



The Echo



Newsletter of the Warwickshire Bat Group

January 2000

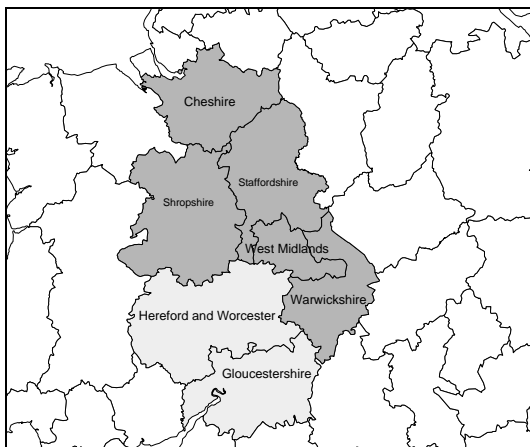
Welcome to the January '00 issue of The Echo. This issue mainly features an article about a very interesting recent talk.

Do have a look at the events list to see the talks that we have lined up for the rest of the winter. Later spring and summer events will be announced in the next issue of The Echo.

Land of the Giant Bat - John Waller

Our Christmas talk for 1999 was really two talks in one. Our guest speakers were Paola Reason and Jon Davies from Cresswell Associates.

Cresswell Associates are ecological consultants based in Gloucestershire and in addition to many other activities they run the Batline telephone help line on behalf of the West Midlands and Three Counties Teams of English Nature



The West Midlands and Three Counties Teams cover Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, The West Midlands, Warwickshire, Hereford & Worcester and Gloucestershire.

Paola told us how they take on much of the legwork involved with bat calls. Firstly by fielding many calls from the general public and then by passing on some of these calls to more local licensed bat workers. Where appropriate, Cresswell will handle all the work involved with some calls thereby taking some pressure off both English Nature and volunteer bat workers.

Cresswell take several hundred bat calls each year, but they are not evenly spread through each month. Paola showed us a graph of the number of calls received each month and predictably the peak time is during spring and early summer with as many as twenty calls a day.

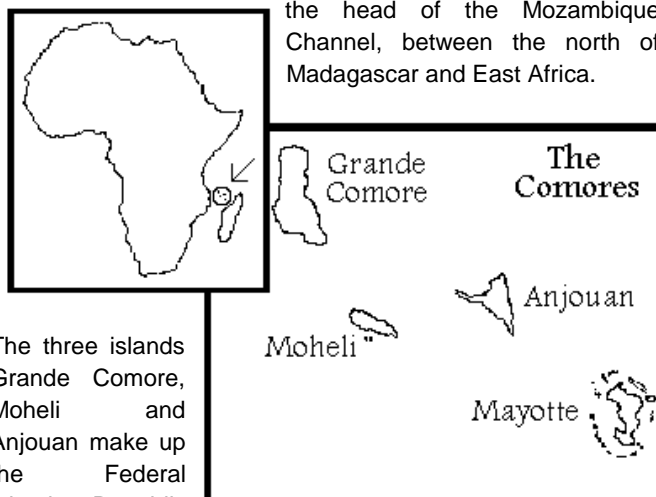
Cresswell's funding from English Nature only covers licensed bat work and they therefore should not be called for problems

where people have found sick or injured bats, however this doesn't stop it happening. It also doesn't stop people calling in having mistaken the bleeping of their smoke alarm with a flat battery for a bat trapped in the ceiling (this has happened more than once)! Cresswell should, however be called to arrange a visit from a licensed bat worker if bats are unwelcome or you plan to do some work that may disturb them.

When Cresswell pass on calls to volunteer bat workers in each county they try to only pass on calls which are reasonably near to the bat workers in question. Now that we in Warwickshire have quite a few newly licensed people, that's not too difficult (although the very north of the county is not covered) but in some counties like Hereford & Worcester there are no licensed bat workers for miles.

Why did I say that it was really two talks in one and why was it entitled "Land of the Giant Bat"? There certainly aren't any giant bats in Gloucestershire.

As well as working for Cresswell Associates, Paola and Jon are also involved in "Action Comores". This is a voluntary conservation organisation working in the Comoros Islands (Comores), which are situated in the Western Indian Ocean between Madagascar and mainland Africa. The Comores lie at the head of the Mozambique Channel, between the north of Madagascar and East Africa.



The three islands Grande Comore, Moheli and Anjouan make up the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comores (RFIC), which has been independent since 1975 while a fourth island - Mayotte - is a French dependency.

The flagship species of the project is Livingstone's flying fox (*Pteropus livingstonii*). This is one of the rarest fruit bats in the world and current population estimates suggest there are only around 400 individuals of this species left in the wild. Livingstone's flying fox lives in mountain forests on the islands of Anjouan and Moheli, roosting on steep sided valleys; it is rarely seen at low altitudes. The forest provides the flowers and fruits that form its diet. Most characteristic are its round

'Mickey Mouse' ears.



It weighs around 700g and has a large wing-span (around 1.4m) with a broad wing profile. It flies with a slow wing-beat, frequently glides and can also soar on thermals.

The Comores are also home to two other fruit bats: the Comores flying fox and the Comores roussette. The Comores flying fox is smaller and more common than Livingstone's flying fox and is found on all four Comorien islands, and also on Mafia Island, close to Tanzania. With a wingspan of about 1m and weigh around 450g, it can be easily distinguished by its yellow head and shoulders, pointed ears and narrower wing profile. Roosts may be found from sea level up to 800m. This bat is better adapted to the secondary forest and cultivation found on most of the Comores, taking more cultivated crops in its diet. Roosts of 500 to 2,000 individuals have been seen.

The Comores roussette is much smaller than either of the other two bats. It weighs around 45g with a wingspan of 0.45m. It has been caught on Grande Comore, Moheli and Anjouan, in forest habitats. It appears to be entirely nocturnal (unlike the others which can be seen flying in the afternoon and evenings) and may roost in tree hollows or caves.

The RFIC is one of the poorest of African states. Geographical isolation and a lack of natural resources have resulted in a weak economy based almost entirely on the export of spices and perfume oils.

The islands, particularly Anjouan, are suffering from severe environmental problems, exacerbated by a rapidly expanding population. The current population increase rate is 3.7% per year, one of the highest in the world. As the population continues to expand, more marginal land is needed for growing food, and more wood is needed for fuel.

Deforestation continues at a high rate - Anjouan has lost 73% of its natural forest between 1971 and 1986; Moheli has lost 53% between 1969 and 1986. Deforestation causes soil erosion and the consequent loss of watersheds. Of 45 permanent rivers present on Anjouan in 1925, only 11 remained in 1992. In the dry season, some areas need tankers to deliver drinking water. In the wet season, some rivers run red with eroded soil; this is carried out to sea where it smothers the coral reefs.

Paola and Jon explained how they, along with other Action Comores volunteers, had visited the islands regularly since 1992 with the primary objective to help alleviate the environmental problems of the Comores through scientific research, direct conservation and environmental education.

They have adopted the slogan "People Need Forests Need Fruit Bats" to show how interdependent fruit bats, forest and people are in the Comores. Of course this is true wherever fruit bats are found, not just in the Comores. They also use the slogan: "Protect our Forests... Protect our Fruit Bats... Protect our Future" Both these slogans have been used on stickers distributed in the Comores.



People Need Forests

Forests supply timber for construction and firewood, provide fruits and other food to eat, provide medicines and a whole host of other essential products for every day life. Tropical forests are also vital in their role of protect soils from erosion and safeguarding watersheds, and hence the rivers that supply water for drinking and irrigation.



Forest Need Fruit Bats

Fruit bats are important agents of forest survival and regeneration, because of their role in pollination and seed dispersal for many tropical trees. It is estimated that

at least 443 products useful to man, from 163 plant species, rely to some degree on bats for pollination or seed dispersal. These include: timber products such as balsa; fruits such as avocados, bananas, durian, figs, guavas, mangoes, peaches and cloves; nuts such as cashews; and fibres such as agave, manila, sisal and kapok. Fruit bats are particularly important on small tropical islands where there is a limited fauna capable of pollination and seed dispersal.

It is also true to say that fruit bats also need forests - forests provide trees for bats to roost in, and a diverse range of food items for the bats.

People Need Fruit Bats

It follows from the above arguments that people need fruit bats.

As part of their work, Action Comores in association with the Discovery Channel have produced a film about the Livingstone's flying fox in the Comores entitled "Land of the Giant Bat". This is to be shown in the US soon and will probably be shown on the Discovery Channel in the UK sometime in the future. However, those present at the talk didn't have to wait (or subscribe to satellite or cable TV) since we were lucky enough to have an exclusive pre-view of the film. This is definitely worth looking out for when it makes it to British TV.

Bat Diary

Thursday 20th January – 7:30pm

Ian Tanner - "*Habitat assessment and its implications for bats*"
Ian works for the Warwickshire Habitat Biodiversity Audit. This is a project that aims to map all the habitats in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull. The project has been funded through a partnership between Warwickshire County Council, all the local authorities in the area, English Nature, Environment Agency and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Wednesday 23rd February – 7:30pm

Jeff Lewis - "*Warwickshire's badgers*"

Learn about some other fascinating nocturnal British mammals.

Both talks will take place in the Senior Common Room, Avon Building, Westwood Site, University of Warwick, Kirby Corner Road, Coventry. If you need more information about how to find the University of Warwick then please get in touch.