



The Echo



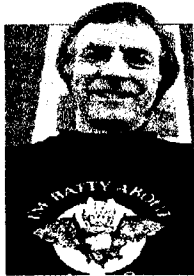
Newsletter of the Warwickshire Bat Group

November 2002

I know, it's been seven months since the last newsletter. We hope you've all had a batty and productive summer. Here at the Echo we've had one of those years of floundering about and getting nowhere and suddenly the nights are drawing in. As for various reasons we haven't made it many of the monthly WBG pub meetings, we don't know much of what anyone else has been up to either.

So, how about dropping us a line or an e-mail about your batty year so there'll be something other than my ramblings to fill the next edition?

STAR ATTRACTION – THURS. NOV 21st.



You heard about his new job in the last edition of the Echo. Many of you have been entertained and enlightened by him before and now WBG are proud to announce "He's back"!

Yes folks, for one night only, your chance to hear Mr. Phil

Richardson (don't be put off by the scary photo) at the Westwood Campus, Warwick University and his adventures as the National Trusts first ever National Bat Conservation Officer.

Phil is chairman of neighbouring Northants Bat Group, was for many years chairman of the BCT, and is author of the highly recommended "Bats by Phil Richardson" published by the Natural History Museum £9.95 (available from all good bookshops, why not get a copy & bring it along for him to sign..... "You can send the cheque later Phil").

The evening starts at 19.30 and will hopefully include tea/coffee & biscuits as usual. Directions to the University are included at the end of the newsletter. There is also a map to help you find our monthly informal meetings in Kenilworth. 1st Monday of every month at 20.00 (Bank hols 2nd)



17th. NATIONAL BAT CONFERENCE – READING UNIVERSITY, SEPT. 7th & 8th.

Sadly, WBG wasn't as well represented at conference this year, with only 5 of us in attendance (well, 4½ really as Julia S. is there as chair of SEStaffs BG as well. Actually, as Dot & I are also members of SE5BG, I suppose that's 3½). Fortunately, the other two were Gareth and Katrena, and Gareth bravely volunteered to write a conference report.

17TH National Bat Conference – an overview.

Following last year's mad dash up to Nottingham on the Saturday morning, Katrena and I decided to book half a day's leave and saunter down to Berkshire in time for an evening bat walk led by Berks & South Bucks BG. The walk took us via many known roosts (where the bats weren't playing that night) to the large university lake, where Pips, probable Daubenton's and a Scrotine were detected.

Saturday's first session of lectures focused on International Bat Conservation. First up was Paul Bates, who described recent field surveys in Myanmar (formerly Burma) which have revealed five more species to be present, including the Bumblebee bat (*Craseonycteris thonglongyai*). Ninety-two species are now known to be present in Myanmar, demonstrating the country's importance in bat conservation.

Next was Dr Ingo Reiger of the University of Basle, who gave an interesting presentation on the social organisation of Daubenton's along the River Rhine, including photographs of a Mk II Ford Fiesta laden with bat monitoring kit! Dr Reiger found that, in the active season, the bats split into sex-specific groups. Study of the females revealed that bats hunting together over the Rhine came from differing forests, while bats roosting together in one forest did not necessarily hunt together. Thus, two distinct social systems of "hunting" and "roosting" were identified.

Simon Mickleburgh, of Flora & Fauna International, described the criteria by which bats are classified as "critically endangered". Typical bats fitting this category are island-dwellers, with little available habitat and typically high human pressure. However, on islands such as Rodrigues, careful management is leading to a bat recovery.

The end of the session signalled the now familiar mad scramble to sign up for the afternoon workshops. This produced the sight of Rob covering the 50m in a record time, having learnt from previous years! There has got to be a better way of organising this.....suggestions on postcards to the BCT.

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The second session began with Phil Richardson outlining his year's work as Bat Conservation Officer with the National Trust. Phil has been involved in educating building managers about bat issues, especially DEFRA licensing, as obvious conflicts between bats in residence and the need for building renovation existed. Wider implications include the consideration of estate management with respect to bats; for example, consideration of whether extensive tree felling would discourage Stackpole Horseshoe bats from using safe commuting corridors to the nearby pools. Phil has many ideas for further work, and presented a petition for all delegates to sign to pressurise the Trust into giving him a further year's employment! Colin Catto brought the conference up to date with the progress of the national BMP (details to follow in a BCT newsletter), then Frank Greenaway presented recent work on surveying for Bechstein's. Conventional survey methodologies have proven of little value for these creatures, as the echolocation call is quiet and easily confused with other *Myotis* species, the bat regularly hibernates in trees and is therefore difficult to find, and the bat is a forest dweller and therefore rarely encountered incidentally. Frank developed an unconventional technique by synthesising a bat call and playing with it until the call attracted bats (a long, quite loud FM sweep proved successful). The methodology was successful in attracting predominantly female Bechstein's, including some pregnant bats (along with other, predominantly male bats of other species) which were then caught with mist nets. As the females rarely travel far from the maternity colony, the pregnant individuals were taken to denote a new roost. The methodology could prove a useful survey tool, but it was stressed that little is known about bat calls and the methodology may be harmful if used indiscriminately (and is highly licencable!!).

Following an update on the BCT's work and the lunch interval (the food was pretty good, although it would have been nice to have a vegetarian curry option, having been attracted to the "curry corner" by the excellent smell!) came the workshop sessions. Katrena and I attended sessions on how trees rot and are damaged to create bat roosts, and on the use of the BCT fibroscope, which is an interesting and quite manoeuvrable tool for survey work. However, care must be taken in order to not create a new speciality dish of fried bat (the light source can get very hot!) and the individual must be fit (to lug around the powerpack) and brave (twelve grand's worth of kit, you know!). Seriously, used in the right circumstance, the device could be useful on bridge or barn surveys where those awkward crevices exist (email the BCT for hiring details).

After the conference dinner was the ceilidh. No members of WBG were seen dancing, although the bar was frequented. Maybe next year.....?

Sunday began with Katie Parsons describing her studies tracking Daubenton's and Natterer's, followed by Margaret Clarke describing work in the Pengelli Forest NNR searching for Barbastelles and Bechstein's, woodland bats that had been rarely recorded in Wales. Transect-walking using time-expansion bore fruit with the detection of Barbastelles. Bechstein's have proven so far to be elusive following a batbox-checking exercise. Niall Moore presented work by the Central Science Laboratory, where studies of immature woodland, planted through DEFRA Farm Woodland set-aside schemes. Bats generally favoured plantations over arable land, and at one study site, weedy plantations were favoured over less weedy areas. Radiotracking studies found Brown Long-Eared and Whiskered adults foraged further distances than

juveniles and were consistent over time in which areas were chosen for foraging (juveniles appeared to explore the landscape a lot more, possibly searching out the best sites).

Following coffee, John Dobson of Essex BG described a woodland north of Coggeshall, where protective wartime bunkers have been converted for bat use. Bat bricks and standing deadwood, with added slots, were two of the measures performed. Seven years after the start of the project, the number of hibernating bats in the bunkers has reached seventy-eight, including fifty-three Natterer's. Ian Davidson-Watts presented research on foraging habitat preference of 45 and 55 pipistrelles. Ian's research demonstrated that the 55 pips tended to favour wetland habitats with abundant mature trees, while 45 pips were more generalist in their feeding areas.

Tony Martin of the E3 partnership presented the results of trawling round the Northumberland countryside at 15mph with bat detectors (apparently in first gear, although I'd favour second at that speed!!). The bats essentially avoided towns and amenity land while favouring denser woodland (often on "patch" level rather than extensive stands). Tony also discussed the implications of planning policy, which essentially favours the protection of smaller villages and large-scale, productive farms (both essentially poor in biodiversity and in supporting insects), whilst smaller-scale, traditional farms may be readily bought up for development. He also stressed that brownfield land could be reasonably biodiverse and support fair insect populations for foraging bats.

Carol Williams presented a study of the winter ecology of the Lesser Horseshoe in Devon. The bats essentially fed on the prey that was available at this time of year, and favoured lesser and yellow dung-flies where available. As these flies are associated with cattle dung, pasture, and also damp woodland, were favoured foraging areas. Mean winter foraging range was 1.2km with a maximum of 2.1km travelled.

After not winning anything in the raffle and listening to the customary comedy answers to the quiz, Anthony Fooks discussed the diversity of Lyssaviruses in bats. He appeared to advocate that all people handling bats should be vaccinated and receive boosters every three months or so. I overheard individuals at coffee commenting that this was excessive and perhaps a failure to realise that the majority of batworkers are handling healthy bats – comments would be welcome. (See following "Bats & Rabies" Did someone know this was coming when they invited Anthony Fooks?)

Liam Lysaght elaborated on the Irish Heritage Council's work in bat conversation; he was followed by Paula Senior of Leeds University who discussed social segregation in the famous Wharfedale Daubenton's. Two discrete upper-dale and down-dale male populations were observed; females tending to remain down-dale. Studies demonstrated that an upstream bat was as likely to farther young as a down-dale bat, suggesting that the more marginal up-dale habitat (where bats forage further and for longer, and had lower body mass than their downstream counterparts) was not impinging on the up-dale males' reproductive success.

The conference closed with a discussion of Paston Great Barn in Norfolk, where the resident Barbastelles are being protected by a long lease on the site bought by English Nature. A management group is being created to protect and study the bats whilst conducting repairs to the building.

Gareth Taylor.

ATS & RABIES – or what you hear on your way to Bat Workers parties.



So there we were, on our way to Chris Sherlock's (B'ham & Black Country Bat Group) 40th. Birthday party with John & Julia, when Radio 4 News calmly informs us that a bat suspected of carrying

rabies has been found in Lancashire! Naturally, this was avidly discussed by all the bat workers at the party for at least 5 mins., after which we all realised that none of us had any further information.

Those of you on the WBG e-group will know that the bat world's information exchange soon got going, but I think most of us were holding our breath waiting to see what sensationalist nonsense the press would make out of the story. For once, we can be relieved to say, the reporting was fairly responsible. For those who missed it at the time, this was Ceefax on 2nd. Oct.: "Bat Rabies Strain Could Be in Britain.

A strain of bat rabies, which in rare cases can affect humans, may be present in the UK's bat population. Further tests on a Daubenton's species bat that bit a woman in Lancashire have confirmed the presence of European Bat Lyssavirus 2. The Government said the result might indicate the disease was present at a 'very low level' among bats in the UK. It is only the second known case of the rabies strain being found in Britain."

Not too awful I think you'd agree, and they had in their previous take on it "Woman Bitten by Bat Carrying Rabies" (a headline we could have done without!) mentioned that the woman was a bat conservationist & that she had received "post-exposure" treatment but was reported to be suffering no symptoms.

For those of you who didn't hear at the time, the "woman" is a Lancashire bat worker called Gail Armstrong, and this is her own report of what happened: "I collected a juvenile Daubenton (*Myotis*) bat on 7/7/02. She was weak & had an injured wing but otherwise seemed okay. She did well in captivity although the wing remained useless.

About 9 weeks after she arrived, she suddenly became aggressive & agitated. Tried to bite me several times on the hand, but they are such small bats she never broke the skin.

Central Veterinary Laboratories recommended I just observe her. Over 10 days her symptoms progressed. She started roosting in the open, tried to bite anything that came in front of her, started trembling & having spasms.

She was euthanased & sent for testing. The test proved positive for European Bat Lyssavirus 2 which has been found only in Daubenton & Pond bats with only 10 cases so far in Europe.

If it had been on the South or East Coast, it could be assumed that the virus had travelled from the Continent. But I am in the North West of England which is why it was surprising. The bat was found in the garden of a house on a canalside.

The news has died down thankfully, BCT have put out guidance for bat workers and hopefully research can continue without any fuss.

I have a restriction from DEFRA on my 'bat room' and they have 2 of my bats under observation since they came into contact with the affected bat."

The BCT have issued a very useful information handout, and EN have forwarded it to all licenced workers, but if you haven't already seen it once (or twice) and would like to, just contact the Echo & I'll send you a copy.

Perhaps the main points of interest are these:

European Bat Lyssavirus is a strain of rabies which has been found sporadically in insectivorous bats in Northern Europe. Confirmation of EBL will not affect UK's rabies-free status.

There has been 1 previous bat-associated rabies case in the UK, a Daubentons bat found in Newhaven, Sussex in 1996.

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency carries out passive surveillance on up to 200 bats each year for EBLs. Over the past 15 years all cases apart from Newhaven & this years Lancashire one have returned negative results.

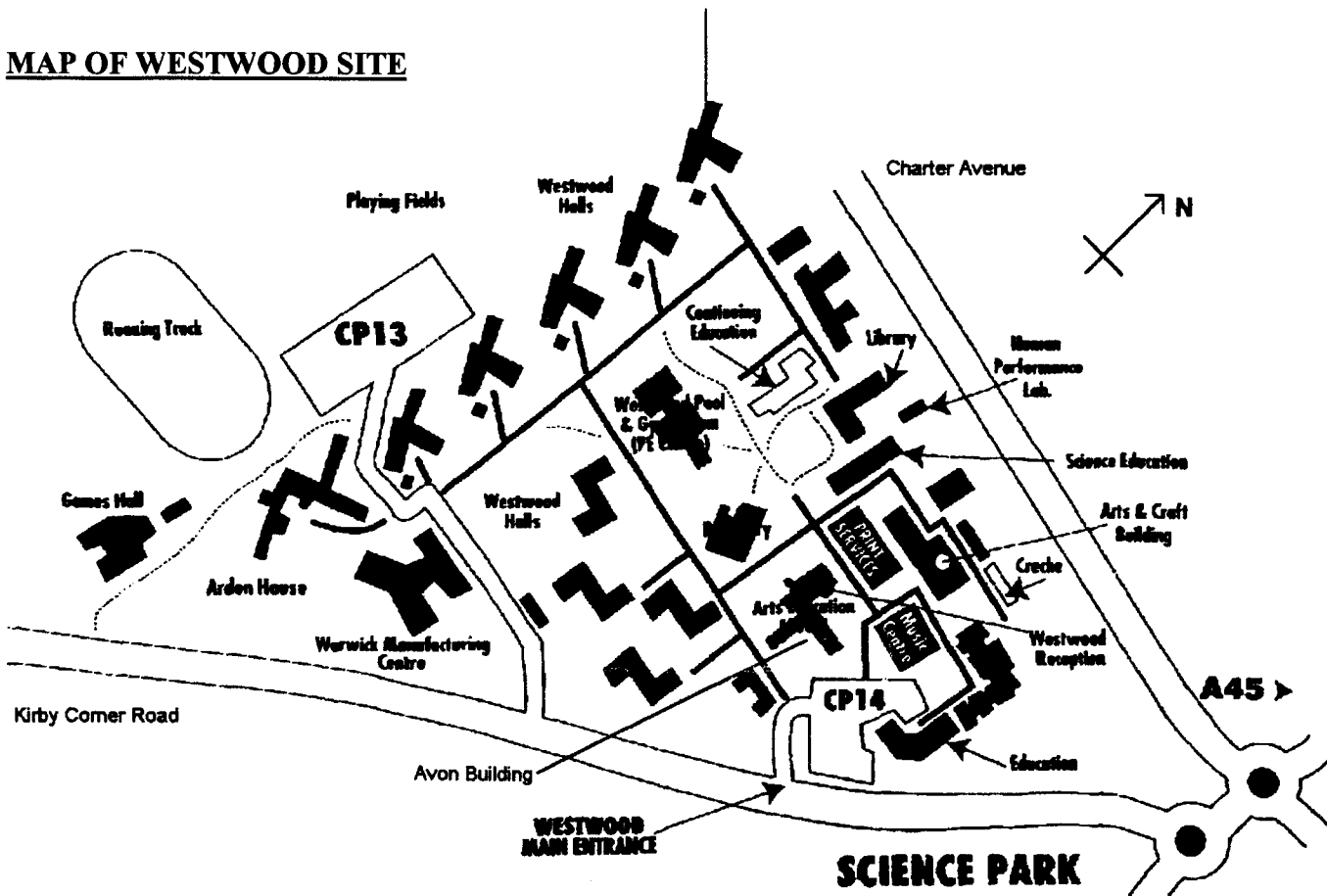
On rare occasions there has been transmission of EBLs to terrestrial mammals. On two occasions sheep have been infected and in 2002 EBL was detected in a stone marten in Germany. Since 1977 there have been 3 human deaths in Europe attributed to EBL infections, all in cases where humans had been in close contact with bats and had received no post-exposure treatment.

As the only way EBLs can be transmitted is by the bite of an infected bat, the conclusions would seem to be: 1. The chances of contracting rabies from a British bat would seem to be slightly less than a win on the lottery & 2. If you find a bat acting like Gail's, avoid the temptation to stick a finger in its mouth!

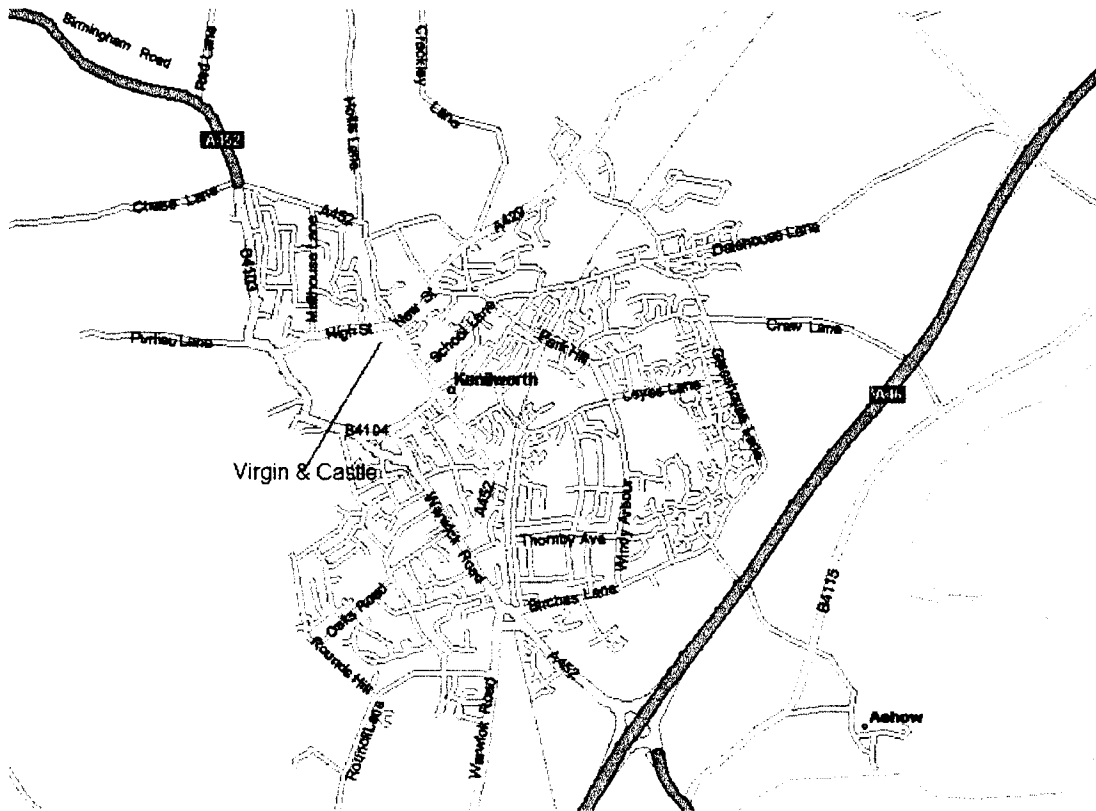
As Nick Ross might say, "Don't have nightmares!"



MAP OF WESTWOOD SITE



The University of Warwick is well sign posted from the A45 in Coventry. Make your way to the main entrance-car park 14 where there will be signs and/or someone to direct you.



This is where we hold our monthly informal meetings.