

WHICHFORD BARBASTELLE PROJECT

On 5th June 2007, members of the Bat Group gathered at Whichford Woods in the extreme southeast of the county to conduct a survey for barbastelles. We split up to cover the whole wood, and most, if not all, saw and/or detected barbastelles, suggesting a reasonably healthy population was present.

It was too late to obtain a licence to catch and tag any bats, so we postponed this aspect of the project until summer 2008. Ceri Griffiths volunteered to organise the catching nights, preceding this with an activity survey in the wood to see if the bats were still around.

Barbastelles were indeed present, and on 16th July the first of three nights netting commenced. Unfortunately, despite several species of bats hawking along the woodland rides, only a single common pipistrelle was caught. We relocated the nets for the second night (21st July), and at 21.45 a bat flew into one. Almost unbelievably it was a Barbastelle, and a lactating female too!



She was measured and weighed, and a tiny radio transmitter was glued between her shoulders on a small patch of bare skin carefully exposed by expert barber Jon Russ. The bat was released and much to the relief of all the tag stayed on.

The transmitter worked well too, and we listened to the signals for several minutes as the bat foraged nearby.



However, the night wasn't over, and within half an hour we had caught and released two brown long-eared bats.

The third session on 23rd July began much earlier with a daytime attempt to find the barbastelle at its roost. Initial tracking led the team to an electric fence several kilometres away (!), but on returning to the wood, the true signal was picked up. An exhausting fight back and forth through the undergrowth in the fading light eventually produced results, with a loud transmission from the top of a dead oak with exfoliating bark. Moments later a barbastelle emerged, followed by up to 20 more, including our female.

Meanwhile the main body of the Group had set up the nets at the top of the wood, and if hadn't been for a late catch of a whiskered/Brandt's Bat, it would have been a disappointing night.

Two days later, Ceri, accompanied by Andy Warren, went to look at the tree in daylight to see if it could be climbed and hand-nets used. This was thought to be too dangerous, not only for the climber, but also the tree, as the exfoliating bark looked very fragile and could easily be dislodged.

Instead it was considered better to erect the nets around the clearing in which the tree stood. So, on 29th July we made a fourth attempt to catch some more Barbastelles. Although about 15 bats emerged, including our female, only 2 or 3 appeared to drop low enough to be in reach of the nets, and we finished the night resigned to failure. We put this down partly to our activities (Jon said Barbastelles were very sensitive to disturbance), but most of all down to a large flock of corvids which decided to roost in the trees around the dead oak just as the bats were due to emerge.



Although we didn't catch any bats, we did put up a large roost box on a nearby oak. Made by Andy Warren, this was intended to provide a replacement roost in case the current site was lost when the bark fell off. Ceri also made a box, which we will erect at a later date.

Summing up our achievements to date; we identified a potential barbastelle woodland, confirmed the presence of barbastelles, caught a female, tagged and traced her back to her roost, which was a maternity colony and the second biggest found so far in the UK, erected a roost box, and started tracking studies to establish foraging routes.

The tag will drop off in a couple of weeks, but by then we should know a great deal more about our Warwickshire barbastelles.



Andy Warren

RARE BAT FOSSILS FOUND IN EGYPT

In an oasis region 50 miles SW of Cairo called El Faiyum scientists have unearthed six new prehistoric bat species. The new species are similar to modern microbats and these finds reinforce the theory that modern bats evolved on the African continent rather than in the Northern hemisphere.



The fossil bats date to the Eocene epoch (56 to 34 million years ago) and the finds were uncovered over the last few decades. A recent re-examination of the 33 fragments concentrated on the teeth, revealing that one of the fossils belonged to a giant microbat with a wingspan of around two feet.

Julia Waller

REQUEST FOR LESSER HORSESHOE BAT RECORDS

On behalf of the Group, Anton Irving (Natural England) and I intend to write a short paper on the current and historic distribution and status of lesser-horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus hipposideros* in Warwickshire.

As such, if anyone has any records, could they send them to me for compilation and updating of the county map.

Ideally I'd like an OS Grid Reference, but as we will be showing the distribution at the 1 km/tetrad level, the exact location isn't essential if you wish to keep the site secret.

All records will be welcome, i.e. roosting, hibernation, fly past, anecdotal, historic, etc., plus date, year, number of animals and any comments. For example, LHB was recently recorded during one of the barbastele netting nights in Whichford Wood, and I've found several in the south of the county over the last few years, including a hibernating individual.

Andy Warren
Tel. 07879 848449 or email
andywarren@dsl.pipex.com

GOING BATTY IN FLORIDA

You would think that mid March would be a bit early in the year for a bat walk, but we did and it was lovely and warm. OK. We cheated, we weren't in Warwickshire. We were on holiday in Florida where we had gone to see a Space Shuttle launch.

Before we left for Florida I looked on the Internet to see if there were any bat walks in central Florida while we were due to be

there. I found a barbecue and bat talk which due to be held on a Saturday night right in the middle of our holiday. It was at Crowley Museum & Nature Center, near Sarasota. I had no idea where that was, but a quick look at a map showed it to be near Tampa on the west of Florida which I knew wasn't unreasonably far from Orlando where we were staying. I therefore 'phoned up and booked our place. The hosts were surprised to have someone call from the UK but booked us in.

A little later I thought that I had better check the route to the event and realised that I had rather underestimated the distance; it was 128 miles, ONE WAY! Oh well, we can get up early and make a day of it.

As well as going to Florida to see a Space Shuttle launch, there was another launch we hoped to see. The US Air Force was launching a GPS satellite on a Delta II rocket. By the time we got to Florida this had been rescheduled to 2:10 on the Saturday morning. Cape Canaveral is on the east coast of Florida, so there was no chance of an early start in the morning.



The venue for the talk

Needless to say, we got there late, but not so late that we'd missed the food or the bat walk. I apologised for being late but when I when I tried to pay, they didn't want my money and insisted on introducing us to everyone. I thought that was odd, I then realised that the people giving the talk weren't there and we'd been mistaken for the bat experts. I'm quite used to being mistaken for a bat expert - it happens every time I lead a bat walk!

Fortunately, the real bat experts - Cynthia & George Marks from the Florida Bat Conservancy soon turned up. First of all they gave us an interesting slideshow. Some of the slides were familiar as were the pressures affecting Florida's bats.

Florida's bats are generally slightly bigger than ours but their legal protection is very limited. Only two of their 20 species have specific protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. Three species are specifically covered by certain chapters of the Florida Administrative

Code, but this doesn't actually contain any wording pertaining to bats. The other species are only protected to the same extent as any other wildlife in Florida. This means that you can't buy or sell wild animals or keep them as pets, you also can't kill them or vandalise or disturb colonies. However exclusion is allowed and is common place.



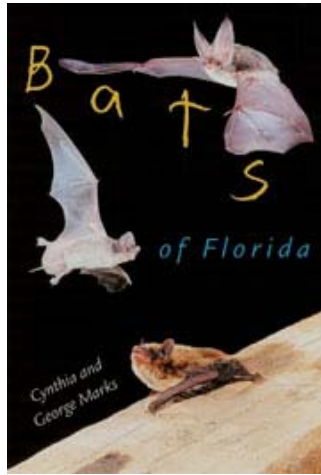
Northern Yellow bat - Lasius borealis

After the slideshow Cynthia & George showed the public some of their long term captive bats who had been previously injured and can't be returned to the wild. Surprisingly to us, Cynthia was handling the bats without gloves and even allowed people to stroke them. Fortunately the bats were pretty well behaved and were:

- Evening bat - Nycticeius humeralis
•Brazilian Freetailed bat - Tadarida brasiliensis
•Northern Yellow bat - Lasius borealis
•Seminoe bat - Lasius seminolus

After seeing the bats, it was outside to see if we could detect some bats. I was looking forward to having a go with some American bat detectors at this point, but no, George had an Anabat (from Australia) and he asked me to help out and he loaned me a venerable old Batbox III. There didn't seem to be much bat activity and soon most of the public drifted away without hearing anything, however we did eventually get some almost Noctule-ish sounds at around 28kHz. George identified these as a Brazilian Freetailed. Unfortunately, we couldn't see a thing. The light pollution is terrible in the big cities in Florida, but once you get out into the more remote areas it can get pretty dark - much darker than we are used to in Warwickshire.

At the end of the evening after most of the people had left, we had a good chat to Cynthia & George, comparing bat experiences across the pond. We also got the chance to photograph their bats and buy their book "Bats of Florida" without which I wouldn't have been able to check the details for this article!



"Bats of Florida" by Cynthia & George Marks

All in all we had a pretty good time and although the organisers had joked at the beginning that we had come all the way from the UK for their event, I think they were quite surprised that we really had come all the way from Orlando. So, when you're away only holiday, check out the local bat walks, I'm sure it'll be fun and you can always write about it for "The Echo"!

John Waller

References: Florida Bat Conservancy: <http://www.floridabats.org>, Crowley Museum & Nature, Center: <http://www.crowleymuseumnaturectr.org/>

BATS AID ORGANIC COFFEE GROWERS

If you get a chance to sip some shade-grown Mexican organic coffee, please pause a moment to thank the bats that helped make it possible. At Mexican organic coffee plantations, where pesticides are banned, bats and birds work night and day to control insect pests that might otherwise munch the crop. Until now, the birds got nearly all the credit. But a new study from University of Michigan researchers shows that during the summer wet season, bats devour more bugs than the birds at Finca Irlanda, a 740-acre organic coffee plantation in Chiapas, Mexico. And they often do it using a "perch and wait" hunting technique that is proving to be far more common than bat researchers had believed.

At a time when bat populations are declining worldwide, this new-found benefit to organic coffee farmers is another example of how these much-maligned mammals provide ecological services that go largely unnoticed. In addition to aiding agriculture, bats pollinate wild plants, disperse fruit seeds,

and gorge on pesky mosquitoes by the ton.

"Bats are impacting ecological systems in all kinds of ways, and I just want them to get the credit they deserve," said Kimberly Williams-Guillén, a tropical ecologist and a postdoctoral fellow at the U-M School of Natural Resources and Environment.



A big-eared bat of the genus *Micronycteris*

The bat's role in controlling coffee-eating insects has been overlooked for two reasons, Williams-Guillén said. The first involves a flaw in the design of "exclosure" experiments used to study the impacts of various animals on coffee plants. In previous experiments, the exclosures—simply net-covered wood-and-plastic frameworks—were placed over coffee bushes around-the-clock. After several days, scientists counted the insects on the protected plants and compared the tally to totals from nearby unprotected plants. The protected plants usually had higher pest counts, and birds generally received the credit.

But because the netting remained in place day and night, bats also had been excluded, Williams-Guillén said. And their impact went unnoticed. To determine the relative contributions of birds and bats at the Finca Irlanda plantation, Williams-Guillén and her U-M colleagues established four types of exclosures: birds-only excluded during the day, bats-only excluded at night, both excluded day and night, and control plants with no netting. They found that during the summer wet season, the bat-only exclosures resulted in an 84 percent increase in the density of insects, spiders, harvestmen and mites—exceeding the impact of birds.



A sword-nosed bat of the genus *Lonchorhina*

The second reason the bat's contribution to coffee-plantation pest control had been overlooked has to do with hunting techniques. Bats are well known for a foraging strategy called aerial hawking, which involves fluttering through the night sky, zeroing in on prey using echolocation, and gulping countless flying bugs. A bat can eat half its body weight in a single night using this technique. But many of the bats at the Chiapas plantation—about 45 species have been recorded there so far—rely largely on an approach called foliage gleaning. They patiently "perch and wait" in the tree canopy above the coffee bushes, inverted and clutching a branch with their feet, sometimes for hours at a stretch. Their large, pointy ears listen intently for the sounds of insects chewing, crawling across leaves, or chirping. Then they swoop down and snatch the bug off the leaf or stem.

"People had believed that all the bats were flying around in mid-air and taking mosquitoes and moths," Williams-Guillén said. "And if that's all they were going for, then you wouldn't expect them to have an effect on insects that were just hanging around on the plants," such as katydids and leaf-eating beetles.

"But it turns out that foraging modes in bats are much more diverse than people had thought," she said. More than 200 species of insects feed on, or can otherwise damage, coffee plants.

Julia Waller

THE 'E'-CHO

If you would like to receive an electronic copy of the newsletter via email then let me know.....

newsletter@warksbats.co.uk

THE BAT-'E'-GROUP

As well as receiving newsletters electronically, you can also take part in an

email discussion group. It's completely free and only open to bat group members so if you have access to email and aren't already on the "egroup", the why not drop an email to me at:

web@warksbats.co.uk and we'll sign you up!

BATTY VITAL STATISTICS!

Don't forget to pass on all your bat sightings to George Burton, Warks Bat Group's Records Officer. Included with this newsletter is a copy of a recording form. Send your records to:

Roost Records, The Old Dairy, 25 Brookside, Stretton-on-Dunsmore, Rugby, CV23 9NH
Email: records@warksbats.co.uk

If you have access to the internet then you can enter the information directly at the Warwickshire Batgroup's website <http://www.warksbats.co.uk>

Click on the 'record entry form' link in the menu on the left hand side of the page.

DIARY

If you know of any batty events then please send us the details and then we can include them in the next issue as well as on Warks Bat Group's website: www.warksbats.co.uk

AUGUST

Lets go Batty!!! - Bedworth Sloughs Wednesday, 20th August 2008 20:30
Join enthusiasts from Warwickshire Bat Group, and first timers alike, on this dusk and evening meander in search of our little ultrasonic friends! Keep your eyes peeled! This is one of our most popular events so booking is essential. Please bring a torch if you have one.

Meet : Bedworth Sloughs, entrance adjacent to 225 Newtown Road, Bedworth

Organised by Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council Natural Environment Team 024 7637 6053

Bat Night - Kingsbury Water Park Wednesday, 20th August 2008 20:30 - 22:30
An evening to find out all about bats. A short talk followed by hot jacket spuds in The Old Barn Cafe, then a night-time stroll to spot the bats of Kingsbury. Please bring a torch. Meet at the Information Centre. Organised by Warwickshire Country Council. Booking essential: 01827 872660.

Cost: (includes food, drinks extra): Adults £5.00, Under 16s £4.50

Bat Walk - Babbs Mill Local Nature Reserve Thursday, 21st August 2008 20:30 - 22:00
Find out how to track down this nocturnal creature with the help of our experts and special detectors. A great opportunity to see bats in their natural environment. Starting from the boat house car park. Organised by Solihull Council 0121 704 8000
Free

Bat Walk - Ragley Hall Friday, 22nd August 2008
A presentation on bats in the UK and Ragley, followed by a barbecue and a bat walk around the grounds. There will be an opportunity to see bats emerging from their roost at the start of the walk. Advanced booking essential, Tel: 0800 093 0290
Cost to be confirmed.

Bonkers about Bats - Coombe Country Park Saturday, 30 August 2008 20:00 - 21:30
A chance to see our night time hunters as they chase their evening meal. Find out about the life of a bat, where they live, what they eat and how we can help to protect them. Please book in advance on 024 7645 3720 .

£2.50 adults, £1.25 children and Passport to Leisure.

Let's Get Batty Again - Ryton Pools Country Park Saturday, 30th August 2008 19:00
An evening slide show followed by a nighttime stroll with local bat experts to spot the bats of Ryton. The event will finish whenever we stop spotting but you can leave whenever you wish. Meet at the Visitors Centre. Organised by Warwickshire County Council. Booking essential on 024 7630 5592
Adults £1.50 Concessions £1.00 Family £3.50

SEPTEMBER

Bat Walk - Charlecote Park (National Trust) Saturday, 06 September 2008 19:30 - 21:00
Take a walk through the park at dusk with our guide, watching these nocturnal creatures and learning about their habits. Please wear suitable footwear and warm clothing. Not suitable for children under 12 years old. Organised by The National Trust, Charlecote Park. Advanced booking essential, contact 01789 470277 or

bookings.charlecote@nationaltrust.org
£5 per person

Bat Walk - Charlecote Park (National Trust) Sunday, 07 September 2008 19:30 - 21:00
Take a walk through the park at dusk with our guide, watching these nocturnal creatures and learning about their habits. Please wear suitable footwear and warm clothing. Not suitable for children under 12 years old. Organised by The National Trust, Charlecote Park. Advanced booking essential, contact 01789 470277 or bookings.charlecote@nationaltrust.org

£5 per person

Bat Walk - Compton Verney Thursday, 11th September 2008 19:30 - 21:30
Join Warwickshire Bat Group out and about in the grounds and discover the secret lives of these fascinating creatures. Children are welcome. Booking essential on 01926 645500.
£5/£3.50 Concessions

Bat Walk - Ragley Hall Friday, 12th September 2008
A presentation on bats in the UK and Ragley, followed by a barbecue and a bat walk around the grounds. There will be an opportunity to see bats emerging from their roost at the start of the walk. Advanced booking essential, Tel: 0800 093 0290
Cost to be confirmed.

Bat Walk - Allesley Park Walled Garden Saturday, 13 September 2008 19:30 - 21:30

Organised by Allesley Park Walled Garden Group

Bat Walk - Compton Verney Thursday, 18th September 2008 19:30 - 21:30
Join Warwickshire Bat Group out and about in the grounds and discover the secret lives of these fascinating creatures. Children are welcome. Booking essential on 01926 645500.
£5/£3.50 Concessions

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR RECENTLY ADDED DATES!

The next issue of the Echo is out on 15th November 2008. The deadline for articles is 1st November 2008. If you have any batty stories, anecdotes, interesting articles or research news then please send us the details so we can include them in the next newsletter.