

Newsletter Special Edition

Jan Ragg - A tribute



[Photo: Amy Swan]

Jan Ragg was the cornerstone of bat care in Essex for many years and her sad death on 11th August has left us bereft, but determined to carry on her good work with her memory as inspiration. Here are some words from some of those whose lives she touched, as a tribute to our friend and mentor

The Jones family - Chester, Gill, Laura and Catherine

As a family we have known our dear friend, Jan, since the 1990s when she was Chester's work colleague. She introduced us to the wonderful world of bats during the summer of 2002 when our daughters, Laura and Catherine were at home at the end of their first year at university.

They have some happy memories of Jan with the bats, especially of their first close encounter with an orphaned bat. When they first went to Jan's house to meet the orphaned pipistrelle, Jan quietly opened the door and they saw the tiny bat clinging to her forefinger. He was pink and hairless and they couldn't believe how tiny and helpless he was. They then went through to the kitchen and watched Jan feeding him goats milk using the finest paint brush. They remember thinking how delicate and patient Jan was with the tiny bat, who kept drifting off to sleep on her forefinger.

The next day Jan brought the bat over to our house for them to look after while she and Geoff were away on their motorbike tour. They took the box and feeding equipment into the house and then asked her 'Where's the bat?' To their surprise she had tucked him away in a small pouch down her bra, to keep him warm! They thought that Jan was so kind and extraordinary. They kept the bat in our airing cupboard and took turns to feed him from the fine paint brush. Sadly, the little bat didn't survive to see Jan return from her holiday, but Jan was very positive about their care and brought another three pipistrelles to us during that summer! We learnt how to wean the bats onto mealworms, initially by decapitating the mealworms so that their insides could be mixed with goats milk to make 'mealworm soup'. It wasn't pleasant but we needed to wean the bats onto live mealworms somehow! Bat care very soon became a family affair with mum Gill, Laura and Catherine taking shifts in feeding the bats while dad Chester took control of feeding the mealworms from his vegetable patch.

That summer we regularly took the baby bats for flying practice in a large tent which Geoff had put up in their garden. It was remarkable to watch them learn to fly. At the end of the summer we were even able to release one of our bats, Bobby, where she had been found.

Jan also taught us about bat calls and how to use a heterodyne bat detector so that we could go along with her to do site surveys and roost counts.

When Laura went back to Aberystwyth for the new semester, she joined the local bat group straight away. This led to many summers of trekking around the Welsh countryside to do roost counts and transects. She also chose to do her undergraduate project on the foraging activity of micro-chiropteran bats in Aberystwyth. She learnt how to use a frequency division and a time expansion detector and became very familiar with the sounds of pipistrelles, *Myotis* bats, long-eared bats and noctules. It was like discovering a secret world! She often wondered if she would have been so interested and aware of them if it wasn't for the close encounters Jan gave them with the orphaned bats.

Jan soon developed the Harlow Bat Hospital with a high success rate of rehabilitating and releasing grounded and injured bats. The flight tent in the back garden was replaced by lengthy journeys to the flight cage at Hatfield House until Jan found a suitable place at Parndon Wood Nature Reserve for a flight cage to be built in Harlow, with which Chester was glad to be involved.

Jan lived by her motto 'bats need friends' and her passion for educating the public about these rare and unusual creatures fuelled Catherine's own enthusiasm to teach others, from arranging school 'bat visits' during her time as a primary school teacher to inspiring her to make the bats the subject of a feature article during her journalism course. Jan naturally insisted on publishing her article 'Helping Bats Hang on at Parndon Wood' in the Essex Bat Group newsletter. Later, the bats also featured in the Harlow Star after their reporter accompanied Catherine and dad Chester on a late night session at the flight cage. It felt empowering to be able to share this secret world with others and thus help protect these endangered species.

Every year, from late spring to early summer, Jan would organise site surveys to look for roosts by gathering large teams of enthusiasts to make recordings across the site. Her detailed analysis of these recordings helped to locate hitherto unknown roosts.

We have all been inspired by Jan, our dear, kind, patient and thoughtful friend, who not only had a passion for bats' welfare and care, but was also interested to learn about the lives and interests of those who helped her with the bats.

We hope to be able to continue to contribute to the work she has inspired us to do.



Jan and fellow carers at the flight cage at Parndon Wood in Harlow.

[Photo: Steve Donovan]

Mick Westby

Pretty well all I have learned about bats and their rescue and repatriation, including how to safely handle them and get them flying back to fitness, I have learned from Jan. Her vast knowledge and dedication, which she was so willing to pass on to anybody that wanted to learn, will be sorely missed by all. I don't think I have known anyone who has been so dedicated to a cause, with no reward other than the satisfaction of knowing that they have done a good job.

Emily Holt

I first met Jan back in 2010. I had seen that Essex Bat Group wanted ambulance drivers for injured bats and thought it would be a great thing to do so I got in contact with Jan. She arranged my training, and from the moment I first saw one of the bats up close, I was hooked. I spent a number of days and evenings that summer over in Harlow either helping Jan with the bats she had at home or flying them at the flight cage.

From the moment I met Jan, the thing that amazed me the most was her dedication to looking after the bats. I would go to help and take over making sure they all got fed and in that time, instead of having a break from bat care, Jan would always find something to do that would help the bats. Jan gave me the confidence and skills to help care for bats, and has always been there to support and give advice. She never pretended to know everything and I remember many times that we had big discussions about a bat and what was best to do and why. At the end of the day, Jan was always thinking about the welfare of the bats and never made decisions lightly. She always tried her absolute best to improve the quality of life for every bat in her care.

Her years of experience with bat care helped so many in Essex Bat Group including myself. I have probably e-mailed her about near enough every bat I have had in my care just to check her opinion and get her advice on how best to proceed. Jan was always willing to share her knowledge and has been such a major support to me.

Jan was an inspiration for her work with bats and will not be forgotten. She has supported and trained so many of us and I hope that we are able to carry on what she has started - an amazing bat care service in Essex.

Steve & Frances Donovan

We will remember Jan as someone who was always generous with both her time and knowledge. She was unique, devoted to Geoff and her bats, and with a dry sense of humour. She would regularly give us a list of jobs to do and then say "you can say no!" Of course we never did. We miss popping round for advice on a bat and will treasure those Fridays spent with her, feeding pups and asking questions. We feel privileged to have known her.

Hayley Farnell

I will always be grateful to Jan for introducing me to the world of bats. My mentor in bat care and a friend, she was a wonderful person whom I will always hold dear.



Jan inspects a cobalt mine near Oslo, in Norway. She rescued a grounded brown long-eared bat while she was there!

[Photo: Jeroen van der Kooij]

Ella Barnett

Jan was such a remarkable person; her dedication to bat care shows this. She was a kind, caring and patient person as well as a great teacher. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

Graham Hart

I got to know Jan well in my early bat days when she organised a survey at Hatfield Forest which was my first foray into woodland surveying and the initial inspiration for my work at Weald. Her dedication to bats and their welfare was beyond compare. She was a pivotal member of our group and will be sorely missed.

Andrew Pilkington

I am very shocked, as everybody else will be. She will indeed be missed by all her friends and all who knew her because of her involvement with bats. She was the font of a great deal of knowledge and skill when it came to looking after an injured or baby bat. I am not sure how we will manage without her.

Andrew Palmer

Seeing Jan usually meant two things. I would be having a close encounter with a bat and I would be learning something new or having to re-evaluate what I thought I knew. It was always going to be an enriching experience. She never failed to deliver. Always kind, helpful, knowledgeable and resourceful. It is no surprise that the word 'inspirational' is used in connection with Jan. She just did what she did, and the rest of us wondered how she ever managed it. My gratitude is heartfelt. I will miss her.

Val Barclay

Jan was an inspiration to me at my first bat care training in Chelmsford some years ago - so very down-to-earth but so much practical information, she enthused me with a love of bats and determination to find out more and do whatever I could to learn and help promote bats as 'great little beings'. Later I was enthralled again by her expert knowledge and hard work at a training day at Abbots Hall Farm. She was a 'tour de force', seemingly spending sometimes up to twenty four hours a day helping her flying 'lodgers'. I was so impressed by her total commitment. To my mind she will be irreplaceable.

Fiona Hearn

Jan was a special lady. When she spoke, you listened. She probably preferred bats to some people, but we liked her for that. She will leave a very large hole in this life. I will remember her fondly.



Jan took great care in compiling and interpreting local bat care statistics. This display is entitled 'Bat Care Has No Conservation Value?'

Patricia Clegg

I have many happy memories of seeing Jan at meetings. She loved her bats so much and really cared about them. I remember her talking about one long-staying patient - I think she called him Billy. "He's a really lovely boy - such a nice personality."

The work she did in caring for bats was immense and her loss to Essex Bat Group will be immeasurable.

Helen Miller

Jan was an expert in bat care and over the years trained many members of Essex and neighbouring bat groups (including myself). She was extremely knowledgeable, dedicated and very patient with all those who she worked with. This is a huge loss both to Essex and UK bat care. I remember one occasion in particular when Jan had received a call about a juvenile pipistrelle in a wildlife rescue centre in Putney. Putney is quite a way from Essex but it was still a bat in need of care so Jan called me at work (at BCT in London) and asked me if I would go and pick up the bat at lunchtime, bring it home with me to Essex and deliver it to her that evening. Having been successfully delivered, the bat was cared for by Jan and later released and I often think of Jan when I pass through Putney and remember the very strange looks I received on the tube that day.



Jan also volunteered for the Epping - Ongar Railway in her spare time! Here seen repairing seat covers from a diesel locomotive.

[Photo courtesy of Epping Ongar Railway]

Derek Barry, Chairman, Harlow and Uttlesford Badger Groups

On behalf of Harlow Badger Group I would like to pass on our sincere condolences on the passing of our dear friend Jan. The sad news of her passing has come as a great shock to both myself and our members that had got to know her over the past five years. Her tireless work for the Bat Group was an inspiration to many and her loss will leave a great hole in both the Bat Group and general wildlife community. I am sure that she will be sadly missed by family, friends and anyone that has had the privilege of knowing Jan over her short time in this world. Our thoughts are with you all at this time.

BCT Helpline staff

BCT Helpline would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Jan Ragg. Being a volunteer bat carer for many years, her wealth of experience made her a real asset to our panel of bat care experts. Jan established the Essex Bat Helpline for bat care, providing a valuable and effective way of referring those who have found grounded bats in the county of Essex. Her dedication was amazing and she was always available as a contact for advice. Her support over the years has been greatly appreciated and she will be immensely missed by all the Helpline staff.

Carol Williams, BCT Director of Conservation

In the last year or so I had been communicating with Jan on the data she had collected and had made a link to university students (University of Exeter, Penryn campus) who saw great value in this and her thoughts on linking casualty rates to possible causal factors. They were hoping to do an undergraduate project on it - about which she was most pleased. What a shame to lose her.

Roger Watling

I will be ever grateful to Jan for the training day I spent with her at her Bat Hospital. Her loss will affect so many lives, human and bat.

Kim Wallis

I doubt I am alone in thinking or saying that Jan was a unique and wonderful person. I met her about six years ago on a bat survey and upon hearing what wonderful work she was doing, wanted to learn more. Following attendance on one of her bat care / ambulance drivers courses I started picking up bats. After a year or so, and with Jan patiently showing me the ropes, she announced I was to look after a few of the casualties. I was terrified but Jan was always at



the end of the phone or on e-mail to answer any of my very many questions. Looking back some of the answers must have seemed so obvious to Jan but not once did she make me feel they were anything other than completely valid. Not only did Jan impart her knowledge but a few times I got upset she showed understanding and compassion (I distinctly remember one of my first cases where a BLE died on me...I sobbed).

I love bat care and find it incredibly rewarding but none of it would be possible without Jan. She enthused, entrusted and helped me more than I could possibly say. I have had a few cases recently where my instinct would have been to call Jan and ask what she thought or if she could take a look at it. I hope those of us in bat care can continue her amazing work and that she is proud of her influence on so many of us. None of us can hope to ever be as knowledgeable as Jan but I would like to think that she imparted enough of her infectious enthusiasm and knowledge for us to be able to continue the work she was so very passionate about. Jan was a wonderful person and it is a great loss to us all and to bats, she touched so many people in her life time and not many people will ever achieve the respect and love that she did.

Pat Hatch

Jan was one of a kind. She combined a scientist's thirst for knowledge, a naturalist's love of her subjects, a conservationist's desire to better their lot and a teacher's vocation to reach out and educate. It made a great impression on me when I realised just how much of what she knew she had found out for herself, through the old arts of close observation and meticulous record keeping. She made the most of having bats in her care, using the opportunity it provided to investigate various aspects of bat biology and ecology, including the real and supposed differences between pipistrelles - sketching wing patterns, taking measurements, studying skull shape and dentition - and relating casualty figures to environmental factors.

Jan's support and approval for the direction the Bat Group has been taking in recent years was very important to me. She also opened my eyes to the value of bat care in conservation, education and public relations, to the extent that I no longer see it as an entirely separate activity. In return for such enlightenment, all I could offer was my weight. If Jan was fed up chasing someone, maybe for records, she would give me their name and I would 'lean on' them!

Jan's passing has brought home to me the depth of shared feeling and commitment in our group and the importance of what motivates so many of us bat folk - a love of the natural world and a desire to do good and make a difference. Needless to say, the best tribute we can pay is to carry on her work, no doubt with her example as inspiration.

Lauren Hull

When I first met Jan at Parndon Wood I must admit I was a little confused about how someone could be so enthusiastic about a small creature which frankly at the time gave me goose bumps. It didn't take long for her to get me into the cage on a Thursday night and introduce me to the amazing world of bats; which has now taken over not only my evenings but spare room and car boot too.

Jan's knowledge was unique. She could always find an answer to my many questions, whatever the time of day. I spent many hours sat at hers listening to stories of where she had found bats and the people she had met along the way.

Jan will always be missed and remembered by the bat careers and ambulance drivers in Essex Bat Group and I know we will work hard to carry on the work she started as I know she would have wanted.

Daniel Hargreaves

In 2005 I decided to re-ignite my earlier passion in life - bats. I joined the Herts and Middlesex Bat Group and attended my first monthly meeting in Hatfield. This is where I first met Jan Ragg, who was tending to the needs of an injured pipistrelle. Jan took me under her wing and over the next few years we spent many days and nights working together on all sorts of activities, mostly concentrating on bat care but also including underground surveys, detector surveys and roost visits.



Jan was brilliant at harnessing volunteers' energy and provided knowledge and experience to anyone who showed an interest in bats. Jan and Geoff's house was like a training ground to bat workers and it certainly had a major influence on my life and not only with bats as it's through Jan that I met my fiancée and best friend Heidi. Jan devoted her life to bat care and was keen to share her knowledge; Heidi and I always commented that you could tell who had been trained by Jan by looking at the condition of their mealworms. In Jan's house the quality of care was as high for the mealworms as it was for the bats and she spent hours painstakingly picking through skins and preparing "soups" for the babies.

From 2005 my spring and summer involved collecting bats, feeding bats, test flying and, if lucky, the highlight of releasing bats back into the wild. The main birthing season was



relentless on Jan and year on year more and more bats kept coming; Jan was always in control but was always very appreciative of help. I lost count of the number of times we would be up until the early hours feeding bats and arranging the hundreds of rehab boxes like a giant game of Tetris. Jan kept meticulous records and through a system of labeling and colour co-ordinating the bats received first class care.

On a couple of occasions the number of bats that needed help was almost overwhelming for Jan and it was at this point that the network of volunteers that she had amassed were vital. Geoff was extremely supportive and I have very fond memories of sharing dinners together and getting through what seemed at times like a relentless task.



On one occasion Jan asked if I could collect a bat that had been passed from a local wildlife hospital to a trainee.

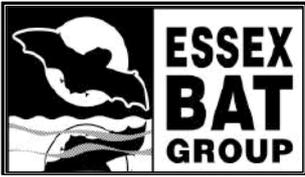
Interestingly the bat had changed from suspected Natterer's to a Leisler's bat; my role was just to collect the bat and deliver to Jan the following day. Once home I prepared some water and mealworms and peered into the box and looking straight back at me was a parti-coloured bat! Jan as usual took it in all in her stride and several days later the bat was released in Central London where it was originally found.

I guess winter provided some sort of respite for Jan and she could get involved with more "normal" bat activities, including hibernation surveys. One of my favourite sites was Shenley chalk mine, which involved abseiling down a long vertical shaft and after several hours of searching and counting hibernating bats we would climb out using caving ladders. As usual, careful planning by Geoff and Jan meant we always had a detailed map, a species key that Jan put together and plenty of energy in the form of chocolate bars to prepare for the strenuous climb out. On one occasion Reg Chapman and I had great fun winching Jan out of the hole with her commenting that it was a very smooth if slightly speedy ascent - which I'm sure was purely due to the sugar rush that she provided.

Sadly I wasn't around for Jan's funeral as I was working in Thailand. But I was thinking of her as I visited a local Buddhist temple, home to a 3,000 strong colony of Lyle's flying fox. The monks value and protect the bats and this "bat sanctuary" reminded me of the thousands of bats that Jan cared for and released over her many years of bat care. Suddenly I envisaged what life would have been like if Jan lived in Thailand and imagined her and Geoff sitting in their living room surrounded by hundreds of flying foxes and a flight cage the size of Harlow!



Thanks for all the
memories Jan,
for the many bats that
you saved and for the
bat care legacy that you
have left behind.



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Bat Conservation Trust
Partner Group



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Membership Form

You can use this form to renew your membership
or recruit a friend

Send to: Helen Miller, 176 Abbotsbury Road, Morden, SM4 5JS

Name Address

Email Telephone

Using e-mail means we can send your newsletter and other correspondence electronically. Your e-mail address will not be passed on to any other organisation or used for any other purpose.

How did you hear about EBG? (internet, local bat walk, EWT, friend etc):

Please tick as appropriate:

- Standard membership of the group is just £5 for 1 year
 or £12 for 3 years

I would also like to make a donation of £

I enclose a cheque for £ (made payable to Essex Bat Group)

*Your first year's membership will run until 31st December 2016.