventing bats from flying within church interiors.



There were at least 200 people at the conference

Amanda Craig, Natural England Operations Director, spoke about the proposed new 'Bats in Churches' class licence, informed partly by the St Hilda's saga, which is currently being trialled. She said that consultants holding this licence will be able to register churches and carry out approved actions to modify bat activity.

Deborah Lamb of Historic England gave a fairly general presentation about how our historic heritage, monuments and fabric were being lost due to damage caused by bats. She also stated that morale was very low within church communities caused by the smell and the mess that bats cause; this problem is exacerbated when there is food and drinks being prepared in kitchen areas installed inside the church. She also raised the question about who would be paying for the Bats in Churches Class Licence which is due to be rolled out this year.

Julia Hanmer of Bat Conservation Trust followed Deborah with an overview of the life cycle and general ecology of bats, an overview of the work of the Bat Conservation Trust including the work of local bat groups. A question and answer session followed.

After lunch Tim Allen of Historic England presented a case study of St Nicholas Church, Stanford on Avon, followed by Philip Parker of Philip Parker Associates, the consultancy responsible for implementing deterrent measures during the project to date. Philip has engaged in making bats an attraction with local church communities by organising bat nights, champing and bat walks at churches with large populations. So far, 200 out of 700 medieval churches have been surveyed in Norfolk, 10% of which show high level of bat use and 25% moderate levels. Where large numbers of bats are present, Natterer's bats are usually the culprits. Philip has now set up a Facebook group called Bats in Churches Study Group.



Attendees interested in Herefordshire's local project

Herefordshire Mammal Group was asked to present at the conference so I presented the third case study about our Bats and Swifts in Churches Project. I was very pleased to see at least 4 members of Herefordshire's church community present at this meeting, 2 church wardens from Pembridge, Reverend Michael Cluett from Wellington Church, and Joyce Marston, the chair of the Diocese Advisory Committee which clearly show they are supportive and appreciative of our work. Only one direct question was asked about the project from one member of the church community who was very keen to learn if any other groups were doing a similar project to us.

A final presentation was given by Stephen Rudd of Natural England National Bats in Churches HLF funded project. If HLF funding had been secured the intention was to fund the "toolkit" mentioned earlier for churches that have large bat populations and to build volunteer capacity. Despite not securing the funding, the 'Bats in Churches' class licence will still be rolled out by the end of 2016. It is not clear how this new Class Licence will be applied and by whom and more importantly who is paying for it! This question was not answered, which probably means it will be the responsibility of the church.



Denise Foster talking at the Bats in Churches Workshop

During one of the question and answer sessions, it emerged that in some areas VBRV's work directly with Diocesan Advisory Committees which is something we will be taking forward in Herefordshire. This will give us upfront information about which churches have planned work so we can have our say!

It was a real shame that funding was not obtained for this very important national project but the Bats in Churches Partnership will be resubmitting the HLF application. It will be interesting to see the feedback from the workshop, but I felt there were a few frustrated members of the church community present, particularly those who clean the church, and some of them went home with very little hope.

For more information about this workshop follow this link

www.batsandchurches.org.uk/latest-developments/

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