

OUR BBQ WAS A BIG SUCCESS!

The weather was in our favour on Sunday 2nd August 2009, no umbrellas needed! Thank you to all of you who attended the BBQ, we all had fun, we had so much food and drink around, thank you all. A big thank you to the band, 'Three's a Crowd'. Some nice music to listen too. We all had the pleasure of being in George's garden- a big thank you to you and your family, and for the night lanterns, these gave a nice ambience as the skies darkened.



The raffle went very well we made £33.00 for our Bat Group. Fourteen prizes were up for grabs including first prize of a large pink Orchid plant which was donated to us by Blooms Garden Centre, Rugby, very kind. A big thank you to all the children who helped collect the money and helped with pulling out the tickets from the bag.



The quiz was great fun. First prize was a bottle of Jacobs Creek Chardonnay South Eastern Australia and for second and third prize, boxes of chocolates. A big thank you to Mark who stepped in at the last minute to run the quiz for me.



All of the children enjoyed the find the bat game! The prizes for first and second were books on mammals and the prizes for third and fourth were FSC fold up bat guides. Not to leave out the other children- they all had bags of sweets!

The Batty BBQ get together is going to be an annual event for the bat group. Look out for details for the date next year.

Look out for the next social batty do coming up, which is a Christmas meal in a pub or hotel, get together more details look out on the groups emails.

Janet Watson

GREAT TITS ACQUIRE TASTE FOR BATS

A Hungarian cave has turned out to be a larder of highly unusual food for great tits: hibernating pipistrelle bats.

Over two winters, researchers found the birds were systematically hunting bats by sight and sound as they hibernated through the cold months.

Writing in the journal *Biology Letters*, the scientists say this is the first proof of bat-hunting in songbirds.

Great tits usually dine on smaller prey such as insects and seeds, with bat-eating probably very rare.

The researchers found the birds preferred other food when they could get it.

"It doesn't look like this is an overwhelming thing that threatens the bat population," said Bjorn Siemers from the Max-Planck-Institute for Ornithology in Seewiesen, Germany, one of the research

team.

"So then the question to ask is 'how do they invent it?', and so far we can only speculate - it could be a kind of cultural learning," he told BBC News.

In previous decades, researchers have reported finding dead or injured bats outside caves in Sweden and Poland.

In one case, the bat was being eaten by a great tit, in others they bore wounds that could have been inflicted by a tit's beak; but there was no proof that the birds had hunted or killed them.

If they did, said Dr Siemers, it raised the possibility that the habit or skill of bat-hunting was carried along migration routes.

Rare treat

During two field seasons in the Bukk Mountains of northeastern Hungary, the researchers documented 16 cases of great tits (*Parus major*) hunting, killing and eating a hibernating bat in the one cave.

Pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) are about one-quarter of a great tit's size.

The birds would fly close to the cave walls, landing frequently and often disappearing into crevices. They would either eat the bats there and then or carry them away for feeding.



When their hibernation is disturbed, the bats squeak in the audible range for humans and great tits.

The researchers speculated that the birds may have learned to listen for these squeaks - and when they recorded some and played them back, the birds responded with interest about 80% of the time.

However, the team believes the birds can only bat-hunt when they can see their prey, as they can in this wide-mouthed cave where lots of light penetrates - again suggesting it would be a rarely-found

behaviour.

In a later experiment, the scientists provided other food - sunflower seeds and bits of bacon - and found that the birds preferred to eat those, leaving the bats largely untouched. This raises the suggestion, said Dr Siemers, that bats are a food of last resort in a harsh winter.

Graham Madge, a spokesman on conservation issues for the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), said it was new to him.

"Normally, great tits are feeding on things like insects, beetles, spiders, seeds and maybe fruit in winter - there's no indication they'd be able to predate something like a bat. It's incredible behaviour."

He noted that in the UK, a close relative, the blue tit, has also been quick to take advantage of novel foods.

"There was this phenomenon where blue tits learned how to open the foil tops of milk bottles, and quickly this behaviour spread through the population; so they're quick learners," he said.

Richard.Black-INTERNET@bbc.co.uk

RARE BAT REWRITES RECORD BOOKS

One of Europe's rarest bats has been found at a site in Wales further west than ever before recorded.

The Bechstein's bat is an elusive creature that likes to hide in the undergrowth of ancient woodland.

It lives in a number of countries in western, central and southern Europe, but is rare throughout its range.

Now a researcher from the University of Bristol has identified a solitary male specimen in Pembrokeshire, 100km west of earlier recorded sites.



University of Bristol researcher Matt Zeale found the bat while pursuing another species in woodland owned by The

National Trust at Colby in southern Pembrokeshire.

He told BBC News he couldn't believe his eyes when he found it in his trap: "I was really shocked though it was a nice surprise as well.

"Bechstein's have these quite long ears and a few other features you can use to tell them apart from the other species we have in the UK. So it was the first thing I thought of.

"Because they have never been recorded anywhere remotely near here, I had to double take and triple take and re-measure and re-measure just to make sure."

Ultrasonic bat lure

Mr Zeale was using an ultrasonic bat lure to attract a slightly less rare species, the Barbastelle, as part of his PhD research. The device makes bat calls for specific species so he was doubly surprised to find that he had caught a Bechstein's bat.



Having made his measurements, Mr Zeale let the bat go. He says what it was doing in this location is a mystery. Not only is it a long way from other recorded Bechstein sites, but the area is generally considered too wet for the species, which generally prefers dry conditions.

David Bullock, the National Trust's head of nature conservation said: "We can only speculate where this male Bechstein's bat might have come from. He either made an incredible journey from the Forest of Dean or Herefordshire or more likely there are other roosting sites waiting to be discovered in Pembrokeshire."

**By Judith Burns
Science and environment reporter,
BBC News**

BATS SET UP HOMES ON THE HIGHWAY

Bats born under bridges are larger and grow faster than those born in caves

Concrete bridges could make better roosts for certain species of bat than natural caves, according to research. Scientists in the US monitored the birth weight and growth of bat pups that were born under bridges over busy freeways, and pups born in caves.



They found that, rather than the relatively noisy man-made roosts being detrimental to the animals, pups born in bridges were larger and grew faster.

The findings are reported in the Journal of Zoology.

Lead researcher Louise Allen told BBC News that, because the Brazilian free-tailed bats she studied live in such large colonies, it is very difficult to repeatedly recapture and study them.

"You can't really do whole-life reproductive studies on them," she said. "So as a [measure] of reproductive success, I looked at birth size and how fast they grew."

When she carried out the study, Dr Allen, now based at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, was a member of Professor Thomas Kunz's research team at the University of Boston.

She and her team captured almost 200 bat pups at two sites in Texas - a natural cave roost and a bridge over a large highway.

They used foot-warming pads to prevent the tiny newborn bats from getting cold while they were being weighed.

To monitor their growth, Dr Allen recaptured the bats up to six times and measured the length of each animal's forearm bone - the long bone on the wing. "Not only were the bats in the bridges larger, they also grew faster," she told BBC News.

"They reached the size where they could go and start foraging on their own up to five days earlier [than the bats born in the cave]."



This finding was contrary to what the scientists expected.

They initially thought the environment - with traffic noise and pollution - would be "stressful" for the animals.

"In a stressful environment, animals often put reproduction to the side and concentrate on survival."

But when it comes to living above a busy road, it seems the benefits for these bats outweighed the disadvantages.

"The [bridges] are often closer to foraging sites and they are warmer," explained Dr Allen.

"So they can spend less time on thermal regulation and put more of that time into fat stores and bone growth."

Dr Allen explained that such man-made structures could provide "corridors" for these important creatures to expand their ranges if, as scientists predict, the changing climate moves US agriculture northwards.

"These bats rely heavily on agricultural pests... They feed on some of the most devastating agricultural pests in the US," she said.

She explained that when they are feeding their young, the bats can consume more than half their own body weight in insects each night.

She concluded: "Not every species [of bat] is going to respond the same to man-made habitat changes, but here we have an example of a species where the animals are doing just fine in a human environment."

By Victoria Gill
Science reporter, BBC News

BARBASTELLE RADIO-TRACKING PROJECT UPDATE

Following on from the success of our barbastelle radio-tracking adventures at Whichford Wood in 2007 and 2008 we decided to continue the project in 2009.

Two bat detector surveys in May detected common and soprano pipistrelles, whiskered/Brandts bats, long-eared bats, serotines and Natterers bats – mainly along the southern ride – as well as quite a few barbastelles.

During the four trapping sessions in June and August we caught common pipistrelles, a Natterer's bat, brown long-eared bats soprano pipistrelles, whiskered bats and of course barbastelle bats.

We were joined on the first trapping night by Bob Cornes of the Bedfordshire Bat Group who had given us a very interesting talk in March about his experiences of radio-tracking barbastelles in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. His presence must have brought us luck as the first bat caught that evening was a female barbastelle!

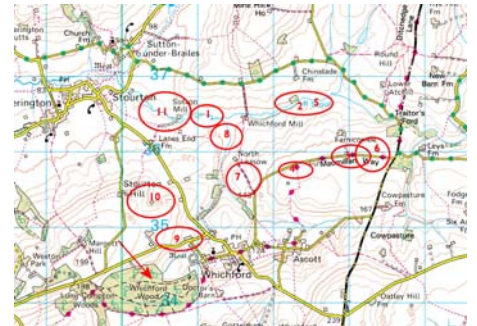
We attached a radio-transmitter and after 3 days spent trying to work out where it had disappeared to tracked it a young ash tree at the eastern edge of the wood. Amazingly it was only 2.5m above the ground in between two overlapping branches (see arrow). The aerial was hanging out of the cavity and the bat was on it's won.



On subsequent days the bat was tracked to an oak near to the southern edge of the wood which, based on the activity

surrounding the tree, was probably a maternity roost.

Evening and all night surveys revealed that the bat was spending a lot of time flying along and near to the River Stour 2.5km north-east of Whichford Wood, returning to its roost just before dawn.



In August we managed to catch two female barbastelles in the wood, one of which was tagged. A large number of volunteers from the bat group, assisted by volunteers from the Worcestershire and Oxfordshire Bat Groups helped to track the bat. Following the discovery of the maternity colony by David Lee and Denise Foster in the centre of the wood the bat was recorded spending time flying approximately 4.5 km north-west of the wood between little Wolford and Todenham. Unfortunately, despite the effort involved the bat was recorded rarely over the three week period that the tag was supposed to last.

On the whole the project was a great success. We managed to locate a number of barbastelle roosts within the wood and identify some of the important foraging areas nearby. We also managed to mobilise large numbers of volunteers!

This winter we will plan the way forward!

Jon Russ

THE GREAT BAT BOX HUNT

The author Mark Twain is reputed to have said "reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated" and so it turned out for many of the bat boxes at Abbey Fields in Kenilworth. The bat box foray began one Saturday morning in late August when a number of bat group members, accompanied by several Friends of Abbey Fields, set off in search of "dead" bat boxes. The Abbey Fields conservation group had been alerted by one of their members to an alleged number of bat boxes that were 'no more' (so to speak).



Abbey Fields is a mixed use amenity/conservation area within easy walking distance from the centre of Kenilworth. It combines a number of leisure resources such as tennis courts and a swimming pool with more natural areas of grassland, a large lake and wooded areas. It has a good number of mature large trees with quite a few natural holes. As such it has become quite a bat hotspot and we have seen or heard Noctule, Serotine, Daubenton's, Pips and other Myotis species. In addition there is an isolated building called The Barn which used to be part of the former monastery complex where Brown Long-eared have been known to take up residence.

Our search began along the various water courses that wind their way around the area. Finding the boxes was a little tricky as the wet weather we have had this year had allowed the trees and associated flora to flourish. So, some of the boxes were hidden away behind new growth of branches or prolific ivy. However, we managed to find a total of 39 in all and we were pleased to see that not only had most of them had survived but they were in very good condition, which is quite a compliment to the bat box builder; one Pete Maule. The boxes are of the flattish design that Pips seem to particularly like with roofing felt covering the top of the box to keep the residents and hinges dry, and with a hook fastening to allow licensed batworkers to inspect them.



In fact we only found 2 boxes that had not fared so well. One was actually on the ground hidden in some long grass and another had fallen off but been caught by a large branch. Unfortunately, we could not properly inspect most of the boxes as they had been fixed at quite a height above the ground by the local council's tree gang – definitely out of reach of the portable ladder we had brought. We agreed with the Friends of Abbey Fields representatives that we would need to liaise with the local council about the boxes. So that, under the supervision of a suitably licensed bat group member, the tree gang could revisit the site and remove any branches that were restricting the flight path to a box, clear away the overgrown ivy, and also clean out the boxes.

Thank you to everyone who turned out for this box check, especially to the Friends of Abbey Fields who are very diligent in their care of this popular bat haunt. They are always very hospitable and on this occasion bought a very welcome round of hot chocolate drinks at the park café.

John Waller

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 Bat Group'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.

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!

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

DECEMBER 2009-11-17

Warwickshire Bat Group Christmas Meal

Tuesday 8th December 2009 19:00
The Royal Oak, Station Rd, Brandon, Coventry, CV8 3HR (Tel: 024 7654 2304)

£17.95 per person (Children under the age of 10 half price)

Christmas Raffle

Can you please chose your starter, main and sweet and send your chosen meals with a cheque for £5 deposit payable to Warwickshire Bat Group and send it to Membership Secretary, Penny Angold, 4 Manor Road, Dorridge, Solihull, B93 8DX, by the closing date of Wednesday 25th November 2009, thank you..

The Christmas menu is attached to this newsletter

JANUARY 2010

Bat Group Talk Wednesday, 20 January 2010 19:45

Talk on DNA Analysis by Dr Robin Allaby of Warwick HRI. The venue is 'The Barn' at Brandon Marsh Visitor Centre, and the time 7.45pm for an 8pm start. Please note there is an automatic barrier at the entrance which will be staffed from about 7.30 until 7.55pm.

£1 members, £3 non-members, (no need to book, please pay at the door).

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

The next issue of the Echo is out on 15th March 2010. The deadline for articles is 1st March 2010. 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.

RECORDS ENTRY FORM

Note: On English Nature visits it is not necessary to fill in the whole form, as it could be attached to the EN Visit Form with the last two sections only (signatures) completed. Minimum requirements for a useful record are shown in **BOLD CAPITALS**.

DATE:

RECORDER:

Determinor: (Expert confirming record if relevant)

SITE ADDRESS:

Location within site: (If large)

GRID REF: (e.g. SP443552)

____ : _____

HABITAT TYPE: (e.g. Built-up area – residential)

Roost Location: (e.g. Behind roof tiles)

SPECIES: (if unknown – state 'indet bat')

Roost Type (e.g. Maternity)

No of Individuals:

Notes of Interest:

Activity of Individuals: (e.g. roosting)

By submitting this form the Recorder (author) accepts that this information will form part of County Ecology Unit records and may be disseminated to others for planning and/or conservation purposes.

Signed: (Recorder)

(Contact details:)

Where this record occurred on private property the owner should sign to confirm that the address may be used in the manner stated above.

Signed: (Site Owner)



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Menu

STARTER

Vegetable Soup

Smoked Trout Tartlet

Sticky Chilli & Lemon Chicken Thighs

Chicken Liver, Smoked Bacon & Cranberry Pate

MAIN

Traditional Roast Turkey

Porterhouse Stack

(£3 supplement)

Pan Fried Bream

Leek & Goats Cheese Risotto

Game pie

SWEET

Christmas pudding & Brandy Sauce

Treacle Tart with Vanilla Ice Cream

Poached Pear with a Berry Compote & Chantilly Cream

White Chocolate Brulee

Selection of Cheese & Biscuits