

Essex Bat Group Annual General Meeting

Friday 2nd March 2012 8pm start
Boreham Village Hall

With talks on local bat projects,
displays and refreshments

Please support your bat group by coming along to our AGM

This year we will have a series of short talks by local project co-ordinators, covering the diverse range of bat work currently underway in our fair county of Essex. Talks confirmed so far include the Epping Forest Project, Churchyard Project, Roadside Mammals/Car Survey, the role of Natural England roost visitors and the work of the Bat Care Network.

There will also be displays, information, tea, coffee and biscuits and a chance to mingle with your committee and fellow members.

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Essex iBats (Roadside Bats & Mammals) Survey 2011

Ralph Cordey with the latest news from the car-based survey project

2011 was the sixth year of the Roadside Bats & Mammals Survey in Essex. The activity now contributes to the iBats programme, an international set of projects led by a partnership between the Zoological Society of London and the Bat Conservation Trust. There is a strong focus on bat monitoring in Eastern Europe, but projects take place as far afield as Thailand and Mexico. iBatsUK is the project to which we contribute. The iBats web site is at www.ibats.org.uk. Our national coordinator is Jon Russ



Figure 1. iBats surveys around the world (from BCT website)

Each survey is conducted from a moving car. Routes of about 25km are driven at an average speed of 15mph, while bat calls are recorded on a digital recorder linked to a time-expansion bat detector. The car's position is recorded on a GPS-enabled PDA.

Sound files are uploaded to the iBats website and analysis is then carried out on 5-minute chunks of those recordings. The chunks are analysed using a suitable sonogram package (*Batsound / Wavesurfer*). A prescribed set of measurements is made on each set of echolocation calls and those measurements are entered into an on-line form. The iBats website makes an automatic identification of bat species based on those entries.

The iBats website has evolved in 2011 with noticeable improvements to the reliability of data upload. However, it no longer supports recordings of other roadside mammals.

At the heart of the annual surveys are two repeat routes, each conducted in July and August. These are kept the same from year to year. Other routes are surveyed at our discretion - in practice we have aimed for about one per month. It seems clear, however, that statistically significant results from the iBats programme are best supported by the use of repeat routes

from year to year. In 2011, all routes had been surveyed in previous years.

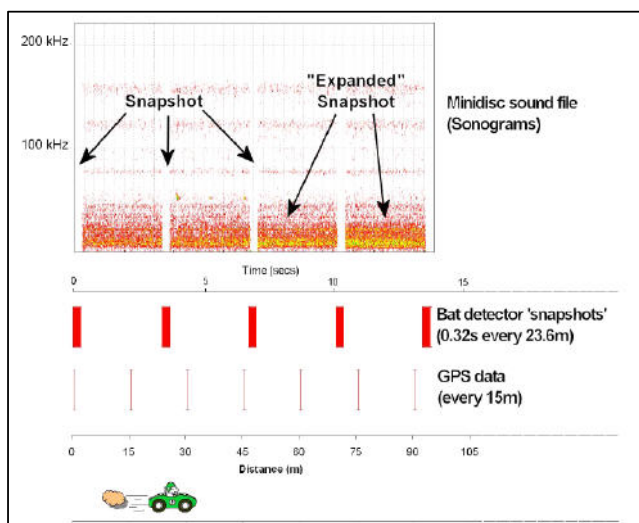


Figure 2. Our survey method summarised

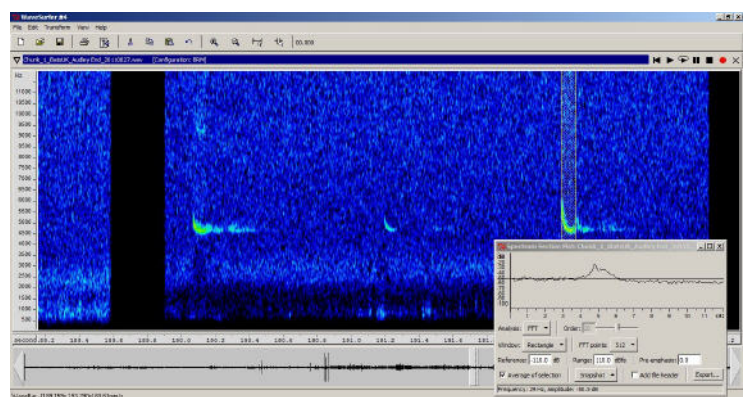


Figure 3. Analysing a bat call in Wavesurfer

Equipment All of the Essex Bat Group's equipment has worked well during the 2011 surveys. We have continued to use our original *Tranquility Transect* time expansion recorder, the *Digiwalker* PDA, and the *Zoom H2* digital recorder.



Figure 4. The detector mounted for a survey [Photo: Ralph Cordey]

Routes and volunteers

Routes recorded in 2011 were:

Danbury: May 21st Ralph Cordey

Rochford: June 14th Neil & Barbara Williams

Audley End: July 9th & Aug 27th Ralph Cordey

TQ5595: July 31st & Sept 24th Helen Miller/
Ralph Cordey

The Audley End and TQ5595 routes are the designated multi-year repeat routes for Essex.



Figure 5 (right). The four Essex routes in 2011

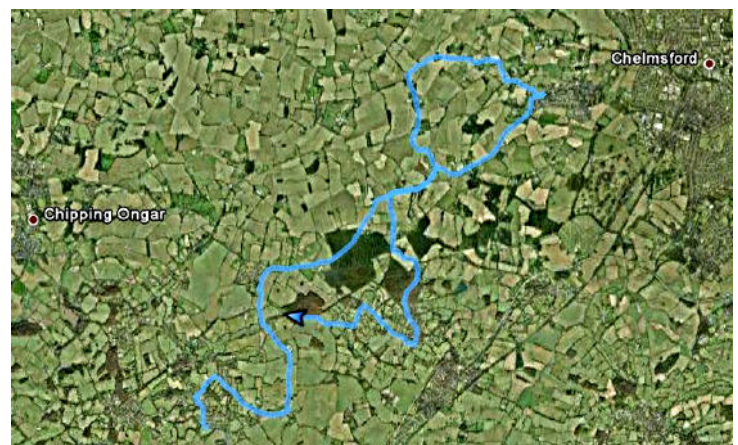
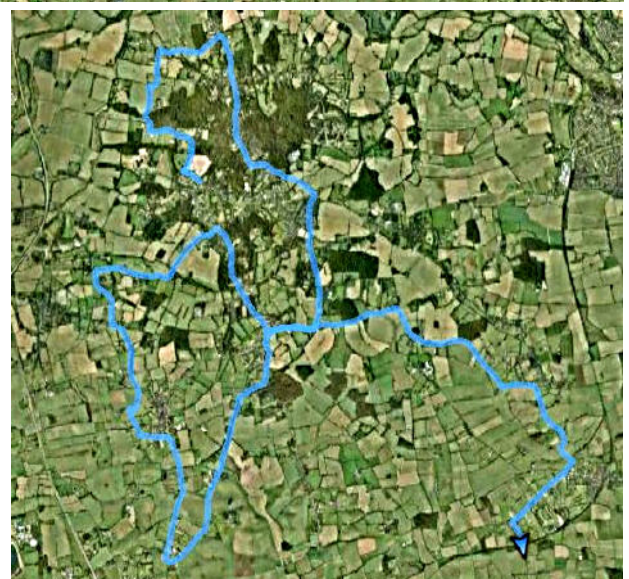


Figure 6. Route detail (clockwise from top left):
Audley End; TQ5595; Danbury; Rochford



Problems Surveys were generally conducted without major incident in 2011. Loss of setup on the PDA led to the postponement of one survey. Incorrect operation of the digital recorder *[by the coordinator, who should have known better!]* led to the re-running of another survey. The July 9th survey, starting at Audley End House, was diverted by an encounter with a police road block but was otherwise successful. There were no difficulties in 2011 with uploads of the large sound recordings to the iBats website.

Data availability to Essex Bat Group

An archive of Roadside Bats & Mammals / iBats data for Essex was transferred to the EBG during 2011. Approximately 1280 geo-located bat records were included. The 2011 dataset (approximately 320 new records) will be transferred in the coming months.

Essex Bat Group's future contribution to iBats UK

The Essex Bat Group's contribution to the Roadside Bats and Mammals Survey / iBats has maintained momentum since its first surveys in 2006, with between six and eight routes surveyed per year. We appear to be one of the most active participating groups across the UK. This consistency is important because key statistical results are likely to result from long-term maintenance of such surveys.

For Essex, the shorter-term local value of these surveys seems most likely to be in their provision of records of calling bats along road corridors - i.e. what bats are hunting where along roads in the county? From that point of view, it might be appropriate to trade some of the discretionary repeat survey work for a wider geographical distribution. Figure 5 illustrates our current focus on south and west Essex - it is several years since we conducted any survey in northeast Essex.

With a maximum of about eight surveys per year (constrained by weather, the single set of equipment, and the limited availability of surveyors) we might wish to trade coverage of the discretionary routes - in 2011, Danbury & Rochford - for coverage of other parts of Essex. For that reason, it would be sensible to agree with the Essex Bat Group on priority areas for surveying in 2012.

News

- EBG is looking for a new Treasurer. If you are willing to help please contact Pat Hatch (see p.10). Our thanks to Peggie King, who will be standing down at the AGM, for fulfilling the role so ably. Peggie assures any potential volunteers that it is a straight forward task!

in

- Surveys of tunnels and a bunker at the Grays chalk quarries (now part of Chafford Gorges Nature Park) have recorded the usual numbers (17-21) of common pipistrelles (which are rarely found hibernating in tunnels) and small numbers of Natterer's and Daubenton's. Work is planned to further enhance one of the tunnels by providing additional roosting places in the coming summer.

brief

- There have been a number of recent reports of bats observed on the wing this winter, presumably on account of the mild weather. Let us know if you see any.

- EBG is in the process of establishing better links with neighbouring bat groups. Newsletters are now exchanged and we are exploring ways of working together, such as joint projects in border areas.

Bat Care Summary 2011 Jan Ragg reports

The Batcare team was very busy in 2011. There had been lots of bats coming into captivity at the end of 2010 because of the extreme cold weather, but we had managed to release most of them during the brief warmer spells - after they had put on a lot of weight of course. This pattern continued at the start of 2011: we had only seen 6 casualties by the end of March in 2010, but there were 15 in the same period last year. Then it just kept on going and we had huge numbers right through the year.

The most challenging period was in June: in the 5 days from 20th to 24th 9 people collected 40 bats from 22 locations, and on 23rd June alone 5 people collected 11 bats from 7 locations. The most difficult time ever was the first weekend of July, 2006 when we collected 40 extra juveniles, but they were from only 3 locations.

We often get a female pipistrelle who aborts her foetus, but in 2011 there were 6. Most were after cat attacks, but one was hit by a car. There was one live birth in captivity, but unfortunately the baby was found dead soon after she started flying. However, the mother had been badly injured by a cat, but the damage eventually repaired and she was released 3 months after the initial attack. We also had a BLE that had been badly injured by a cat, and then gave birth in captivity. The mother died as a result of her extensive injuries, but she lived long enough to give her baby a good start in life. The baby was eventually released with another juvenile BLE, after a period of getting to know each other.

Numbers of most species increased, though we did not have any Nathusius', but we had three times as many 55s and twice as many BLEs as usual. We have never had any juvenile Serotines, but there were two in 2011.

Batcare Statistics			Outcome				
Species	2011	2010	2011		2010		
			Total	Juveniles	Total	Juveniles	
45	138	100	Released	153	89	76	39
55	93	34	Over winter	11	4	4	2
Pipistrelle	5	8	Permanent captive	3	1	8	1
Nathusius	0	2	Euthanased	34	10	28	6
BLE	31	15	Died after >48 hours	25	23	8	4
Serotine	3	1	Dead on arrival	52	23	34	22
Noctule	2		Unknown	1		5	1
Leisler's	3	2	Total	279	150	163	74
Daubenton's	2	1	Roost found	127		53	
Natterer's	1		Attacked by cat	91		48	
Barbastelle	1		Starving	123		70	
Total	279	163					

Despite the difficulties of coping with huge numbers, we still managed to release twice as many as during the previous year. All the juveniles, and some adults are tested in the outdoor flight cage in Harlow to see if they are capable of fending for themselves after release.

Some flight cage statistics: 143 bats assessed in the outdoor flight cage, 127 released after being certified fit (some short term adults were assessed indoors without going to the cage), 240 evenings that the cage was used, 2 hours on average each evening, 34 different people operated the cage, 4 kids included.

A Year of Bat Care

Emily Holt recounts her recent experiences

It was a busy summer in terms of bat care and I was able to have some more hands on experience with caring for the bats. I looked after a number of young pipistrelles that hadn't yet learnt to fly. I set up a mosquito net with their box in it, open, so they could get out and exercise whenever they wanted to.



Two young pips [Photo: Daniel Bridge]

My evenings were spent hand feeding the bats trying to get them to eat by themselves then persuading them that they should fly. This wasn't as easy as I thought with most bats clinging on by one foot, determined not to let go! It did, however, make me feel extremely proud when the bats would take flight for the first time.

During the summer I also spent a lot of time looking after Brian, our noctule bat that most of you will have heard of. When spending a lot of time with one bat, you really get to see that they all have different personalities and Brian seemed to enjoy his summer getting himself fat and being lazy! By having a bat in captivity as long as Brian was, you start to worry about them being on their own so it was great when he decided to make drastic improvements and get released.

Winter time is a different story, I currently have three hibernating bats. My Guide group love hearing about the bats so when they heard about these three, they had to name them, Barry, Gordon and Irwin. With hibernating bats it is important to disturb them as little as possible and so they are staying in a flexarium (see picture). The flexarium has cloths hung around the top of it, with a heater in one spot in case the bats get cold. Their box is at the bottom with two compartments, one for sleeping and the other for their food.

This setup allows me to leave food and water for the boys without stopping them from hibernating. Every so often I check on the bats weight to ensure they are doing ok and sometimes I can come into the room they are in and they decide to squeak to let me know they are fine! Usually my three boys have their own hiding spaces but when I checked on them on Christmas Day they were all cuddled up together for the first time!

Looking after bats during the winter is actually more difficult than you realise. It is a stressful time for bats and so it is important to get the right balance between giving them care and attention and leaving them alone completely. Thankfully Barry, Gordon and Irwin seem quite settled in their current home and I am looking forward to them getting ready for release in the spring.



The flexarium [Photo: Colin Edwards]

Helping bats hang on at Parndon Wood

Catherine Jones reports on a key Essex bat site

It is a dark, drizzly autumnal evening as I walk through the dimly lit Parndon Wood towards the vaguely discernible white cage. I hear voices, which tell me that I have found the right place. They let me inside. I close the door behind me carefully.

A shadowy movement flutters silently through the air, a brilliant navigator, swooping up and down, skilfully turning corners with incredible agility. One could be forgiven for mistaking it as a small bird. But, unlike a bird, the wings are webbed and almost translucent. Every few minutes the creature rests, making itself visible as a dark patch on the white wall. Close examination reveals a brown long-eared female bat. Her distinguishing feature, the long delicate ears, makes her truly beautiful.

She is almost weightless in my hands when I hold her. She does not stay for long. She wriggles free and continues her flight. Her high pitched calls are only audible through the bat detector as a twittering sound. It is easy to understand why bats are described as "the real stars of the night" on the Bat Conservation Trust's website. After a while she is caught and safely returned to her box. Satisfied that she has no injury to the wing, the bat workers prepare to leave Parndon Wood and return the patient to Harlow Bat Hospital.

My new bat friend is one of the hundreds of rescued bats receiving care through the Essex Bat Group to enable successful rehabilitation in its natural habitat. The flight cage provides the ultimate test before a bat is deemed ready for release. Jan Ragg, who is retired and literally lives by the motto "bats need friends", runs the bat hospital from her home in Harlow. When I visit her, there are still hundreds of empty plastic boxes and folded cloths in her living room from the influx of casualties admitted during the summer. Her second room downstairs is occupied by a large white clothed flight cage, inside which is a hand-crafted wooden house (complete with a gold 'number one'), home to Sudbury, the young long-eared bat found in the fire escape of a care home in Sudbury on 29th September. (Some of the bats are named after their home town for ease of identification, because they must be released back to their original roost). Next to the cage is a white cabinet, with all sorts of medicines arranged on top, reminiscent of an apothecary.



Parndon Wood Nature Reserve
[Photo: Catherine Jones]



Brown Long-eared Bat
[Photo: Catherine Jones]

Jan first became involved with bat care nearly 20 years ago. After meeting her first bat she quickly realised the appeal of these unusual creatures, and is now devoted to enlightening the public. With this year's casualties in the Harlow Bat Hospital reaching a record-breaking 230 due to adverse weather conditions, Jan had an extremely busy summer where she was constantly providing bat care round the clock, for months without so much as a day off, spending a lot of time feeding inpatients.

With 131 bats deemed fit for release, Jan has many success stories to tell. During the winter months she will analyse the data, so important to bat protection.

The bat group is one of the many wildlife groups which rely on Harlow Council's Parndon Wood Nature Reserve for its successful conservation work. Other groups include Harlow Wildlife Project, Harlow Conservation Volunteers, Harlow Green Team, Wildspace Volunteers and the Harlow Badger Group. With a total of 16,149 visitors during 2010, for the third successive year, Parndon Wood has been awarded a prestigious Green Flag, a sign to visitors that the park is well maintained and well managed with excellent facilities.

However, due to funding cuts, Harlow Council now wants local voluntary and private companies to take over the site. Despite assurances from the council that it would remain protected as a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), members of local groups and organisations have expressed strong concern. Mick Westby, a member of the Essex Bat Group, said: "We believe that the council's plans could seriously jeopardise the future of our bat rehabilitation programme at Parndon Wood. A great deal of time and labour has been invested into building the flight cage, which could be under threat if the nature reserve goes into private hands." However, bat workers are determined to continue with their work.

A few memorable visitors to the bat hospital

Colin Edwards with some of the bats that came into care in 2011

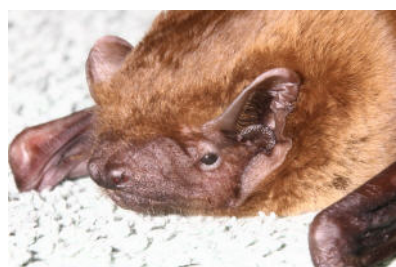
Here we have a Serotine (right) which was liberated from a blocked up chimney of a house. He was a juvenile bat that had just lost his way and not been strong enough to clamber back up and out to freedom. He put on a good show around the garden before making off along the tree line when he was released.



This Leisler's (left) was starving when he was found, but was released after only seven days in

captivity. Leisler's are easier to photograph than most species as they know they look good and seem to have no trouble in posing in front of the lens!

Barbastelles are very rare and this chap (right) was found starving - in the stairwell of a building of all places. He was released following 8 days in captivity, after he put on a delightful display of pure agility and elegance in the cage in front of a whole row of spectators.



This is Brian the Noctule who was found by a dog and was with us for nearly 6 months. Brian had lost the tip of his left wing which meant he was only doing left turns in the flight cage. For some time it looked like he would not make it to release, but after some practice in Beds Bat Group's poly-tunnel, Brian was able to improve and eventually included some right turns in his aerobatic displays.

Bats and Churches: Soprano Pipistrelles in the East of England

New EBG member **Madeleine Ryan** is studying for a PhD researching bats and churches. Here she explains the project and some of the work she has been doing, and how to get involved

I started my PhD studies, based at the University of Bristol and the Bat Conservation Trust, in May 2011 on the ecology, conservation and management of bats roosting in churches in the East of England (covering the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex). The work focuses on the soprano pipistrelle, a Biodiversity Action Plan species that sometimes comes into conflict with people due to its habit of forming large colonies in buildings.

The study is funded by SITA Trust and Natural England. It will investigate the selection of churches as maternity roosts, the foraging and roosting behaviour of soprano pipistrelles in the East of England, and methods to reduce the impacts of large maternity colonies without harming local conservation status.

I spent the summer of 2011 in Norfolk surveying churches and radio-tracking bats. All the churches visited had signs of bats, from discarded moth wings to colonies of Natterer's bats, which can sometimes be seen huddled together in the chancel arch or other crevices (see photo). For the radio-tracking study, bats were caught as they emerged from a maternity colony in a large mediaeval church on the North Norfolk coast. Adult female soprano pipistrelles were fitted with 0.31g radio-tags and tracked all night every night from July to September, with the day roosts of each bat located in the morning (over the weeks I cursed a few bats that decided to roost in particularly remote trees when trying to find them at 9 o'clock in the morning - way past my bed time!).

The bats foraged almost exclusively in or above woodland, a freshwater marsh and a river, at locations up to 5km from day roosts. Bats were active on average for three hours per night, with foraging bouts interspersed with periods of night-roosting. Alternative day roosts were in old rural houses, outbuildings (both modern and old), and trees, which included oak, ash, sweet chestnut and a scots pine filled with woodpecker holes.

Fieldwork will continue in 2012 and 2013 (April to September) and will include sites in Essex. Volunteers can get involved to help with evening emergence counts, bat catching nights and radio-tracking. If you're interested in helping out on the project, please get in touch by email or telephone. Additionally, if any members are aware of pipistrelle (particularly soprano)



Natterer's bats in a chancel arch
[Photo: Madeleine Ryan]

maternity roosts in churches in the county, please get in touch. I still need sites for monitoring studies and for radio-tracking.

Contact details:
madeleinesryan@hotmail.com
madeleine.ryan@bristol.ac.uk
07891 307626



Evidence of a feeding perch
[Photo: Madeleine Ryan]

Events Programme 2012

For further information or suggestions for future events please contact Becky Gibson

Hanningfield Reservoir Visitor Centre Fortnightly Maternity Roost Counts Hawkswood Road, Downham, Billericay, CM11 1WT. Join a small team of volunteers to count the soprano pipistrelles as they leave the maternity roost at dusk. Fortnightly counts on Wednesday evenings. Contact Pete Cloughton by email pete.cloughton@btinternet.com to confirm date, time and other arrangements.

East of England Regional Bat Conference Saturday 14th April - Ickworth House, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk A day of workshops and talks for bat workers from the East of England, including Essex. Contact Lisa Worledge (LWorledge@bats.org.uk) for details and let EBG know if you're going.

Bat Walk Saturday 14th April - Colchester Castle Park Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 19.40 start. Booking is essential 01206 282962. £4 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Meet at the café in the park.

Bat Walk Saturday 28th April - Salary Brook, Colchester Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 20.00 start. Booking essential 01206 282962. £3 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Confirm meeting place on booking.

Bat Walk Saturday 5th May - Colchester Castle Park Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 20.15 start. Booking is essential 01206 282962. £4 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Meet at the café in the park.

Bat Evening Friday 18th May - Lexden Park, Colchester Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. Exceptional views of bats are often gained over the lake. 20.00 start. Booking is essential 01206 853588. £3 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Please confirm meeting place on booking.

Bat Walk Friday 17th August - High Woods Country Park, Colchester Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 20.00 start. Booking is essential 01206 853588. £3 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Please confirm meeting place on booking.

Bat Walk Saturday 15th September - Hilly Fields, Colchester Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 19.00 start. Booking is essential 01206 853588. £3 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Please confirm meeting place on booking.

Bat Walk Saturday 22nd September - Colchester Castle Park Event in partnership with Colchester Borough Council. 18.40 start. Booking is essential 01206 282962. £4 for adults, children free. EBG members free. Numbers limited. Meet at the café in the park.



Committee members
and other contacts

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EBG Clothing Order Form

<u>Item</u>	<u>Size</u>	<u>Cost</u> per item	<u>Number</u> per item	<u>Total</u>
Sweat Shirt	S/M/L/XL/XXL	£15		
Polo Shirt	S/M/L/XL/XXL	£15		
Fleece	S/M/L/XL/XXL	£25		
Gillet	S/M/L/XL/XXL	£20		
Subtotal				£ _____
P&P (£2.35 per item)				£ _____
Donation				£ _____
Total				£ _____



- [] I enclose cheque made payable to EBG for the sum of £ _____
 [] I would like my clothing sent to me and have enclosed p&p.
 [] I will collect my item from Hornchurch / Harlow / Ingatestone

Name _____ Address _____
 Email _____ Telephone _____

Please enclose a cheque made payable to EBG for the total amount. please allow 3-4 weeks for delivery.
 If you can collect your clothing from Harlow, Hornchurch or Ingatestone then please do not add the postage.
 Return form to Sue Burton, 2 Mellish Way, Hornchurch, Essex. RM11 2GU.

Membership Form

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

We are indebted to our members for their support and enthusiasm. If you would like to help your local bats, please fill in the form and send to: Helen Miller, EBG Membership Secretary, 16 Hogarth Ave, Brentwood, Essex CM15 8BE

Yes, I would love to become a member of E.B.G. for 2012*, 2013, 2014 (delete as appropriate)

Name _____ Address _____

Email _____ Telephone _____

Using email means we can send your newsletter and other correspondence electronically, saving on postage and stationery so more of your membership money is used for bat conservation. Your email 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 the appropriate box:

___ Standard membership of the group is just £5 for 1 year

___ OR a *SPECIAL OFFER* of £12 for 3 years

DONATION: 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 2012.