

# Newsletter

Autumn  
2011

## Hanningfield Latest

Becky Gibson with news from the roost

Essex Wildlife Trust's Hanningfield Reservoir Visitor Centre is host to a large maternity roost of soprano pipistrelles, which have exceeded 470 in numbers since 2006 when the roost was discovered. The roost is surveyed on a fortnightly basis during the active season by Peter and Jannette Cloughton. They invite other volunteers to join them to assist with the count and monitor other parts of the centre that are being used by smaller groups of bats. EWT run a series of events to show people the spectacle of bats emerging at dusk and swarming around the roost entrance at dawn on special early morning events.



[ Photo: Becky Gibson ]

EWT is keen to make the bats even more accessible by having a camera installed inside a roost to show images which can be viewed by visitors to the centre, giving an even greater insight into the lives of the Hanningfield bats. In 2009, Maurice Webber, a wildlife consultant with a particular interest in bats, built, donated and erected a large bat box (see photo) which stands on top of a telegraph pole adjacent to the centre and roost entrance. It is designed to attract a range of species, provides a wide range of roosting opportunities and is an ideal structure to house an infra-red camera.

We are pleased to announce that bats started to use the box for the first time this summer. Nineteen soprano pipistrelles were counted out on 10th August, four on the 24th and three on 7th and 21st September. The box will now be closely monitored and the team at Hanningfield are looking into inserting a camera to allow people to get an even closer experience of these amazing creatures. Installation will require the approval of Natural England and would need to be done in such a way that no bats are disturbed.

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Deadline for next issue, Winter 2011/12: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012. pathatch@live.co.uk

# Do habitat or regional differences affect the activity of British bats?

## Ella Barnett with a summary of her recent study

[Photo: Adam Taylor]

During the summer of 2010 I collected data for my dissertation by listening to the bats at Chafford Gorges Nature Park in Grays. I was looking at the number of feeding calls in the first hour of activity and numerous abiotic factors to see if there were any correlations. I had two study sites; one over Warren Gorge, which was next to a lake and was therefore called the 'Wetland Site' and one over Grays Chalk Quarry, which was surrounded by trees and so was called the 'Woodland Site'.

My main aim was to see if habitat differences (both structural and abiotic) affect the activity of bats. Biotic factors such as the insect density were attempted to be measured but the method of a net seemed to be very unsuccessful, despite there being plenty of insects around (as I could tell from the number of bites I had at the end of each night!). Pipistrelles were the most commonly heard bats but there were also some Daubenton's bats heard at the Wetland Site. One night we even followed them over the water surface with a torch, my mum, who was out with me at the time, thought it was marvellous!

We did encounter a few passers-by whilst we were out, fortunately there was no trouble and the fishermen we bumped into over Warren Gorge thought that listening to bats was fascinating; not that them casting out helped much with the recordings!

After collecting the data the joys of statistics came. It was found that the bats at the Woodland Site emerged significantly earlier (mean =  $7.660 \pm 2.212$  min after sunset) compared to at the Wetland Site (mean =  $40.733 \pm 1.916$  min after sunset), probably due to the increased coverage and therefore protection from predators such as diurnal birds of prey at the Woodland Site. This meant that the light intensity at which the bats started feeding was also much greater at the Woodland Site (mean =  $32.287 \pm 8.613$  lux) compared to the Wetland Site (mean =  $1.153 \pm 0.195$  lux).

The abiotic factors seemed to affect the bats differently at the two sites. Correlations appeared between the abiotic factors and the number of feeding calls at the Woodland Site but not the Wetland Site. For example temperature and light intensity had a positive correlation with the number of feeding calls whereas humidity had a negative correlation at the Woodland Site but not at the Wetland Site. Wind speed, cloud cover and the phase of the moon did not correlate with the number of feeding calls per night at either site. At the Woodland Site any rain reduced the number of feeding calls whereas only heavy rainfall reduced the feeding activity of the bats at the Wetland Site.

Another part of my project was to compare my findings with previous studies from other sites in Britain. The purpose of this was to find if latitude affected the time of emergence of bats. Studies such as those by Swift (1980), Swift and Racey (1983) and Rydell *et al.* (1996) were compared to studies such as those by Maier (1992), Jones (1995) and Catto *et al.* (1996). It was found that in southern England bats emerged much closer to the time of sunset (mean = 15.414 ±1.483 min after sunset) compared to bats in northern Scotland which emerged much later (mean = 43.500 ±16min after sunset). Sunset occurs later at higher latitudes during the summer and so there's an even bigger difference between the bat's emergence times at the different latitudes. However, it must be noted that there are many variables which differed between each study like the habitat surveyed, percentage cover, species of bat looked at etc. and so I concluded further studies would need to be carried out in order to back up this statement.

Studying bats at different latitudes is important as there are differences in temperature and day length at different latitudes and with the changing climate it could be that Britain becomes warmer and the northern limits of the bats' habitats are forced to stretch higher. This could restrict the habitat suitable to bats currently living in the northernmost parts of Britain or mean greater competition from bats moving in on their territory.

This project was the beginning of a new passion of mine and I am still working with bats and hope to continue for the foreseeable future!

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# Night of the Falcon

**John Smart** relates a tale of attempted chiropticide by an avian predator

It took me a little while to comprehend what was going on. I was seated in front of the stand alone bat roost box at Hanningfield Reservoir Visitor Centre, counting the emerging pipistrelles. At about 8pm, a small falcon dashed over the Centre with cranked wings, as if performing an aerial manoeuvre. I then realized that a predation of bats was being attempted.

A little later it made another pass just above the tree tops over the gable end, where the bats were emerging. And a little later still, a third pass. This was way past dusk and the light was very gloomy, although the sky was clear.

Reference to "Birds of the Western Palearctic" refers to Hobbies taking bats as large as Noctules. The next day, three Hobbies were above the conifers on the opposite bank of the reservoir hawking the rising dragonflies. This interaction between bats and birds has always intrigued me. I once saw a small party of House Martins approach and pass through a tight knit group of small bats. Each party bobbed and jinked accordingly to avoid collision and continued on their way undeterred.

The London Swift Conservation Group, who provide artificial nest boxes for Swifts, sometimes mount a web cam inside them. It not being unknown for a bat to roost up in the corner of the box as the Swift is tending its young. Little squabbling or animosity is observed as each life-form keeps to itself. The bat being a lodger as it were.

Editor's note: I once watched Swifts and Leisler's Bats feeding together for at least twenty minutes. Do let us know if you have made any interesting or unusual observations of bat and bird interactions.

# National Bat Conference 2011

## Kim Wallis reports on the Bat Conservation Trust Annual Conference

Despite being involved with bats for a number of years this year was the first time I have ever attended the BCT National Bat Conference..... well it is the Year of the Bat after all, which makes for a perfectly valid excuse.

The two day conference in September was held at the lovely venue of Warwick University, a good choice considering its location and huge conference facilities. They also fed us very well which obviously went down a treat. After a hearty breakfast the Saturday conference opened with a talk discussing the comparison of maternity roost colony counts. This was followed by a very interesting talk by our very own member Helen Miller on the BCT Bechstein's project, which has been a huge success. Other talks which I found particularly interesting included Bat Conservation International discussing the issues in North America with White-Nose Syndrome and the micro-imaging of the bats ear, nose and throat which produced fantastic 3-D bat images! Afternoons are dedicated to workshops with available topics ranging from 'which bat pooped this DNA', kite making, roofing membrane discussions, bats and churches and my choice (for both days); sound analysis.

Saturday ends with a conference dinner followed by music and dancing. This year we were entertained by Ceilidh dancing! I have to take this opportunity to congratulate the EBG table I was on as we won the batty quiz! Our very welcome prize consisted of more wine... a perfect end to a good day!

Sunday's talks were equally as enthralling as Saturday - bat ecology in a changing environment, people and engagement and bats and development. The Pete Guest award follows, for which EBG member and top bat carer Jan Ragg was nominated. Well done Jan!

If you have never been to the conference then you really are missing out, it was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative weekend. Bats, good company and plenty of food....what could possibly be better than that!

News

in

brief

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- Two second world war pill boxes in the Colne valley, which were converted for use by hibernating bats several years ago, have been enhanced further by the addition of new roosting features. These include logs with slots cut into them, which have already proved successful at the nearby Marks Hall Estate.

- The protection of wooden bat boxes from woodpecker attack has worked well at EWT Abbotts Hall Farm, near Colchester. The birds made holes in the boxes last summer and it was feared they would have to be taken down to avoid any risk of harm to bats. Metal fronts were made by the farm manager and fitted last winter. A recent check of the six boxes (September 2011) found two Common Pipistrelles in one and five in another.

- The EBG Committee has decided to run induction days for new members, to introduce them to bats, local projects and fellow bat folk, starting in the spring.

- A video of Noctules emerging from their maternity roost at Colchester can now be viewed on the Essex Bat Group web site.

# The Life of Brian



A **Noctule**, whose rescue featured in the Spring edition, gives us his side of the story (translated by Mick Westby)

Hi Folks, my adopted name is Brian, and this is my story of my unusual (for a bat) life for the summer of 2011. I am a Noctule bat, the largest of the British bats and my tale goes as follows.

I was born in 2010 in a perfect place for bats in Audley park, Saffron Walden. My first summer was idyllic, living in any one of the dozens of ancient oak trees and feeding in the wide open meadows by the lakes and stream running through the park. As the weather cooled, I hid up for the winter, and came out again in the spring. I am not sure what happened, but I was out one day, the 27th March, and suddenly found that I was on the ground with a border collie sniffing me to see what I was. The people with the dog picked me up and put me in a box. It was them that christened me Brian.

I was taken to a nice lady who said that I had lost some finger tips. I knew it hurt, but being a big bat I was brave and did not show it, I could not let bats in general down. My life from then turned into a time of absolute luxury. I was fed mealworms, which took a bit of getting used to, but they were so delicious that I turned into the bat equivalent of a couch potato as I did not have to fly or do any exercise for my rewards. I wanted to try and taste one of the humans, but they always wore gloves, so I didn't get the chance. I lived in a big box which just had room to stretch my wings, and really smelt of home after a few days. I spent some time at other peoples houses to give my carer some respite, as she had dozens of little bats to care for, and their needs were greater than mine by this time..

As the summer passed I was taken to a special place, called a flight cage, to see if I could remember how to fly. I thought to myself that if I flew straight away they may take me home where I might have to work for my food, so I did not perform. Also it was a bit cramped and I kept flying into the wall. I was left in this cage on a lot of nights and while nobody was watching I used to fly on my own, that fooled them, however the fact that in the morning I was at the other end of the cage may have given the game away. As the middle of August approached I thought of home and put a bit more effort into flying and it was at this point that I was taken to a lot bigger place to hone my skills. This seemed to work because after a week or so I was pronounced fit to go home.

In September I was taken back to where I came from and as I sat on somebody's hand warming up and getting the nerve to make the break from a life of cosseting I thought what a wonderful summer I had spent. I thought that the people watching deserved a good show, so I took off and circled a couple of times, and then flew up to about 120 feet, circled a few more times, flew away about half a mile and then flew back before heading off over the trees to home.

Postscript by Mick Westby: Brian was released at Saffron Walden on the 3rd September, and it was a great privilege to see a big bat that was thought to be a permanent captive, soaring high in the sky and circling to get its bearings before flying off into the distance. Well done to all his carers and we wish him all the best.

# My First Summer with EBG

Hayley Farnell reviews a busy debut season with our bat care network

It's been an exciting summer as a new recruit with the bat ambulance helpers. We've had Brian the Noctule, a colony of juvenile Pips, a shouty little Pip, a fussy eating Serotine and a soggy little Barbastelle (who'd been mopped up).

None of which I expected when I went to the AGM in April to find out a little more about how I could get involved. There I was sitting in the back hiding as all new people do when a lovely person (who I now know is Sue) came up and gave me information on how I could help and took my number and details and said she would be in touch. Off I went thinking "well this'll be fun I hope I will be able to help I doubt you really get many injured bats, probably only one call a month, I suppose it will mainly be surveys....." How wrong I was. A few weeks later I met Jan and she trained me up to help care for and handle the bats, towards the end of the day she brings out a box in which there is a bat for us to hold. It was a pip which seemed so tiny in my giant hands and they can wiggle out of your hands and try and escape so easily. The fear I was going to squash the little bats took a few weeks to get over but once I'd learnt my own strength and gained confidence I was able to keep hold of them.

One of the first tasks I had was to collect a little bat from Clacton. She was not a happy bat as she had a torn wing and was quite willing to shout about this. I took her to Jan who gave her antibiotics and juicy mealworms to eat. A few weeks later Clacton the bat came to stay with me at my house in the flexarium (a small little cage in which she could walk about and stretch her wings). She was a talker and always had a squeak whenever I checked on her. She's still in the "bat hospital" at the moment but we're hopeful she can go back home next spring and tell all her friends about her adventures.

Another part of helping to care for bats is taking the recuperating ones up to the bat cage (yes I've heard all the jokes and no I don't have a fancy car and a friend called Robin). This is a larger space in which the bats can build up their strength and eventually be evaluated to be releasable back to where they came from. The first bat I met to fly in the cage was Brian the Noctule who was beautiful and much bigger than the little pips. Thanks to him I managed to improve my handling skills. At first we didn't think he would be releasable but we never gave up and in September he finally went home.

I tried to help out at the "bat hospital" as much as I could (about one or two evenings a week) as there were definitely more than one bat a month coming in and so lots of mouths to feed. This is when I met the eleven Silver End juveniles who I was surprised to see as when I and another volunteer had done a survey at Silver End we hadn't found any bats. So here they were all eleven, tiny and proving us wrong. Well a grudge couldn't be held for long and I helped feed them soup and sort into ones that could feed themselves and who needed hand feeding. It took a few weeks but eventually they were all in the feeding themselves box and were going up to the cage to begin flying. Eight went back home fairly quickly but the three remaining ones must have liked us so much they took a bit longer, eventually though we managed to get them fit enough for release. It was great to watch the last two go as I'd seen them from tiny little things unable to feed themselves to flying off into the night back from where they came.

The fussy eating Serotine was a female who'd been hit by a car. She couldn't feed herself so I was given the task to hand feed her. I gave her the first meal worm which she held in her mouth and wouldn't let go; eventually I manage to get her to drop it and tried another which she again held in her mouth and definitely wouldn't let go. Half an hour later she decides she's going to eat and finally devours the one she's had in her mouth. After this there was no stopping her and she went from strength to strength. I think I still hold the record for the longest time taken to feed one bat.

Just as I didn't think I would get to see any new types of bats (I'd already met a Noctule, pips, Serotines, Brown Long-eareds and a Leisler's, pretty good going in the first year) we had a Barbastelle brought in. He'd been found in an office block and mopped up by the cleaner and dumped outside in a box. Luckily a volunteer was working on the site and picked him up and brought him to the hospital. He was released a few weeks later and we were all chuffed we'd managed to see a Barbastelle in Essex.

It's been an extraordinary summer and I've learnt so much about how to hold and feed a bat, and identify all the different species we have seen. It's such a sense of achievement to save a bat and watch it go back to the wild. I'm so glad I've been able to help and will continue doing so, It'll be interesting to see what next summer brings and who I might meet.

## Bat care babies

**Geoff Ragg** with a few  
of this year's casualties

We were surprised to see this young Serotine (below) in the middle of July, as we had not had a juvenile before, but we had another from a different area the very next day. The two bats came from Great Chesterford (Cambridgeshire border near Saffron Walden) and Hornchurch.



This young Brown Long-eared Bat (above) had trouble controlling her ears and sometimes they both flopped over on one side. She was released a couple of weeks later when she was able to catch her own insects. She was found and released at Ugley, near Stansted Mountfitchet.



A one day old pipistrelle from Willingale (near Chelmsford), who unfortunately died. Note the perfectly formed fingers, but the wings are too small for the baby to fly at this age.



[Photos: Geoff Ragg]

# An Unforgettable Bat

Colin Edwards relates a rare encounter.....

It was Tuesday morning, the day after the Bank Holiday and a decision had to be made, work from home, or go to the office? A difficult one, lethargy had set in with the holidays and the last Bank Holiday this side of Christmas now behind us, but some careful thoughts as to a teenage daughter still

being on school summer break and those sentences starting "Can I have...." made it a no brainer. So the office it was, and what a good decision it was going to be!

The day was passing as per usual until 13:30 when I noticed the doorman hurrying down the corridor in my direction and when he turned into my pen and said "are you Batman?" my first thoughts were, "yes mate and don't you know my brothers called Robin" (which he is of course). I was thinking along the lines of him just being another one trying to take the proverbial as they think I'm a little strange....having bat photos on my desk instead of family ones, but to my surprise he said, "Seriously, the cleaner has found a bat whilst mopping the floors in the stairwell". He went on to explain that the cleaner was in shock over this terrifying creature that had hissed and stuck its tongue out at her when she had tried to mop it up thinking it was a clump of fluff, and so he had resolved the situation by placing the bat in a box and placing it at the back of the car park under a bush....much to the satisfaction of the cleaner who was still shaking at the mention of the word 'Bat'.

So off to the back of the car park I go followed by a few other people who had overheard the conversation and who were also looking for any excuse for stopping work. On route across the car park there's me saying it's bound to be a pipistrelle, it's always a pipistrelle they like buildings, and if we are really lucky it could be a long-eared. I could see the box across the car park....a large box....a very large box for a bat, how big is this bat I thought. Finally we reached the box which had been left laying on its side and my first thought was anything in there has probably crawled out and gone by now....but no, it was still there, and how happy was I that it was still there? Give me a lifetime and I'll probably be in a better position to evaluate that one.



[Photo: Henry Curry]



[Photo: Alan Outen]

I could barely get the words out, "wow, it's a ...barbastelle" and what a beauty - but is there any other way to describe a barb?

So back into the office and into bat care mode, a quick check over as I was unprepared and without the necessary gloves..... no obvious injuries, just looks a bit thin and there's plenty of mites. Out with the mineral water which it took without hesitation. By this time another half a dozen people had appeared from nowhere to see the V.I.B. (very important barbastelle) so after a quick talk as to how this bat was probably the rarest mammal they were ever likely to see in this country outside of a zoo, it was into a stress free environment for the bat and off to see an expert... Jan Ragg (no better place for a bat in need of assistance, especially a V.I.B.).....



On route I'd called Jan to tell her the barb was on its way, so she was ready for a more thorough assessment of the bat. Forearm first, 39mm, weight 5.8g, below the minimum stated in the book, so a drop more water and a couple of mealworms only to start with not wanting to over do it and cause bloat, and a quick look below ends the assessment with the bat being a young male.



[Photo: Colin Edwards]

So with the V.I.B. under the careful supervision of Jan it was off for a quick bite to eat and then out to the Beds Poly Tunnel to fly Brian the Noctule (can a day get any better than that?).

The following day started with many interested people asking how the bat was, even the cleaner was pleased that she hadn't harmed it with her mop. After this it was off to have a look at where the bat had been found and to investigate how it may have got into the building. This was followed by a mail from Jan saying the bat had survived through the night and that she was now more hopeful for its future.

After a few days of pampered care so as to put on some weight it was time to test the chap's flying prowess. Normally the flight cage is at best manned by 2 people, even when there's something interesting like a Leisler's or Serotine, but on this occasion we could have sold tickets! Thankfully the barb put on a show for us, its flying skills were nothing less than fantastic, weaving around those of us seeking to get at least one good photo with such agility. The bat used the entire space within the cage, at times flying much lower than other species tend to. Also the echolocation appeared to have more calls around 41KHz than the usually recorded 34KHz which may have been down to the bat having to take account of the ceiling.

After a good 15 to 20 minutes of flight the barb, having been declared fit for release, was placed back in its box which prompted many of the spectators to leave, not taking up the opportunity to see the Leisler's and pips that still needed flying. A very pleasing evening in the presence of the V.I.B. had taken place.

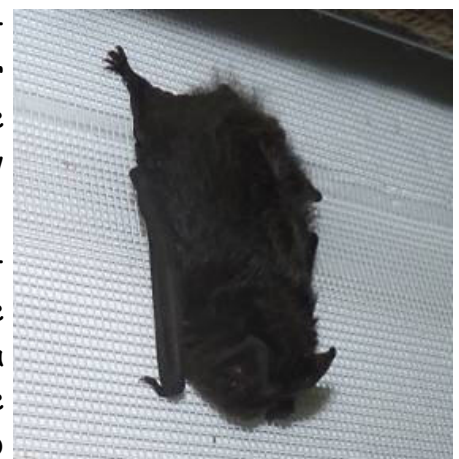
The release was initially planned for the 6th September, but the weather turned against us with it being a very windy evening and thus we postponed until the following day. Again a good attendance for the release and as we all prepared another bat was detected flying by... it sounded very much like another barb, but none of us had switched our recording devices on so we will never know for sure if it was one. At 8pm, Jan helped the barb from its box, fed it



[Photo: Henry Curry]

a couple of mealworms and off it went, once up and down the car park and then off through the hedge.... all over in but a few seconds.

I keep thinking that this is what it's all about, those once in a life time moments that provide such a buzz of a feeling and makes one feel like everything is so worthwhile.



[Photo: Colin Edwards]

# Essex Bat Group Members' Evening

Friday 2nd December, 8pm. Boreham Village Hall, Boreham

## Bats of Trinidad

Daniel Hargreaves will give us a talk on his recent research trip to this Caribbean island

Trinidad is the southernmost island in the Caribbean and lies just seven miles off the coast of Venezuela. It has a rich diversity of bats, with approximately seventy species recorded, representing all the major feeding guilds and including the infamous vampire bats.

Daniel will give an illustrated talk about the amazing variety of bats, their ecology and recent bat conservation efforts in Trinidad. The talk will last about one hour, with a mixture of photos and videos. A buffet and light refreshments will be provided.

This is our first members' evening, which we aim to run every winter in addition to our AGM. These evenings will provide an opportunity to meet other members in a sociable atmosphere, to share your ideas and experiences and find out more about bats and their conservation.

Our inaugural event takes us to a land of unfamiliar, exotic bats:

leaf-nosed, disk-winged, free-tailed and funnel-eared, fishing bats and vampires.

The perfect antidote to a winter's night perhaps, with drinks and nibbles to boot!

All are welcome. If you're not a member you can join on the door.



Committee members  
and other contacts

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Bat Conservation Trust



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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 it 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 2011/12\*, 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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012.