

Newsletter Autumn 2012

Essex Bat Group Members' Evening

Friday 30th November 2012 8pm start
Boreham Village Hall

Nathusius' Pipistrelles

Daniel Hargreaves will give an illustrated talk
on his research project in Somerset

As anyone who attended last year's talk on the bats of Trinidad will know,
Daniel is a very informative and entertaining speaker.

It is thought that Nathusius' pipistrelles from northern Europe migrate to
Britain to join our resident population for the winter, crossing the North Sea
to get here. As Essex may well lie on their migration route, this species is of
great interest to us. Please come and find out more about this under-recorded
species. This will also be a good chance to meet with other members and find
out what is happening in Essex Bat Group. Refreshments will be provided.

Venue details: Boreham Village Hall, Main Road, Boreham, near Chelmsford CM3 3JD

Weald Country Park report.....	Page 2
Daubenton's of Thurrock	Page 3
Coastal surveys	Page 4
Dengie Natterer's.....	Page 4
EBG Grant Scheme.....	Page 4
When is a bat not a bat?	Page 5
News In Brief.....	Page 5
Contacts, membership form, EBG clothing.....	Page 6

Deadline for next issue, Winter 2012/2013: 15th December 2012. pathatch@live.co.uk

Weald Bat Project

Graham Hart reports on an exemplary project

A couple of years back I wrote an article for this newsletter that began with the line "If you get into bats, they will take over your life". I was quoting a long term experienced bat worker who muttered these words after I told him I wanted to set up my own surveys at Weald Country Park in Brentwood with my



Survey at Weald Country Park
[Photo: Graham Hart]

friend Duncan Fisher. So has this prediction proved true? Well, to a certain extent yes it has. I am still doing the surveys, I now help with many others, and I joined the Essex Bat Group Committee as Projects Officer. I even had some rabies jabs - not because I joined the committee though! It seems that normal life is unlikely to be resumed anytime soon

So how have things been at Weald? Well, it's been like that first few days of a holiday when you are still familiarising yourself with the area, planning what you are going to do, maybe trying to cram everything in at once, unable to contain your excitement at having the chance to do what you love with people who feel the same way. Now I've reached that point where everything is a little less frantic and I can enjoy the views more. But this is one holiday that is unlikely to end anytime soon.

To recap on my journey. I got into bats thanks to newts. Er, let me explain, I was doing evening surveys of ponds in the Brentwood area looking for amphibians and I would regularly see these other fascinating creatures dominating the crepuscular setting and hoovering up the hapless insect life around the pond. Curiosity and an enquiring mind led me to pick up a FSC field guide and learn more about them. A subsequent investment in a bat detector has now snowballed into The Weald Bat Project which I now run with my bat sidekick Duncan Fisher, without whom I would probably be suffocating under a ton of unanalysed bat recordings by now.

We have had some major success in the short time that we have been surveying at Weald Park. We bagged a barbastelle in our first survey season (not literally of course) and in our second year we stumbled upon - I mean 'located with much intense survey effort' - a soprano pipistrelle roost on the island at the Fishing lake. This roost has triggered much discussion as it's temporary in nature, only appearing shortly after emergence from hibernation in April before disappearing. Perhaps it's a meeting up place after their long sleep where they all get to have a brief social before heading their separate ways for the summer. (Any serious views by members on such temporary spring roosts are most welcome). I now excitedly look forward to each April hoping to see if they will return again.

Perhaps the biggest success of the Weald Bat Project though has been the people. I mean this in the sense that our work there seems to inspire others. We are often joined by people new to bats (as well as the veterans) who want somewhere to go that's rich in bats but also where they can practice survey skills with others who they can learn from and share experiences with. Last winter I also set up a sound analysis workshop, where those who had attended last year's surveys could come and share their recordings with others, especially those more tricky recordings that always seem to require second or third opinions. This proved very successful and I hope to repeat it again this year.

This year has seen less bat activity during our surveys due to the appalling summer weather. However, another pip roost has been identified by an EBG member at a picnic pond site and we managed to confirm this on a successfully attended stake out session in July (it didn't rain for once). We also had a new pip maternity roost in the visitor centre but we are not sure how successful it was because a few of the young bats had to be taken into care. It will be interesting to see if this roost returns next year.

2013 will be the Weald Bat Project's 4th year and I am sure it will be as exciting and as interesting as always. I will be announcing the survey dates in time for the next AGM and I hope it continues to attract people new to bats as well as new faces. There are new plans for our survey work next year but perhaps I should keep these under wraps for now so I will have something new to write about in next year's newsletter!

Daubenton's of Tunnel 3

Pat Hatch on the discovery of an unusual maternity roost

During August, I carried out a survey of the tunnels at Grays chalk pits (aka Chafford Gorges) to see if there was any summer use. These winter hibernation sites may seem unlikely locations for summer roosts, but there was a past record of Daubenton's bats in Tunnel 3 at this time of year.



Tunnel 3, Grays Chalk Pits

[Photo: Pat Hatch]

Sure enough, we found a cluster of bats in the tunnel. A brief shine of the torch and a quick photo identified them as Daubenton's. It was difficult to tell exactly how many there were among the tight ball of furry bodies, but peering at the photo later, counting noses and forearms, I estimated 16 - 20 bats. To me, a cluster of Daubenton's in August means a maternity roost and this was confirmed by other experienced bat workers. A cool tunnel, open at both ends and subject to a flow of air much of the time, may seem unsuitable for a maternity roost and this find is, to the best of my knowledge, very unusual.

The bats appear to have chosen a roosting spot and a method of roosting which minimise any cooling effect of their location. They hang at the highest point of a large domed section of the tunnel ceiling, which is probably the warmest, most sheltered place available. With most of the bats hanging on fellow bats rather than the rock above, and many sandwiched between roost mates, huddling together in close bodily contact conserves heat and moisture.



A ball of Daubenton's in Tunnel 3

[Photo: Pat Hatch]

Tunnel 3 is used by common pipistrelles and low numbers of Daubenton's for hibernation. Essex Wildlife Trust, who manage the site, are considering fitting grilles to the tunnel, with advice from Essex Bat Group.

Kent Underground Research Group had requested a tour of the tunnels and several of their members accompanied us on the survey. Relations between caving and other 'underground groups' and bat workers are generally much better than in the past. KURG has a Bat Liaison Officer and a caving group helps with hibernation surveys at Grays Deneholes SSSI.

Coastal Surveys

Pat Hatch with recent sightings from our coastline

When we think of typical foraging habitat, we tend to imagine largely inland locations such as woodland, parks, hedgerows, lakes, ponds and rivers. The coast does not immediately spring to mind, and is probably under-surveyed as a result. With the longest coastline of any English county, we in Essex have ample opportunity to play a part in rectifying this situation.



The cliffs at Walton-on-the-Naze
[Photo: Pat Hatch]

This summer, surveys by EBG members have found bats in coastal and estuarine habitats from Tilbury to Walton-on-the-Naze. At the Naze cliffs, a large number of soprano pipstrelles were recorded foraging over the 'undercliff' during August. This is a unique site in Essex and is one of my favourites, its eroding sandy cliffs supporting a diverse array of wildlife, including specialist invertebrates, grass snakes, lizards and temporary freshwater pools with breeding smooth newts, so it was quite gratifying to find that bats are part of the ecosystem here.

Following up a report of 'large bats' at Tollesbury marina, two members found *Nyctalus* (noctule or Leisler's bat) foraging over the sea wall. At Canvey Island, local members regularly see pipistrelles foraging over Benfleet Creek and the shores of the River Thames, including a recent report of Nathusius' pipistrelle. And at Coalhouse Fort, East Tilbury, a presentation on



bats for local volunteers who work at the site was followed by a bat walk, during which common and soprano pipistrelles (and possibly Daubenton's bat) were recorded foraging over the moat and over borrowdykes behind the sea wall. A pipistrelle (species unknown) was also found down by the river, well beyond the sea wall. We also have reports of large numbers of bats foraging further up the Thames at Rainham Marshes.

Natterers' discovered on the Dengie Peninsula A maternity roost of about fifty Natterer's bats was found at Bradwell-on-Sea this summer after a householder called Essex Wildlife Trust wanting more information about the bats in her loft. This is a great find for the new Dengie Project and is one of very few known maternity roosts of this species in the county.

Essex Bat Group Grant Scheme The EBG Committee would like to invite members looking for small-scale funding to apply for a grant under our new scheme. The amount on offer will be reviewed annually, but a maximum of £300 is available for this year. The intention is to provide help with activities which are in line with the aims of EBG and are of direct benefit to EBG and bat conservation in Essex. Full details, including conditions, will be sent out to members shortly. If you are interested, please contact Pat Hatch: pathatch@live.co.uk.

Britain's rarest bats

Mick Westby with a case of mistaken identity

On the 31st of July this year I got a call from Jan Ragg to ask if I could go to Barking to rescue three juvenile bats. They were in the 99p store in the High Street. The Polish manager, who spoke very good English, had looked up the Bat Conservation Trust on the internet and contacted them. They gave the staff the usual instructions to put them in a box with air holes and a drink of water, till help arrived. Jan gave me all the details for collection, so I called to make sure that all was okay, and was told that there were now six bats in the box, and that they could hear the mother bat on the roof (strange, I thought). I called Jan back to warn her that there must be a major catastrophe in a roost. She said that she would get her casualty unit ready for a large consignment of sick or injured bats. I arrived at the store to be let in a big roller shutter door at the back. I was shown a box about two feet square with one inch diameter holes in it. Oops, I thought, they will have escaped, so I gingerly opened the lid to find, lo and behold they were all there swimming around in a large dog bowl of water.

I could hear a noise outside through the open door, and on going outside could see a mother Mallard bat, three stories up on the next door building, who had lost her children. She had been outside for at least two hours, knowing where her offspring were. I took one 'batling' out to show her and she actually hit me on the shoulder in her haste to get to it. I tipped the rest out onto the pavement, and she waddled off, with her kids in tow, happy as a duck could be. We had gathered quite a crowd by this time, and there was lots of applause from the shoppers. Another successful bat rescue, I thought. Jan was mightily relieved when I called her and said to stand down, emergency over.



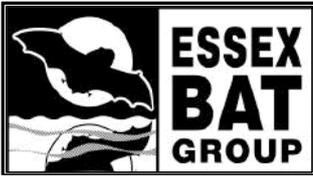
[Photo: Mick Westby]

News

in

brief

- EBG would like to thank Essex Biodiversity Project for funding the purchase of equipment for the Dengie Bat Project with a grant of nearly £500, with which we have bought a Batbox Duet frequency division detector, recorder and sound analysis computer programme;
- We have attended five public events this year, including providing support to Roger Havard at his usual stall at the Tendring Show. We gained several new members, reports of roosts in houses and established a good contact with Stow Maries Aerodrome, who want us to carry out a bat survey;
- Our first joint survey with Suffolk Bat Group took place at Hintlesham Woods, near Ipswich, in August. The survey was well supported by EBG members and we hope to hold further co-operative events in the future;
- Madeleine Ryan carried out radio tracking of soprano pipistrelles at Chappel (near Colchester) this year. We will carry a report in a future newsletter;
- The joint barbastelle radio tracking project with Herts & Middlesex Bat Group sadly had to be postponed this year but will be go ahead in 2013;
- Seven EBG members attended the annual Bat Conservation Trust Conference in York in September. This is a great opportunity to learn and to make useful contacts and members are encouraged to attend next year's event.



Committee members and other contacts



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EBG Clothing

Essex Bat Group clothing is now available, featuring our evocative emblem of a bat flying over moonlit water

Please send your order to Sue Burton, 2 Mellish Way, Hornchurch, Essex RM11 2GU, enclosing a cheque made payable to EBG for the total amount, including £2.35 per item post and packaging. Please allow 3-4 weeks for delivery. If you can collect your clothing from Harlow, Hornchurch or Ingatestone please let Sue know and omit the postage charge.

- Sweat Shirt £16
- Polo Shirt £15
- T-shirt £12
- Fleece £25
- Gillet £20
- Cap £9

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 Avenue, Brentwood, Essex CM15 8BE

Yes, I would love to become a member of E.B.G. for 2013*, 2014, 2015 (delete as appropriate)

Name Address

Email Telephone

Using e-mail 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 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 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)