

Moving forward following Defra's rabies research

It was made clear to us at the recent Bat Group Forum, conference workshop and AGM that strong feelings have been generated by Defra's rabies research (see Bat News, Issue 80), not only with regard to the research itself and how Defra communicated it but also with regard to how, in turn, the Board of Trustees (BoT) communicated it and the neutral position the BoT finally took on it*. Different aspects of this have caused distress and upset across the bat world.

With some members of the bat world strongly supporting the position taken by the BoT, some members strongly opposing it and others lying in between, it is essential we all now acknowledge this and focus on what can be done in order to move forward. In this regard the BoT has made initial steps on two fronts.

It has been said that the BoT was not as transparent as it could have been in communicating with the bat world on the research. In hindsight we recognise that some aspects of our communication could have been better and we apologise for these shortcomings.

To improve how the BoT, BCT and the bat world communicates, and to ensure greater transparency, we plan, as a first phase, to post the following on the BCT website (www.bats.org.uk):

- Extracts from BCT's Quarterly Report with a facility for accessing more details on particular items.
- A more frequent newsletter covering topical items and updates.
- Agendas for the BoT meetings – not only to inform but also to encourage suggestions for agenda items.
- Minutes from the BoT meetings (except confidential items such as those involving personnel).

In addition, we are finalising the membership of a working group which will be implementing the action agreed at the Bat Group Forum, namely to garner opinions from around the bat world on whether a review of BCT and how it and the wider bat world communicates is needed, and, if so, what the scope and terms of reference of such a review might be. Feedback from this process is scheduled for January.

It is clear that what needs to come out of all of this is a strengthened movement for bat conservation with clarity of purpose and openness. This is essential if we are to move forward and progress BCT's vision of a world where bats and people live in harmony.

Ian Dunbar, Chair BCT Board of Trustees, Amy Coyte, CEO BCT

* How the BoT arrived at its position on Defra's rabies research, including the BoT's own scientific investigation was presented and discussed in a workshop at the recent National Bat Conference in Reading. BoT's position statement on the research is available at <http://www.bats.org.uk/rabiesresearchstatement.asp>. Alternatively, a hard copy can be obtained by contacting BCT on Tel. 0845 1300 228.