



The Echo



Newsletter of the Warwickshire Bat Group

July 2003

A BAT ON THE THUMB.....



As ever apologies, this will be the first proper newsletter of the year. We were sorry not to see more of you at the AGM, but realise that it was fairly short notice & that Monday nights aren't always appealing after the first working day of the week! (Report later in the newsletter).

STOP PRESS AGAIN

We now have details of the exciting evening at Brandon Marsh Reserve mentioned in the last newsletter.

Sue

Parsons of Norfolk Bat Group is giving a talk (*with fancy PowerPoint presentation I hear*) on the Norfolk Barbastelle survey, with a bat walk on the reserve to follow.

Thursday 21st Aug. at 7.00pm.

I know it's a bit of an early start if you've got to get home from work, but it promises to be well worth it. The evening has been organised by the volunteers who look after the reserve, and WBG members have been specially invited to attend.

(They would like us to get involved with surveying for bats & checking bat boxes on the reserve, so a good turnout would create the right impression).



TOWN & COUNTRY SHOW

After a break last year, WBG will again be having an information stall at the Town & Country at the Royal Show Ground, Stoneleigh.

This is on Aug. Bank Holiday weekend, 23rd, 24th & 25th. Dot & Rob will be manning the stall all 3 days, and Ray Dutton of Birmingham & Black Country Bat Group has kindly volunteered to help out on Sun. 24th.

However, we have 2 places going spare on both the Sat. & Mon. and we wouldn't mind some extra help!

What could be nicer than spending a day telling the public how wonderful bats are and dispelling some of the wilder myths! A real chance to do something for bat conservation that doesn't involve staying up half the night. (Skills required: the ability to say "It's probably a pipistrelle" and "I don't know, but I think I can help you to find out. Please help yourself to the leaflets).

If you can offer to help, please contact Dot by 'phone or e-mail at the Echo SOON.

.....IS WORTH ONE IN THE HAND





AGM Mon 23rd June.

The AGM was held at Coombe Abbey Country thanks to the rangers there, and particularly WBG's Martin Baxter.

Attendance was rather low, only 13 members having made it, and apologies were received from Susie Duke & George Burton.

Paul Elliott, our chairman, gave his report summarising the previous years activities. He particularly mentioned that the splendid winter talk from Phil Richardson was the only one we had managed to organise this time & pledged to try to restore our talks programme to its former glory (sorry Paul, but you did open your mouth!). He would therefore be pleased to receive any suggestions for speakers, especially with contact details. They don't even have to be 100% batty.

Honourable mentions were given to John Waller, for his building of good relations with the NT through his bat walks at Charlecote, to Pete Maule for his continued supply of bat boxes on demand for all manner of projects (most recently 45 for a project with Friends of Abbey Fields in Kenilworth), and to Julia Waller for WBG's excellent website.

George Burton gets a dedicated service medal for giving a talk to a Coventry Rotarians BREAKFAST club! George wasn't able to attend because of his wife's illness (hope things are better soon) but had indicated that he would be willing to take on a role looking at Planning & Development issues as they affect bats, and also would be happy to take on our bat record keeping. Gratefully accepted!

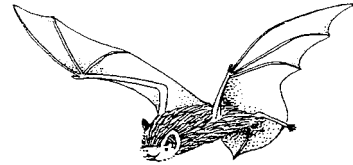
The Warwickshire Bat Hospital has had to be put into suspended animation as Susie has a new job which will be taking her all over the country. Any volunteers who would like to get involved in collecting/caring for sick & injured bats would be very welcome. Julia Summerton (SEStaffs & WBG) who is Regional rep. is tearing her hair out looking for cover.

John Waller, with his membership hat on, reported that we had lost some members over the last 12 months but gained some new ones. The membership therefore remains at about the same (fairly healthy) level. As treasurer, John informed us that WBG's bank balance is reasonably healthy and that suggestions for projects/equipment where this could be used would be welcomed.

John also brought a draft for our new membership leaflet, we're nearly out of the old one, and a few suggestions were made to "fine tune" it.

There being no other offers/suggestions, all the job holders present agreed to carry on for another year (and by implication anyone not there who'd ever agreed to anything was still lumbered!).

We then watched an enjoyable batty "home movie" of Paul's and the brilliant bat sequence from Life of Mammals before finishing the evening with a pleasant bat walk in Coombe Country Park.



John & Ros Matthews are two of the busiest people we know at this time of year, being experienced birders, involved heavily with the Snitterfield Bushes reserve and amongst the longest standing & most experienced "batty" people in the south of Warwickshire. We were therefore delighted & really grateful that with the minimum of coaxing they sent in the following article.

SNITTERFIELD BUSHES BAT BOXES

Checking bat boxes is always exciting and on the 6th June, 2003 at Snitterfield Bushes it was no exception. Thirty eight boxes were checked on the north side of the reserve and of these one box contained one male Brown Long Eared bat, four other boxes each contained a male Pipistrelle and two a female Pipistrelle. The big surprise of the evening was, however, a male Leislars bat in one of the boxes. Fortunately the bat was fairly quiet in the hand and we were able to examine it closely to be sure of identification. When released the bat flew off very fast along the ride and up into the open area looking more like a bird than a bat. We all commented on the speed at which it flew. A bat flew from one of the other boxes before I could get hold of it and therefore was not identified, very frustrating. Twenty one of the other boxes contained bat droppings, which shows how successful these type of flat boxes are. On the 10th June we checked the boxes south of the road and again were rewarded with another new species for the reserve, a male Whiskered bat. Two more male Pipistrelles were found and out of the fifteen boxes checked on this side of the road all had signs of being used.

Many thanks to group members who once again helped to monitor the Lesser Horseshoe colony at Gorse Farm. Despite our fears, after being told of vandalism to the site, we were very relieved to see bats emerging while we still had good light conditions and we could see the amazing agility of these creatures as they fly round obstacles. The first count on 5th June was 26 bats and the second on 15th June was 24 bats.

John & Ros Matthews

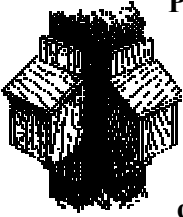


Friends of Abbey Fields

As mentioned in the AGM report, WBG are pleased to have forged strong links with the recently formed Friends of Abbey Fields. Abbey Fields in Kenilworth is a site where we have held successful bat walks in the past, and is a great example of how wildlife can be conserved right in the heart of the town. This is an extract from their newsletter.

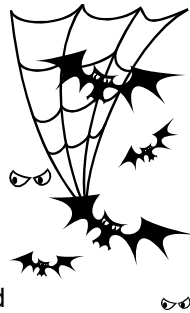
"The bat boxes have now been made for us by WBG & will shortly be erected.....The bat walk led by Paul Elliott from the Bat group was a great success.

Paul & his colleagues met a group of F.O.A.F. members & showed us how to distinguish between the different species of bats. We saw Noctule, Pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats feeding in Abbey Fields but also discovered a fourth species, either Brandt's or Whiskered, in an old Oak tree."



WBG E-Group.

If you have access to the Internet & you haven't joined in yet, why not e-mail info@warksbats.co.uk and get John to sign you up? As well as hearing about the latest events while you're still wondering where the Echo's got to, you can ask people questions, make your own comments and receive wonderful snippets direct to your PC. Like this one that appeared recently:



Verdant Bats

The mystery of a bat with green fur has been solved. Mammal fur comes in shades of brown, black, yellow and red. But biologists were intrigued when they found several species of bats in Papua New Guinea sporting olive-green fur.

"Lab tests have now revealed that the green hue is produced by microscopic algae growing on, and within, individual hair shafts," Deanna Byrnes of the University of Wisconsin told the annual meeting of the American Society of Mammologists last week.

One other animal uses a similar trick. Sloths cultivate green algae in their fur to help disguise them as they creep slowly around the forest canopy. Being green may also help camouflage the bats, as they roost under leafy branches, the researchers say. "It could be that

algae grows on lots of mammals in the tropics. We have just never looked before," says Byrnes.

New Scientist July 2003.

Barbastella Barbastellus.



The description of the Barbastelle bat in most identification guides is far from flattering. It has a short nose with nostrils pointing upward, and the expression "squat pug-like face" seems to be favoured by more than one author. With the addition of its quite distinctive ears

and its very dark, somewhat shaggy looking fur, it cannot be mistaken for any other species in Europe.

A medium-sized bat (wt. 6.0 to 13g, wingspan 26 to 29cm) it could be thought to be a bit of a bruiser, but actually with its narrow gape & weak teeth it preys on small delicate insects. It emerges in early dusk and is a fast and skilful flier, hunting low over water and at treetop height along woodland edges. In Europe it seems to prefer wooded foothills and mountainous regions. It is found across Europe from the UK to the Caucasus mountains, and in Norway and Sweden to about 60deg N. Only small numbers are found in most areas and there are no records for S.Spain, most of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece.

In Great Britain the Barbastelle is considered very rare, with until the late 1990's no known nursery roosts. Here in Warwickshire there are only two records that WBG know of, one being a hibernating bat found by a party led by our chairman a couple of winters ago. A check of a known hibernation site was being made on NT property, but even Paul was so taken by surprise that it took him two or three looks to feel sure.

One of the difficulties in locating these bats is their unusual echolocation call, which has two elements: A loud, short CF/FM signal at 35-28khz and a low, short CF/FM signal at 43-33khz. This can be easily dismissed as a confusing aberration, particularly if other more common species are also present.

Over recent years some progress has been made in locating and studying Barbastelles, and the most significant colony to date was identified in 1996 at Paston barn in north Norfolk. In 2002 EN were able to further protect this site by taking a 50yr lease on the barn from North Norfolk Historic Buildings Trust.

Ecologist Sue Parsons has been monitoring the bats there for four years. "The barn is bat heaven. Natter's bats roost in the mortice joints while brown long-eared bats hang from the thatch. The Barbastelles and both pipistrelle species tuck themselves into discrete cracks all over the place."

Hope that's whetted a few appetites for Aug 21st.

DIARY.

Sat. 2nd Aug.

The Whitacres & Shustoke Annual Show

At Blythe Hall, Shustoke (B4114)

WBG display stands & info. stall.

11.00 – 17.30

Weds. 20th. Aug.

Kingsbury Water Park

Bat Night – A short talk followed by jacket potatoes in the Old Barn Coffee Shop & then a bat walk.

Meet at the Info Centre.

19.30 – 22.00

Cost (inc. food) Adults: £3.50 Concessions: £3.00

Booking essential 01827 872660

Thurs. 21st. Aug.

Brandon Marsh Visitors Centre

Talk by Sue Parsons of Norfolk Bat Group followed by bat walk on the reserve.

19.00

Fri. 22nd. Aug.

Bat walk at Draycote Water Res/Country Park.

20.00.

Sat. 23rd. – Mon. 25th. Aug.

Town & Country Show, Royal Show Ground, Stoneleigh. (see press for details)

WBG info stand.

Fri. 12th. Sept.

Charlecote Park (NT)

Bat Walk

19.30 – 21.00

Cost: £3.00 Booking essential 01789 470277
(apologies for incorrect phone no in the last Echo)

Sat. 13th. Sept.

Charlecote Park (NT)

Bat Walk

19.30 – 21.00

Cost: £3.00

Booking essential 01789 470277

Fri. 19th. Sept.

Nuneaton Bat Walk – Nuneaton, Bar Pool balancing lake.

Meet at the lake in Elizabeth Road.

19.30

Please book in advance – 024 7637 6494

024 7637 6557

Sun. 19th. Oct.

Autumn Wildlife & Bird Fair.

Brandon Marsh Visitors Centre.

WBG info stand.

If you would like directions to any of the events, e-mail info@warksbats.co.uk or phone or e-mail the Echo & we'll try to help.



And finally.....

**Why does the little pipistrelle each year about July,
Insist on going gad around, when it can hardly fly?
Are roosts so dull & stuffy that it must go walkabout,
Exploring's often fun, but does its mother know it's out?**

**In offices & factories, in beach huts by the sea,
In almost any place that really young bats shouldn't be,
In houses up & down the land, hanging up on doors,
Or curtains, backs of sofas, or scuttling on floors,**

**Tucked behind gas boilers, in day as well as night,
And clinging to a bedspread once, that gave someone a fright!
If you're not used to bats it's a surprise, I wouldn't doubt it,
But why does half the country phone US up to talk about it!**

**(If you're looking for excitement, if you're feeling kinda bored,
Try moving pipistrelles from Walsgrave's psychiatric ward).**

