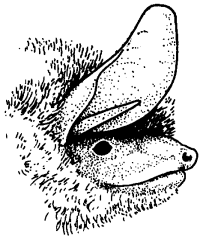




# BAT NEWS

Newsheet of the Warwickshire Bat Group Issue 6, Autumn 1996

## Bat Profile: - Natterer's Bat (*Myotis nattereri*)



Natterer's bat is a medium sized species. The ears are narrow, fairly long and slightly curved backwards at the tip; pink at the base, a little darker at the tip. The inner lobe of the ear (the tragus) is long, narrow and sharply pointed. A characteristic feature of this species is a fringe of very stiff bristles along the trailing edge of its broad tail membrane. Its rather pinkish limbs give rise to its old name of "red-armed bat"

(Bat profile information supplied by the Bat Conservation Trust)

<b>Description</b>	<b>Head and body length</b>	40-50 mm (1½"-2").
	<b>Forearm length</b>	36-43 mm (c. 1½")
	<b>Wingspan</b>	245-300 mm (10"-12").
	<b>Weight</b>	7-12g (c. ¼ oz).
	<b>Colour</b>	Fur light buff brown on back, white underneath. Bare pink face..
<b>Life cycle</b>	<b>Mating period</b>	Autumn and Winter.
	<b>Maternity colonies</b>	Late spring. Young: one, born end of June to early July, weaned at six weeks.
	<b>Colony size</b>	50-100+
	<b>Longevity</b>	Up to 20 years.
<b>Habitat and food</b>	<b>Summer roosts</b>	Old stone buildings and large-timbered barns, tree-holes.
	<b>Winter roosts</b>	Caves and mines, most underground shelters.
	<b>Feeding habitat</b>	Open woodland, parkland, hedgerows, along waterside vegetation.
	<b>Food</b>	Flies, moths, spiders, other small insects.



## The 7th European Bat Research Symposium

This was held from 12-16<sup>th</sup> August in Koningshof, a hotel and conference centre, near a small town on the outskirts of Eindhoven, Netherlands. The conference was attended by nearly 200 delegates from many European countries. The largest contingents included the British, Polish and of course, Dutch. The five-day conference consisted of talks and poster sessions along with workshops on bat detector survey work, education and conservation. Unfortunately the efforts of some delegates to observe the rare pond bat (*Myotis dasycneme*) on one of the detector workshops were hampered by torrential rain during which only one Daubenton's was fool enough to venture out in.

Talks were of varying quality the most bizarre of which was undoubtedly the half hour session on bats and philately, a discussion covering the representation of bats on postage stamps! Apparently there have been 133 bat stamps produced since the earliest, which was issued by the Imperial Chinese Post in 1894. Many of the talks focused on population distribution and status studies with a great deal of emphasis, understandably, on conservation requirements. Some of the more interesting talks included one by Tamsin Burland on the population structure of the brown long-eared bat in North East Scotland, a presentation on Europe's first bat cave as a tourist attraction (in Italy) and a talk by Sian Courts of Jersey Zoo on insectivory in two species of fruit bats. The conference was made all the more interesting by the surroundings which included an indoor swimming pool, bowling alley and acres of woodland to walk and bat detect in. The next European conference will be held in Krakow in 1999.

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## Snitterfield Bat Count - 1996

If you go down to the woods today be sure you go in disguise . . . . .

Explaining to my working colleagues what I was doing in the middle of an isolated wood, after dark, wearing a silly hat, carrying a powerful torch and a small black box which emits strange clicking sounds was never likely to be easy.

“What did you do last night Rod?”

“Oh, (with restrained enthusiasm) I went to Snitterfield Woods to count bats coming out of a ruined building.” - I realised as soon as I had opened my mouth that the statement was likely to be a conversation stopper.

And, so it proved. “Oh, (with casual indifference) really,” the conversation changed and drifted almost immediately to the other side of the office and clearly to much more important topics, like - “did you see Neighbours last night? Wasn’t Dean cool . . . . .” and I was left, quite alone, to reflect on last night’s nocturnal activities.

But strangely, that is exactly what I was doing and I let my mind wander back to last night. Together with several other members of the Bat Club we had encircled, in true SAS fashion, an old WW2 Air Field building which really was in the middle of a wood. So at the appointed hour, well about half past nine anyway, the building was ‘secure’ and nothing was coming out or going in without us noticing! The air was charged, nay, electric with anticipation!

George Yates, complete with clipboard, wandered around the building at ten minute intervals, recording activity. “Seen anything yet?” “Nope” “OK” “See you later!”

A little doubt started to creep through my mind when nothing happened and I started to wonder - why me? Why here? What for? And then . . . .

“There’s one!” I shouted,

“Are you sure?” from the gloom, “I didn’t see anything!”

“There’s another one” I shout and I’m getting excited now.

“Oh yes, I saw that one - brilliant!” came the reply.

The bats, silent and ‘swift like’ arched out of the building and vanished quickly into the surrounding woods. It had happened so quickly that you barely had time to blink. Blink and you might miss one, concentration was paramount.

I was positioned within 10 feet of an opening and had my Batbox 3 tuned to 110 kHz and on full volume. Not a peep! I had definitely seen bats depart but no sounds on this frequency. Was my detector faulty? Did I need a new battery? Whatever, there was no time to do other than watch.

The final count was 12.

In some ways it was a satisfying night because the numbers had increased on previous counts but were they Lesser Horseshoe bats? Were they really *Rhinolophus hipposideros*?

Yes! I believe so because John Matthews and George Yates previously had the very great privilege to see them at roost. Quite distinctive wrapped up in their wings and also quite small.

What came out flew quite differently to Pipistrelles, Whiskered or Brown Long-eared and the final confirmation went to Niamh, who had the good fortune to have one fly straight at her, within a couple of feet, and that characteristic continuous warble was definitely picked up. Yep, they were definitely Lesser Horseshoe bats.

We stumbled back through the wood to our cars and then picked our way carefully to the exit. A large fox stopped momentarily in my headlights and I gave way to a reluctant and bewildered rabbit. Moths and flying insects were everywhere - bat food!

*Rod Müller*

## Light Up The Sky (and the bats)

Heard bats but can’t see them?  
Do you need a powerful lamp?

Cluson Engineering Ltd make a range of really powerful lamps (fry a bat at a 1000 metres! Only joking) which might just solve your problem.

Their lamps are quite expensive but they have rechargeable batteries and spares for all models.

Cluson sell ex-display models (seconds) at greatly reduced prices. I recently bought their Smartlite (SM126), which retails at £94 new, but for £45 as a second. It looks new to me!

If you would like further details, Rod Müller has the Cluson brochures, spares and price list, etc., or give the company a ring on: 01730 – 264672

## Lesser Horseshoe Monitoring

As part of the first phase of the National Bat Monitoring Programme we were asked to carry out roost exit counts for the Warwickshire roosts of the Lesser Horseshoe bat. Thank you to all the people who volunteered their help with this and especially to George Yates, John Matthews and Chris Brooke-Harris who agreed to co-ordinate the counts. Twenty or more people were available at the right times to carry out the work which was good given the short time scale that the BCT had allowed for organisation! If you would have liked to help with this count but were not available at the right times, do not despair, since this is only the start of a five year project. More species will be monitored in future.

Up to 57 bats were recorded leaving the roost, which is a healthy number that confirms the importance of this

site in the tower of a ruined church. Access to the site was complicated by the presence of the Scotland football team for Euro 96 in the adjacent hotel and all the security arrangements that this entailed. In less salubrious surroundings at Snitterfield up to twenty-three bats were counted out. This was very encouraging since this recently discovered roost was thought to be much smaller than this. The disappointment was the Compton Verney site where the bats appear to have made themselves scarce because of restoration work being carried out.

The Lesser Horseshoe (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) is one of Britain's smallest and rarest bats. We are at the margins of its range in Warwickshire, its strongholds being in Wales and South-west England. It requires roosts that it can fly straight into and this limits the buildings that it can make use of. It is usually found roosting in buildings in a state of disrepair, barns or disused railway tunnels and mines. Work done in North Wales indicates that the roost sites are normally very close to trees, if not actually in woodland. Like its larger, even rarer relative, the Greater Horseshoe (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) the Lesser Horseshoe is unusual in making its ultrasonic echolocation calls through its nose, rather than its mouth. To aid this it has evolved a horseshoe shaped arrangement of fleshy nose leafs that help it to focus the sounds into a powerful "beam". Its short, broad wings mean that it flies slowly, but with terrific manoeuvrability.

It seems unlikely that there are only three roost sites in Warwickshire for this species. People living in the southern part of the county are encouraged to look out for buildings that could be roost sites. We really should have a more thorough look for unrecorded roosts.

### Bats and Rabies

The biggest news story concerning bats in recent months concerned a rabid bat found in Newhaven. It has been known for some time that bat-rabies was present in a small proportion of bats in continental Europe. Evidence suggests that this individual crossed the channel on one of the ferries operating out of Newhaven. The publicity has probably had an undesirable effect on the public perception of bats and could make the conservation message harder to get across. English Nature has issued the following information. Please use the facts related here to educate anyone that you encounter with misconceptions!

MAFF is stepping up its rabies monitoring programme to see if there is any evidence for British-based bat rabies, so if you find a dead bat it should be sent to them. A copy of the necessary form and associated details are enclosed.

The Ministry of Agriculture has recorded a case of rabies in a bat in Britain. This arose from a bat that was found grounded in Newhaven and taken to a member of the Sussex bat group for care. The bat behaved in an uncharacteristic way and bit the handler. A few days later the bat was put down and the corpse sent to the MAFF veterinary laboratory for routine rabies testing as part of their continuing surveillance. Tests for rabies, including a fluorescent antibody and other tests, gave a positive result. More specific tests to characterise the virus are currently in progress and will take some time to complete. At present the bat is believed to be a Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*). The person who was bitten and another who handled the bat are receiving post-exposure anti-rabies treatment as a precaution. Both are well.

It has been known for some years that rabies-related viruses, known as European bat lyssavirus (EBLV), exist in bats in Europe. The species most commonly involved is the serotine, (*Eptesicus serotinus*), though small numbers of other species, including Daubenton's bat, have also been recorded as positive. This strain of bat rabies is distinct from the sylvatic rabies that infects other mammals (notably foxes, cats and dogs) and has never been recorded from any animal other than a bat. It seems that there is no interchange of the virus between bats and other animals. Thus a bit with EBLV is not considered to be a route for rabies to spread into foxes or other wildlife in Britain. The situation is quite different in the USA and Central America, where the type of rabies found both in bats and in the main terrestrial carriers, raccoons and foxes, is sylvatic rabies.

Since 1987, when it became apparent that bat-rabies was reasonably widespread in serotines on the western seaboard of continental Europe (Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands), the Ministry has maintained surveillance for the disease by testing bat corpses sent in by bat workers. Until the recent case came to light, over 1800 bats had been tested with no positive results. This suggests strongly that bat-rabies is not endemic (normally-occurring) in bats in Britain.

Although the origin of the Newhaven bat is unknown, there is a possibility that it might have originated on continental Europe as it was found in a disabled state close to a port, in an area where bat detector surveys have failed to find any Daubenton's bats. It is quite possible that this bat could have flown across the Channel or it may have been imported on a ship. Both these routes have been recorded in the past.

### Public health

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food has issued the following guidance:

1. There is no risk to the public provided they do not touch or pick up bats.
2. Bats, especially sick or apparently injured bats, should not be picked up. Anyone bitten or scratched by a bat should seek immediate medical attention. If the bat involved can be caught, it should be sent immediately for rabies testing via the nearest office of the Ministry.
3. Persons working with bats who are bitten should receive post-exposure prophylactic rabies treatment.

This advice is very much in line with advice which has been given by bat conservationists in the past. We have always advised that everyone should avoid being bitten by any wild animal as they may carry a range of diseases. Prophylactic (pre-exposure) rabies vaccination has been available to bat workers for some years, but the general consensus has been that it is probably only necessary for those who work with the larger species of bats and handle significant numbers of

bats. With the Newhaven bat proving rabies-positive, we are currently re-examining this advice. In the meantime, bat workers should take particular care not to be bitten and send any bats that appear to be sick or behave uncharacteristically to the MAFF for testing. If anyone is bitten, they should consider having post-exposure rabies treatment.

### Bat Conservation

There is, of course, concern that there may be an anti-bat backlash because of the massive publicity given to this case. Both ourselves and the Ministry emphasise that bats are protected by law and there is no danger arising from having a bat roost in one's house roof.

The current situation is that further tests are being carried out on the Newhaven bat and its origins are being investigated. It is likely that the level of disease surveillance will be increased by MAFF, so we will have more information about whether this was an isolated incident arising from an imported bat (in which case no significant change to our current advice is necessary) or whether EBLV does occur in the UK. Given the large number of bats already tested, the probability is that this was an isolated incident.

Experience in other European countries where bat-rabies is recorded makes it clear that the only situation in which members of the public may be at risk is if they pick up a sick bat and are bitten. There is no suggestion that bats with rabies will attack humans or other animals or bite unless provoked. Similarly, there is no evidence that bats are carriers of rabies (i.e. can have the virus without dying from it). On the continent of Europe, many people live with the full knowledge that bats occupying their roof are, or have been, infected with a rabies-related virus.

Every effort must be made to reassure roost owners that there is no extra risk attached to having bats in the roof. The probability of finding a sick bat is no greater for roost owners than for anyone else and the great majority of roost owners never come into contact with their bats. Perhaps a pertinent question is to ask concerned roost owners how often they have picked up a bat.

Tony Mitchell-Jones, Lowlands Team, 11 June 1996

### **Rabies in British Bats**

European Bat Lyssavirus 2 (EBL 2) has been isolated from the Daubenton's bat (*Myotis Daubentonii*) found in East Sussex that was suspected of being infected with a rabies virus. This rabies related virus causes bat rabies in Europe but is not known to affect domestic pets or terrestrial wildlife.

Bat rabies had not been previously recorded in Bntain but does occur in continental populations of various species. It is possible that the bat originated from Europe but this cannot be established with certainty.

### **Survey of British Bats for Evidence of Rabies**

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has been surveying dead bats for evidence of rabies since 1986 and the recent case was the first infected bat to be discovered through this survey. Your continuing co-operation will be greatly appreciated in assisting this survey by sending any dead bats you find accompanied by the attached Form Bat 1 to:

Rabies Diagnostic Unit, The Central Veterinary Laboratory, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 3NB

If it is not possible to send them to the Rabies Diagnostic Unit, carcasses can be handed in at the local Animal Health Office for dispatch to the laboratory.

### Post Office Regulations

Carcasses should be packaged in a tightly sealed container packed in absorbent material and sealed inside a leakproof bag then placed in a box constructed of suitably strong material and surrounded by absorbent material. The box or case must be securely fastened and placed in a stout envelope or padded marked bag. The packet must be marked "Pathological specimen, Fragile with Care". It will help with handling if the package is marked with a large red R on the label.

### Sick Bats

Now that EBL 2 has been isolated from a bat in Great Britain, you should be alert to the possibility that this disease may be present when handling sick or injured bats. Your local Animal Health Office should be informed if you encounter a bat that is behaving abnormally or aggressively and for which no explanation of its behaviour is readily apparent.

### Personal Safety

You should only handle bats if you have the necessary expertise and gloves should be worn. Gloves should be leather or of equivalent protection if you are handling live bats and the Department of Health advises that individuals who handle bats on a regular basis should be immunised against rabies.

If you are bitten by a bat you should thoroughly wash the wound with plenty of soap and water and seek immediate medical attention.

(MAFF)

### **Letters**

*The small breeding colony of pipistrelle bats returned this year. On the evidence of droppings (one never sees any bats, despite being outside in the garden, at dusk, to feed hedgehogs). The colony was slightly larger than last year's, but very much smaller than the bumper year, 1994. Happily, there are no small corpses. Same location chosen, ie under the eaves on the south side of the house.*

*Yours sincerely, Elizabeth A Parry*