



# BAT NEWS



Newsletter of the Warwickshire Bat Group

Issue 10 Winter 1998

## The Batman of Onley

*Paul Elliott*

Most of us would think twice about an invitation from Her Majesty to take up residence behind bars and barbed wire fences. This invitation is being made to bats living on the Warwickshire/Northamptonshire border and is being enthusiastically accepted!

Peter Maule works at Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institute at Onley, near Rugby, where he is responsible for the in-house sewerage plant. Over the last five years he has worked with selected inmates to develop the site's potential for all sorts of wildlife. The site is dotted with boxes they have tailor-made for different bird species and success has come in the form of nesting kestrels, little owls and kingfishers among others. An elegant and somewhat incongruous butterfly garden has been installed with generous financial assistance from the institute authorities and next to it is a purpose built pair of pools designed for the rehabilitation and release of frogs and newts rescued from the plant's filters.



Peter has installed a number of fairly standard bat boxes over the years with some success. In 1997 he decided to try a more ambitious project. He designed a very large box with many partitions inside, along the lines of some of the larger North American designs, and the inmates installed this on the roof of Peter's office. He rigged up a speaker next to the box from which he has broadcast a tape of roosting Pipistrelles "chittering" noises in an attempt to lure the real thing. Whether it was the recording that did the trick we do not know, but the box has already attracted roosting bats.

In 1998 Peter and his team have erected a large post topped by four standard sized boxes and resembling a simple dovecote. Bats immediately moved in. On August 7 he placed a large, flat box in an oak tree on the margin of the site and within days he observed a bat leaving at dusk.

The management of the sewerage operation has been fine-tuned to gain maximum benefit for wildlife. Tertiary reed beds used for the final stage in the treatment have been allowed to develop tall and diverse flora that in turn supports more insects than previously. Peter comments that far more bats can be seen on the site since this change in practice. A stream running along one side of the plant has been cleared of obstructions and is now used by foraging Daubenton's bats. Peter has been using a bat detector to help identify the species turning up to this oasis. He recently joined Warwickshire Bat Group and we plan to help him with a more intensive survey of the site.

Around three inmates a day have the coveted duties at the sewerage plant. They spend the mornings working on the running of the plant and afternoons are devoted to projects to improve the environment and wildlife value of this quiet and peaceful corner of an otherwise large and rather daunting establishment.

The work that Peter Maule has done has brought enormous benefits not only for the wildlife, but also for the young people he works with. The value and significance of this work was recognised this year when the Princess Royal presented Peter with a certificate "for an outstanding contribution to the quality of prison care" from the Butler Trust.

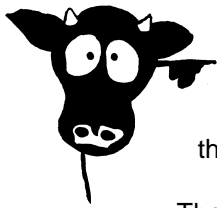
Peter's plans for his bats have not finished. He is talking about installing a "really big" bat roost tower and the possibility of creating an artificial hibernaculum on site. Watch this space!



# Never Mind The Bullocks – Here's The Slugs

## Episode 1: "never mind the bullocks ..."

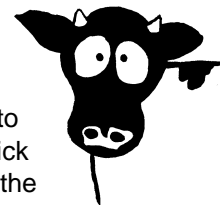
*Rob Hunter*



"We're going out to watch bats. Look, it's just something we do, okay? " It's strange but after hours of patiently talking to total strangers at shows, in social situations I seem more often to resort to a statement like this. I haven't always of course. I used to relish the chance to say we were busy with The National Bat Monitoring Programme, or other bat work; but then you see the double-glazing fit over the eyeballs, the feet start to shuffle, the head nod in a panic-stricken way and....

The only problem is that the words 'watch', 'just' and 'bats' don't go together whichever order you arrange them in. Most of you will know what I mean, but for the uninitiated perhaps an example will help to explain.

When you volunteer to join the NBMP, chances are you get sent a copy of an OS map with a triangle drawn on it. The object of the exercise will be for you to follow the course of this triangle on the ground as closely as possible, listening with a bat detector for Noctule, Leisler's and Serotine bats and stopping at intervals to listen for Pipistrelles. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Our triangle had obviously been carefully and scientifically selected. Carefully selected to include the land of three separate farmers (one of whom we knew from before...) and, best of all, TWO crossings of the A5 trunk road in near darkness. Still, never mind, it says in the instructions that you can alter the route if it is in anyway dangerous or otherwise impossible. So by inverting the triangle we could avoid the A5, and avoid the farmer we already 'knew', leaving us to deal with three new farmers.



Dot contacted the farmer, who owned the bulk of the land the route took in, and he seemed happy to have us, but he did warn us that the other two landowners might be difficult. So, after a quick consultation, a new and interesting version of what makes a triangle was achieved, which had the advantage of all being on the one farm, and we were ready to get down to the practical work.

We went to recce the route in daylight on Sunday morning, and barring a few problems finding landmarks for our stopping points and some deviations for gates and stiles, we were doing alright until we came to the field containing the beef herd. Now we'd been warned, with an obvious glint in the eye, that some of the 'little' crew had been hand-reared and were wont to be quite 'friendly' Still, we'd be okay. We're not too nervous of livestock, and we were only planning to walk across the field with a couple of stops of two minutes each. So, we let ourselves into the field and closed the gate behind us, seeing the 'lads' over the other corner.

Look, you know that bit on the cattle drive to Laramie or El Paso when some pillock fires his six-shooter in the air? We knew they weren't charging us. We knew that they'd had the bits that-make them aggressive removed. We knew they were being friendly and/or curious, like Dot's three year old grandson. But when our Kyle runs at you to say hello, you also know that if he doesn't stop in time he doesn't actually weigh several tons. Well, they did manage to stop and formed a tight circle round us. I mean a really tight circle. Being closely hemmed in by a couple of hundred head (okay, about twenty) is interesting. When you move, they move, often with a cute skip and a frisky kick of the back legs (that is several hundredweight of cute and frisky). When you stand still they nudge your arm in case you're carrying a bag of feed that can be spilled. That's nudge in a playful, pick-yourself-back-up-from-the-mud sort of way. A single lick from a bullock's tongue can remove your jumper over your head.

We thought we might eventually make it across the field in daylight. At night we weren't sure. We were sure we wouldn't be managing to listen for bats. We sounded the retreat.

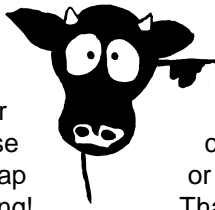
After some further map-reading, measuring, and new twists and turns to our triangle, we finished our recce and were at last ready to come back and watch bats.



Now farmers are often possessed, if not with an aggressive contempt for, then with a devilish humour towards, townies. He probably hadn't been watching the morning's encounter with his binoculars. Having observed that Dot might have trouble with all the thistles (as most of you know Dot doesn't wear shoes) we're sure he wouldn't have realised that cut thistles are far worse than intact ones on bare feet. Anyway, he couldn't actually see in the dark without a night sight. No. We're sure he doesn't own one .....

So off we set, happy that we had dealt with most of the difficulties. The newly cut thistles were greeted by Dot with some exclamations and a fair degree of stoicism, and we made steady progress in failing to hear any bats till we got to the second field. Then came close encounters of the beef kind, part two. We didn't remember this lot from the daytime.

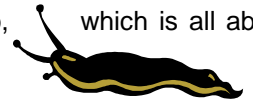
Granted, they were younger, smaller, and less confident. They came across the field only sounding like a small avalanche. They didn't form such a tight circle. If you raised as much as an eyebrow they skeetered away. However, if you stood still with your back turned the bolder ones still looked as if they might fancy a go at the famous arm-nudge. And a hand holding out a bat detector was obviously encouraging ideas of an investigating lick. Well, we and our entourage crossed the field, somehow managing to listen for Noctules, and even made our scheduled stops to listen for Pipistrelles. Have you any idea how long two minutes is under those circumstances? Did we abandon the job? No, we're stupid like that. We carried on, without further mishap or bats until we reached the furthest field on our route. Guess who'd moved in since the Sunday morning! That's it, the 'lads' we'd done all that careful re-planning to avoid. So, in the pitch black, by the light of fading torches, as we'd already taken twice as long as we should have, we once more had to read the map, remembering what we'd seen in the daylight, and re-plan our route. We did finish. We 'just went out to watch bats'. We stumbled about in the dark, got menaced by the bullocks, partially crippled; and the bats:



Noctules – nil    Pipistrelles – nil

Whiskered - possibly one of these on the other side of the hedge.  
(We weren't, of course, surveying for these!)

So, that's the bullocks, If you want to know about the slugs you'll have to wait for episode two, which is all about how not to see Daubenton's bats.



## Donation for bat conservation

*Paul Elliott*

The Warwickshire Bat Group has been given a donation of £330 to help with their work. The money was presented to the group's chairman by Hilary Wilson, manager of EcoLine, a local environmental consultancy firm. Hilary Wilson said "Local species groups such as this are tremendously important and add a great deal to the protection and conservation of these extremely vulnerable creatures. Moreover, the group provides a free and essential service to anyone who has discovered bats in their homes and requires advice or reassurance."

The chair of the Warwickshire Bat Group, University of Warwick lecturer Dr Paul Elliott, was very pleased to receive the money and said "The money will be used in the purchasing of expensive but desperately needed equipment. The number of active members has swelled since the introduction of a training programme for bat group volunteers, but a lack of specialised equipment may limit what can be achieved"

Bats will be hibernating from the end of the year until next April. Anyone who encounters bats during that time, especially whilst carrying out maintenance or repair work to their homes, should stop work at once and contact Bat Line on 01453 764450. Bat Line will be able to put you through to a local volunteer who will call on you as soon as they can. Any bat should be left undisturbed until advice can be given. If it has been unavoidably disturbed it should be placed in a small cardboard box or similar clean, draft-proof and secure container. The box should then be left in a garden shed, garage or other similar unheated building until the bat group volunteer arrives.

## Bats And The Law

Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, bats have become amongst the most protected animals in Britain. The act makes it illegal to

- Intentionally kill or injure any bat.
- Disturb a bat at roost
- Damage a roost site or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter.

It is not illegal though, to remove bats from the living area of a house or to rescue injured or abandoned bats as they may be released when recovered.

Should any work be planned that may disturb bats or their roost, English Nature must be consulted.

If bats are unwelcome or work is planned in a building suspected of housing bats at any time, contact English Nature on 01743 709611 or Bat Line (see above). Work will not necessarily be prevented, but advice given on the least disturbing way of doing it.

## And The Nearest Late-Night Mealworm Shop Is?

*Dot*

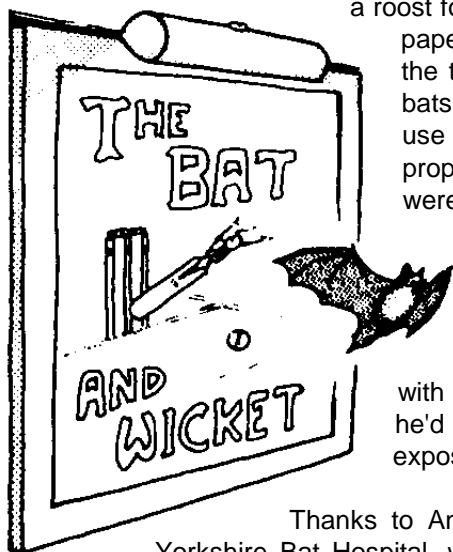
It's useful, if you have both hands full, to have someone to open the car door for you. And help you in, fasten the seatbelt, help you out, and let you into the house once back home.

The moral of this little tale? No matter what you've been told about the situation, go out prepared for every eventuality. We were expecting dead bats, and thinking we'd get a couple of samples for investigation, just in case the cause of the mass carnage couldn't be determined on site, we took out an airtight tin!

You're ahead of me. We found two (barely) live bats; couldn't possibly leave them on the ground; couldn't return then to a roost where all the bats had abandoned 'ship', and apparently died!

Which is how I came to be sitting in the car with a Pip in each hand, looking for a public telephone box, to get in touch with Debbie, the vet, and her supply of mealworms. There aren't any 24hr meal-worm shops; and when everyone you call for help, is out, or can't, then you seriously begin calculating the viability of just such a business.

It's a long saga, but we got hold of some meal-worms and lots of advice, and at about midnight all we had to do was make a roost for our two bats, now positively identified as non-flying juvenile males. A photocopier paper box with a reasonably tight lid made a good 'home', with holes pierced through the top and scratches on the inside to perforate the corrugated cardboard to give the bats something to hold on to. We needed to keep them warm, and the best idea is to use a hot water bottle wrapped in a flat-weave material, or stand the roost box in a propagator. We had neither of these, so used large jars of hot water wrapped up. As we were having to feed the bats every two hours, we could keep replacing the hot water and keep the roost box at a more or less suitable temperature.



Although theoretically from the same roost, Cricket and Rounders as they had now become, were quite different. Cricket was almost 1cm longer than Bounders, but a lot thinner, with shorter, sleeker fur. Rounders looked untidy in comparison, with paler tips to some of the hairs along his sides. He was luckier than Cricket in that he'd managed to get into a crack in the paving slabs at the roost site, and so hadn't been exposed to so much direct sunlight.

Thanks to Andrew McLeish (Montgomery BG) we got in touch with Maggie Brown of West Yorkshire Bat Hospital, who gave me lots of invaluable advice, should they survive; so far, I was doing everything in the right order and they had come through their first night. Luckily we had goat's milk in the house already, so had something to feed to Cricket who would not touch meal-worms, and Maggie gave me the name of a proprietary milk to use.

Although he was supposed to be working Rob toured the vets and pet shops of Rugby but no-one had the Esbilac milk powder, or the insect killer to rid the bats of the ticks and fleas that were swelling rapidly now that the bats were being fed.

We acquired the bats at about 8.30pm on the Monday. At 1.20am on the following Thursday morning Cricket spread out his wings along the cardboard walls of his roost, and died.

At 1.30pm, the same day, Rounders just faded away in the space of 15 minutes while I was trying to feed him. I literally felt him go.

By now we had heard from George Yates that the probable cause of the deaths on site was heat and lack of ventilation, so it wasn't essential to keep these bodies for examination, and being, by now, tremendously attached to my two new, if troublesome, babies, we decided on a proper burial in the garden, with labelled and dated envelopes as coffins and an undisclosed site for the internment. Even as we put the last spadeful of soil on top I could hear Paul's voice asking ..

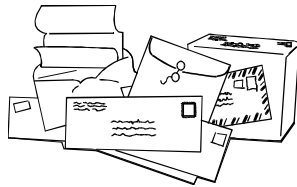
"And did you keep them?", and just imagine the look he'd give me at the news of their last resting place, I saw my roost-visitor licence disappearing on heavenly bats' wings! But as it turned out, he's guilty of a similar crime .....

Maggie Brown issues a quarterly magazine for carers of bats called Bat Care news. It costs £4 per year, and the address is: Maggie Brown, West Yorkshire Bat Hospital, 10 North Avenue, Otley, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS21 1AJ. Tel:01943 466101 (don't be put off by the answer machine, leave your message, if it is urgent and Maggie is there she WILL pick up and talk)

## Letters

Some months ago we received a phone call from someone asking for information about bat detectors, which he could send to his son. We thought that this was a typical request for information until the gentleman said that his son was in Tasmania! Although we weren't sure what types of bats lived in Tasmania we sent out a standard information sheet. A couple of weeks ago we received the following letter.....

Bob Fletcher  
Currawong Wildlife Education  
PO Box 24  
Colebrook  
Tasmania 7027  
Australia



I am writing to you because I understand my father recently spoke to you on the phone regarding my work in Tasmania and my particular interest in bats. I grew up in Warwickshire and Leicestershire although I have now immigrated to Australia and work with Currawong Wildlife Education in Tasmania.

Recently I acquired a 'Magenta MKII' Bat Detector so that I can locate and identify the Tasmanian forest bat species. I thought that I would write about these bats since they maybe of interest to you and other members of the Warwickshire Bat Group and it is always nice to link up with people of common interest on my old stamping ground on the other side of the world!



There are nearly sixty species of Australian bats, eight of which are members of the Megachiroptera (Flying Foxes, Fruit bats and Blossom bats), the rest being part of the enormously diverse Microchiroptera. These are further split into representatives of five

families of bats. The Megadermatidae has just one species, the large predatory Ghost Bat distributed across northern Australia. The Rhinolophidae Horseshoe Bats have eight species found in near coastal tropical and eastern Australia. The seven species of Emballonuridae Sheath-tail Bats are widely scattered across the arid regions of central Australia as well as the wetter forested areas such as Cape York (which actually contains two-thirds of Australia's bat species). The six species of Mastiff Bats, the Molossidae, have a similarly wide distribution across both wet and arid Australia. However it is the Vespertilionidae, the 'typical' insectivorous bats which provide the greatest diversity. The knowledge of their habitat requirements, distribution and even which species occur here is still very much incomplete, as is the taxonomic status of many species and sub-species.

The bat fauna of Australia is made up of species which crossed the Tones Strait from New Guinea to Cape York probably about Fifteen Million years ago when Australia and New Guinea were connected by a land bridge. Some of these bats evolved and diversified to occupy both the wet forest niches similar to those found in south-east Asia and the more arid habitats in what was becoming a continually drier continent. These bats themselves had filtered down through Indonesia, and this is almost certainly a continuing process. The filtering of species southward continued into south-east Australia and on into Tasmania where just eight species have been found

These eight species would have found two main types of habitat awaiting them. Tasmania's wet temperate rainforest covers the west and south-west of the island, whereas the drier Eucalyptus forests are in the north and east. There is also a central highland area with alpine vegetation that is unlikely to have provided suitable habitat, except in the odd pocket here and there. This division of habitat types is not of course particularly well defined and patches of both wet and dry forest can still be found close together over much of the island.

Today two-thirds of these forests are reserved or are part of the World Heritage Area. However, the highest bat numbers are probably found in the drier forests and it is the wet forests that attract the most attention from conservationists. Also a lot of reserved forest is secondary or regrowth forest and is unlikely to provide suitable tree hollows for the Tasmanian bats. Also much of the dry forest in the east and throughout the Midlands has been cleared for agriculture over the last 150 years at an accelerating rate and logging of most forest types accounts for huge losses in available habitat each year. This still includes the logging of old-growth temperate rainforest!



It is generally accepted in the literature I have seen on Tasmanian bats that these species are entirely dependent upon tree hollows to roost, breed and hibernate when temperatures drop below 15 degrees Celsius. However my observations seem to contradict this. I have seen bats in areas where there are very few

trees left, including urban areas so it seems certain that at least some species can adapt to using the attic space of houses. I have received reports of bats in small caves, behaviour that doesn't seem to have been reported before in Tasmanian species. A Lesser Long-eared Bat has even been reported from underneath a rock! However, only a few bats can probably be found in such areas and there is little doubt that bat numbers and diversity decreases when forests are cleared.

The observation I have commonly heard that Tasmanian bats hibernate when the temperature drops below 15 degrees is also not strictly true, but for a very interesting reason.. It is true that all the species hibernate, although Gould's Wattled Bat can be seen well into early winter. However on certain nights in the middle of winter certain bats can still be seen. These are probably males risking warming themselves up to seek a female with which to mate. It was previously believed that all mating took place in the Autumn and either the fertilisation of the egg was delayed or the implantation of the blastocyst was delayed like in Kangaroos and some seals and rodents. This probably still occurs most commonly since the

female going into hibernation would in itself delay the advance of pregnancy. However, in species where the female stores sperm over the winter, any male game enough to warm up for a brief foray to find a mate could in theory implant warmer more active sperm into her and thus increase his chances of successfully contributing to the following generation.

It is clear that there is still much to be learnt about the behaviour of Tasmanian bats. I am looking forward to many nights out in our Southern hemisphere summer, with my bat detector in hand , searching in the bush for all the species from the five gram Little Forest Vespadelus to the twenty-six gram Great Pipistrelle.

I hope you have enjoyed reading a little about our bats and please feel free to write to me if you or any of the Warwickshire Bat Group would like more information on Australian bats.

Yours Sincerely,  
Bob Fletcher.

## Going Green In The Park – Rugby



July. The sky is as grey as a Welsh slate nine, and I can't see out of the marquee for the curtain of rain across the entrance. This is a serious case of Deja-Vu.....

Haven't I said all this before'....." (see WBG Bat News, Issue 8 Winter 1997).

Actually, it's August 1st not July, but all the other facts are accurate, and at least the solar powered Scalextric didn't make an appearance this year (I mean, who can compete with THAT!). But neither did the Lady Mayor (make an appearance that is). She posed outside, for the camera, with a juggler, and the owl, and the Punch and Judy man, but if she saw any of the stands at all, it can only have been as she sailed past at high speed. And I blinked and missed her.

This year we were placed next to the Environment Agency, which had advantages and disadvantages. They had lots of give-aways, which meant the big crowd they gathered spilled over into reading our stand and leaflets, but, and it's a big but, (I'm going to have to have a serious word with the Environment Agency about this), they were giving away large EA plastic carrier bags; which meant that every kid in the place was determined to fill it before 4pm. Handfuls of leaflets disappeared inside these bags, and my Paddington-Bear-type hard-stares did nothing to halt the open-cast quarrying of our display table. I had to quietly, and forcefully, insist; on only one of each type, and did they really need a leaflet about Bat Access bricks (when the only time they were likely to come into contact with bricks was when they were throwing them at cars) as they were clearly too young to be in the building trade; this through gritted teeth.

But the rain did stop, and it became very warm with the crowd in the marquee.

Like last year, most people wanted to know what the bat was over their garden, but it was pleasantly surprising just how widespread were the early evening sightings of bats over gardens: Some in areas where it is hard to believe there could be sufficient feeding habitat. Something to follow up next year, perhaps.



Although Going Green is just a small local event it probably is worth doing again, if asked, if only to raise the issue of bats in the area; it's amazing how many people presume there are no bats in Rugby itself, only in the villages. Warwickshire Bat Group got its name into the Rugby Telegraph, Observer, and Advertiser, all local papers, and only as having attended the event, granted, but nevertheless it was there in black and white. Somewhere, in somebody's head, that information is filed away for later or further use.

# The Warwickshire Bat Group Roadshow

Rob Hunter

Well, it's certainly been a busy year for our display boards. They've been to Burbage Common, Coventry Memorial Park (twice), Caldecote Park Rugby, Bedworth Sloughs, a Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group barbecue and no doubt some other places I've missed. And of course they've been accompanied by boxes of leaflets, souvenirs to sell. Oh, and I almost forgot, a wonderful varied cast of Warwickshire Bat Group Members.



But the big one was probably, once again, the Town and Country Festival at the Royal Agricultural Showground. We were there to run a stall for the BCT, and they had arranged with Marshalls Bricks for their Bat House exhibit to be there, and had sent us some of their display and promotional material. However, we don't let an opportunity to talk about bats go by without giving it our all, and having won an award last year for best educational exhibitor, we were determined to do the best we could to 'sell' bats to the public.

Rod put together a special little quiz for children with wonderful questions like 'How much does a 5g adult Pipistrelle weigh?' and 'What do bats do in the winter, Hibernate or go to Parties?' (One little girl, no matter how much her mother coaxed her, insisted she wanted to put 'go to parties'. Dot sent her a special little prize!) Rod and Dot, with much hectic photocopying and collating, put together a gift pack for every child who entered, with leaflets, activity sheets, and batty games, and Rod donated a prize which was sent to a randomly selected winner from the 100+ entries.

Despite nearly running out of vital leaflets (we had been sent no 'Garden for Bats' - one of the most popular, and even nearly ran out of our own membership leaflets) resulting in frantic 'phone calls between Bat Group members asking for cupboards to be searched, desks emptied etc., I think over three days of intense activity we provided nearly all the information requested, and managed to answer most of the questions we were asked.

Identifying a bat by the vague description someone gives of something he saw over his garden last Summer is a skill all of us have become familiar with, and along with such one-to-one encounters there were many occasions when all four people on duty could be seen giving impromptu mini-lectures to crowds of 20 or so people.

It's always impossible to quantify what effect doing these shows has, but even if most of these leaflets are just put on a shelf when they get home, and a lot of what we tell people is lodged right in the back of the memory, hopefully when people encounter anything to do with bats in the future, their reaction will be a positive one. What I can say is that I'm sure that everyone in the Bat Group who took part in this, and all the other events mentioned, had a great, if exhausting, time, and learned a lot as well as giving out information and enthusiasm for bats.

Thank you to all the members of the Bat Group, who have given their time to help man stalls, and prepare materials for the shows. We always want more members to join in with these events, so whatever your level of knowledge, don't be shy to volunteer.

If anyone has any ideas for other shows, fetes, country fairs etc. which might be good places to give out information about bats, please let us know.

## Diary

All talks start at 7.30pm and are at the Westwood Site of Warwick University in the Avon Building Common Room.

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| Nov 18 <sup>th</sup> | "Bats in the Gambia"<br>Linda Barnett & Craig Emms                         |
| Dec 14 <sup>th</sup> | "The Bats and Wines of Bulgaria"<br>Paul Elliott – bring your own nibbles! |

Events for 1999 will be advertised in due course.

