

# Newsletter Autumn 2013

## EBG Members' Evening

Friday 15th November 2013 7.45pm  
Boreham Village Hall

## Norfolk Bats In Churches Project

How important are mediaeval churches to Norfolk's bat populations?

Phil Parker will give an illustrated talk on his research, including his work to conserve bat roosts in churches and find solutions to the issues sometimes raised by the presence of bats in these historic buildings.

A fascinating and informative evening guaranteed. Refreshments provided.

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

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## Essex Bat Group AGM

Friday 7th March 2014 at Boreham Village Hall

Bat Conservation Trust Partnership Officer Lisa Worledge will give us an illuminating talk on **Bats and Infectious Diseases**

Further details to be announced

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Hanningfield Calling A summary for 2013.....	Page 2
Essex Nathusius Pipistrelle Project Radio tracking begins.....	Page 3
EBG in Transylvania Our Treasurer reports from Romania.....	Page 5
'Bat Batty' - a poem.....	Page 7
The adventures of Bert An intrepid tale of bat rescue.....	Page 8
News In Brief.....	Page 8
Are Brown Long-eared Bats in trouble?.....	Page 9
Contacts, EBG clothing & membership form.....	Page 10

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Deadline for next issue, Winter 2013/14: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2014. pathatch@live.co.uk

# The Hanningfield Bats 2013

Peter Claughton brings us up to date

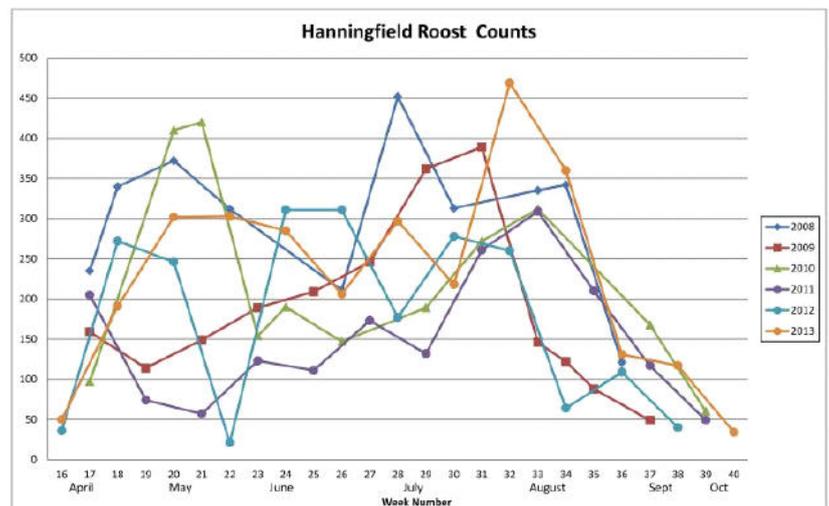
Since 2008 we have been doing fortnightly counts of the Soprano Pipistrelles as they emerge from the maternity roost in the roof of the Hanningfield Visitor Centre and, whilst every year has produced something interesting, it was only at the end of the 2013, when looking back and sending off the records, that it was apparent just what a fascinating year it has been observing the bats at Hanningfield.



It wasn't a very promising start with the cold weather lasting longer than usual and some early reports of bats being seen flying near the Centre in daylight were slightly worrying, but come April we heard the first signs of our Soprano Pipistrelles returning to their roost. The first count exceeded expectations, with 50 bats being observed and the numbers steadily increased until the middle of May when they levelled off and, with the exception of one count, stayed at or near 300 until the middle of July. The count at the end of July was a little disappointing at only 218 but that was more than made up for by an amazing 469 at the beginning of August. The numbers then trailed off but there were still 117 to be seen in the middle of September and 34 at the beginning of October, the latest we have ever done a count.

We started to do the regular counts so that we could compare year against year and get an idea if "our" bats were doing well or having a bad year, but as you can see from the graph below the pattern has been so inconsistent it is hard to draw any conclusion, other than they return to the roost in April, the young emerge in July or early August and they leave by early October to go to their hibernation roosts.

The numbers don't tell the whole story; one of the reasons for the peak in numbers in August 2013 was the discovery of another exit. We already knew the bats were emerging from three locations around the Visitor Centre but reports of hearing social chatter around the reservoir side of the building resulted in finding bats emerging from above the cleaners' cupboard, or the Lakeside exit as we have named it.



The big bat box in front of the Centre has been there for a number of years but we have never observed much activity around it, with more than two bats emerging from it being a cause of excitement amongst the counters. This year a new record was set when a dozen bats were seen leaving the box on one evening. It was always the plan to put a camera in the box and this year saw three installed, one inside the box, one at the exit on the bottom and the third camera on the outside pointing at the end of the Visitor Centre where the main roost exit is.

The output from the cameras is fed into the Centre and is recorded, but can also be watched live on a television on the wall in the education room. At the end of August five bats were seen moving around in the top of the box. There are still some problems to be solved. Whilst the external camera provides an excellent view of the end of the building during the day, when it switches to infra-red mode in the evening the cobwebs across the front of the lens come into sharp focus, obscuring the view we want to watch.

### **A final treat - Hannah the Nathusius' Pipistrelle**

A new exit, record numbers and the cameras is pretty good for one year, but it didn't end there. For a while Essex Bat Group has been trying to start a project to monitor the Nathusius Pipistrelle, a bat we know very little about in Essex outside of Epping Forest. A licence to trap, ring and radio tag was finally granted and all the necessary permissions gained in September.



Bat A4040, alias Hannah [Photo: P Hatch]

It was a little surprise when Pat, Emily and Daniel turned up at the second count of the month with all the equipment and a very successful evening saw six bats trapped including a Brown Long-eared and the desired Nathusius Pipistrelle, a healthy female weighing 9 grams, so large enough to attach a small radio transmitter to. Unofficially named Hannah, because she was caught at Hanningfield, she led us a merry dance for two weeks until the transmitter finally ran out of power, but she provided us with a whole pile of new information to consider over the winter months while we plan for the next stage of the project in 2014.

## **Nathusius Tracking Underway**

**Pat Hatch** reports on the start of what we hope will become a significant research project

Three of us ventured into the plantation at Hanningfield nature reserve on a moonlit night in mid-September, intent on our mission to catch a Nathusius' Pipistrelle. Our licence had finally come through, access to water company land had been arranged and we had EBG's new radio tracking gear to hand. We were running out of time if we were to make a start on the Essex Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project before 2014. Daniel Hargreaves had heroically agreed to come up from London with his harp traps and acoustic lures at a few hours' notice.

We picked a spot behind one of the bird hides that looks out over the reservoir and set up two traps and lures among the trees. The lures broadcast social calls of the target species at regular intervals. Sure enough, the second bat we caught was a Nathusius' Pipistrelle, and perfect for our purposes, being a weighty female in good condition. Three Soprano Pips and a Common Pip were also caught and the Brown Long-eared Bat was a new record for the reserve.

Our guest was fitted with a ring and a radio transmitter. The ring fits over the forearm and has a unique code which enables anyone who catches the bat in the future to identify where she came from. Ringing is our main way of investigating migration, which is an important part of the Project. The tiny transmitter weighs less than 0.3 grammes and is attached to the back of the bat using skin bond. It falls off the bat within one to two weeks, which is also the lifespan of the transmitter.

She was then released and the radio tracking began. The following evening her day roost was found to be a house in Downham, one kilometre to the south of the reservoir. After about a week she appeared to change her day roost for another, near the original roost.

Over the following fortnight, typical emergence from the roost was about 30 - 40 minutes after sunset. She always flew straight to the reservoir from her day roost. For the first few nights she spent about 1 - 1.5 hours foraging at the reservoir, mainly at the south end, seemingly concentrating on the south east shore, near the nature reserve. She also ventured further north, including the far end of the reservoir, where she foraged near the north dam.



Ready to go - Emily, Pete & Pat

[Photo: D Hargreaves]

She would then leave the reservoir, heading off to the south west, either calling in at, or by-passing Crowsheath Fishing Lake, before continuing on in the general direction of Norsey Wood and Billericay. Her last known position along this route was about 1.7 kilometres away from the reservoir. During these flights, no definite evidence of foraging was recorded and she typically flew fast and more or less direct. She stayed briefly at the fishing lake on one occasion, presumably foraging.

We noticed that the bat seemed to use a slightly different route each night in leaving the reservoir, her route moving approximately 50 - 100 metres north on successive nights. It seemed to be a definite pattern rather than a random thing, almost as if she was looking for something. Could this be evidence that our bat was not from the local area. A migrant, perhaps, from northern Europe, familiarising herself with the local landscape?

After the first week, she remained at the reservoir (with one brief unobserved trip beyond to the north) until tracking ended (typically 3 - 5 hours post-sunset). This change came a few days after a reported mass hatching of insects from the reservoir and also coincided with stronger winds. She now spent most of her time at a lagoon on the south west edge of the reservoir. One evening, her signal was stationary for more than 1.5 hours, indicating the presence of a night roost in a tree beside the lagoon. Numerous other foraging bats were also present at the lagoon - three pipistrelle species and Myotis.



Pete demonstrates the 'Dalek' tracking method [Photo: P Hatch]

Our first attempt at radio tracking as part of the Essex Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project has given us a fascinating glimpse of one bat's activities, including emergence time, habitat use and commuting routes, not to mention a willingness to forage in bright moonlight and stiff winds. Next year we hope to track up to six bats in total, at Hanningfield and elsewhere in the county, and so continue to build a picture of the species' status in Essex. We also aim to carry out systematic coastal detector surveys, to find autumn mating roosts, investigate Soprano Pipistrelle maternity colonies for hidden Nathusius, look into the possibility of bat box schemes at our reservoirs and run a campaign calling for sightings of bats at sea. [See also map on page 6]

# Kim's Transylvanian Adventure

**Kim Wallis** on her recent research trip in Romania

During July I had the opportunity to head out to Transylvania in Romania as a bat scientist with Operation Wallesea. Located in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains we were a team of wildlife enthusiasts searching for those species we were most passionate about. In each of the villages we set up camp with a mission to record as many birds, butterflies, plants, reptiles, amphibians and bats as possible and to enthuse and teach A-level students who were on their field trip.



The Transylvanian wildlife is much the same as Britain was a few hundred years ago... the comparison, however, is both shocking and saddening. Not only were the bats plentiful, but we saw over 100 species of butterfly, caught over 100 species of bird and I even extracted at least 6 Red-backed Shrike... just a typical RBS day's catch in the mist nets! The reason the wildlife is still so amazing is a lack of farming intensification and general industrialisation.

Life is still fairly simple in the villages, with horse and carts returning the hand cut hay from the meadows and shepherds taking the village livestock on to the hills every morning. Most return of an evening, although some do indeed live in the hills alongside their stock and the very scary sheepdogs. These traditional farming practices mean that the hay meadows retain their floristic diversity and are teeming with insects in both quantity and species diversity. This amazing food source, coupled with high roost potential in the woodlands, barns, churches and houses, mean that bats are currently also doing well. This could all change, however, as this fragile habitat and their roosts are under threat. The over-arching reason we were all out there was to provide the Romanian partners with sound scientific data to help fund and protect these traditional farming methods and help Romania conserve their amazing wildlife. The surveys continue next summer and I really can't wait! Right, now onto the bats....

The first day in each village was spent wandering around looking for potential roost sites and signs of bats. Each village we visited had a spectacular fortified church and, as with most old churches, they contained plenty of batty evidence. At first, during the evenings, I tried locating



bats by carrying out transect surveys, However, listening through a bat detector was pretty much impossible because of the background insect noise! I am hoping my recordings will shed some light on the amount of species actually present! Spending only 3-4 nights in each village and not being able to use a detector to its full ability makes finding bats quite hard; most of the time the nets were put up in what I thought was suitable foraging habitat, then I basically just hoped for the best! The most successful net proved to be the one strung over a small stream. With little water around following the warm weather, the bats were coming to drink. In one night, this net caught a Bechstein's, BLE, Brandt's and Geoffroy's, but the star of the night was the huge Greater Mouse-eared Bat, weighing in at a monstrous 32g!



In action... and yes, the net is across a stream (I am ignoring the things biting my feet!)

A buzzing Barbastelle!  
Potentially my new favourite species



Yes, this is indeed a Grey Long-eared... I was ecstatic!

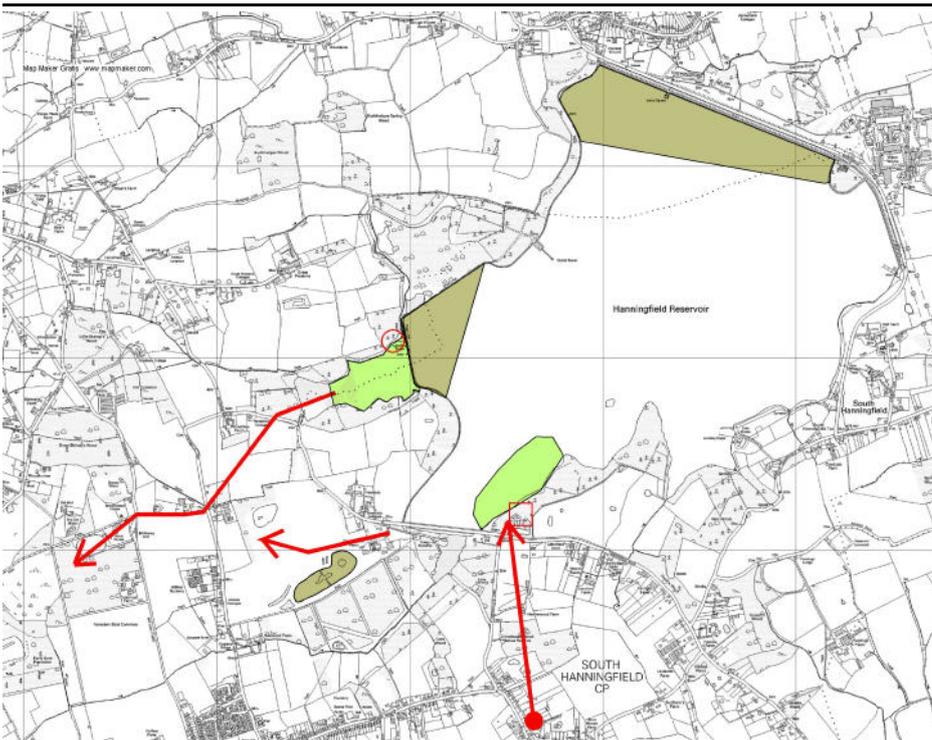
See.....very happy!!

Greater Mouse-eared Bat



The most common species caught during the trip were BLE's. However, only further surveys will show the actual species diversity of each area. It's clear that the churches hold large numbers of Mouse-eared Bats and there were a few species of pipistrelle flying around as well as lots of

Myotis bats. Further surveys and sound analysis should shed some light so... watch this space!



### Hanningfield Reservoir Radio Tracking Map Sept 2013

This map shows the results of our radio tracking of Nathusius' Pipistrelle A4040 (alias Hannah) at Hanningfield reservoir in September, including main foraging areas (pale green - lagoon and south east), other foraging areas (brown) and approximate commuting routes. The day roosts are shown by a solid red circle. There is a night roost at the lagoon (red ring).

# Bat Batty Poetic ecology? Sincere apology!

A poem by **John Smart**

Pippy, pippy, pulse and buzz  
Gnat fuelled on umbrella'd wings  
Stretchy skin, handy design  
Packaged in brown  
All upside-down

Real-time as a bungee cord stretched  
In a magical box with dials and knurly knobs  
Scribes ziggy-zaggy peaks and troughs  
Searches for the electronic truth  
On the case, clues for the silicon sleuth

Hovering over a flora, all verdant green  
Long brown ears with no gap between  
Creepy crawlies, enough for a pie  
Full of scrummy squidgy surprise  
Picked-off before they can stir to fly

Vesper Dauby rakes the lake  
Juicy aquatics to keep its belly fat  
Little fishy for a snack?  
Rapid fire rat-a-tat-tat  
Strafes the water-bat

Noctule High! Noctule Nigh!  
Narrow wings and ginger cloak  
Thunderclap under the stars evoke  
Lightning strike, killer hurts, vertical drop  
Whirring beetles for the 'chip-chop' chop

Horseshoe, Horseshoe, softly warbles  
Music of the sonic spheres  
Waxes lyrical in my ears  
A nose for music; quavers of delight,  
Graces the unseen shape of night

Behind the peeling bark cosy  
Under a blanket of loose fitting tiles  
Light-rise to light-fall in a drowse  
Then seeks to trawl the midges' swarm  
From owl-light until the cocky crows

In the rancid roost all milky and teats  
Itchy itchy, scratchy scratchy  
And chitter chatter, 20 aplenty  
Pinky pups, crimped and clingy  
Hustle bustle in a squeezed-in snuggle

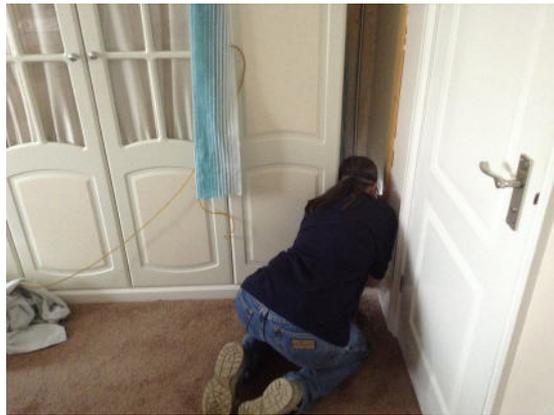
Flit and jink, twirl and whirl  
Through leafy clutter to my cardiac flutter  
Into my psyche, now under my skin  
In the habitat of my thoughts within  
How could I have lived so long without you?



[Photos: M Pugh]

# The Adventures of Bert the Bat Jan & Geoff Ragg

None of us will ever understand why Bert went in through the bedroom window of a house in Hullbridge at four o'clock in the morning. We can only hope that he has learned his lesson and does not do it again. The householder tried to persuade him to leave by the window but he preferred to seek refuge behind the wardrobe. The built-in wardrobe ended short of the side wall leaving a hidden gap which could only be seen from above. This was hidden behind a chipboard panel which was glued to a batten on the wall. The space is narrow and the sides are slippery. Once Bert had found his way down there was no way to get out again.



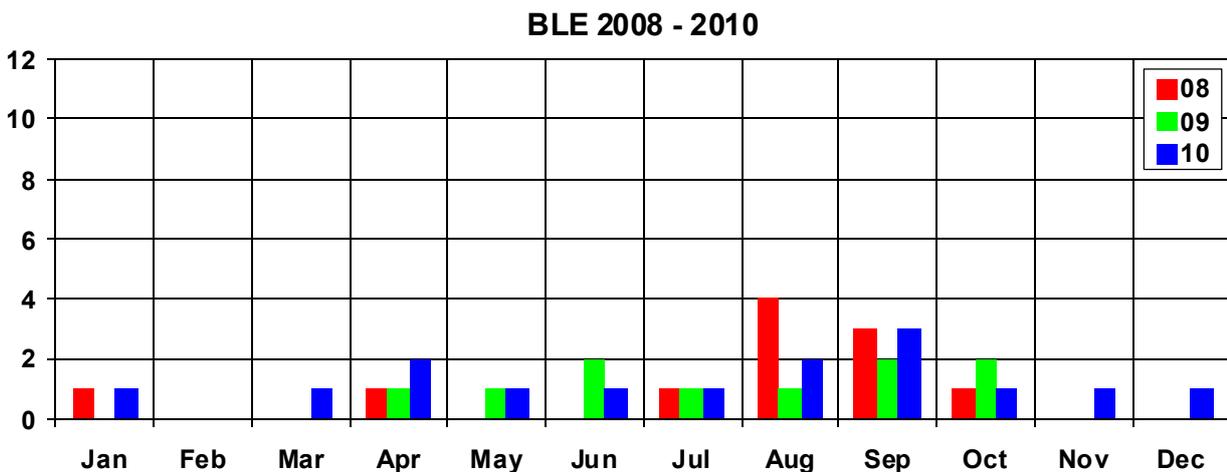
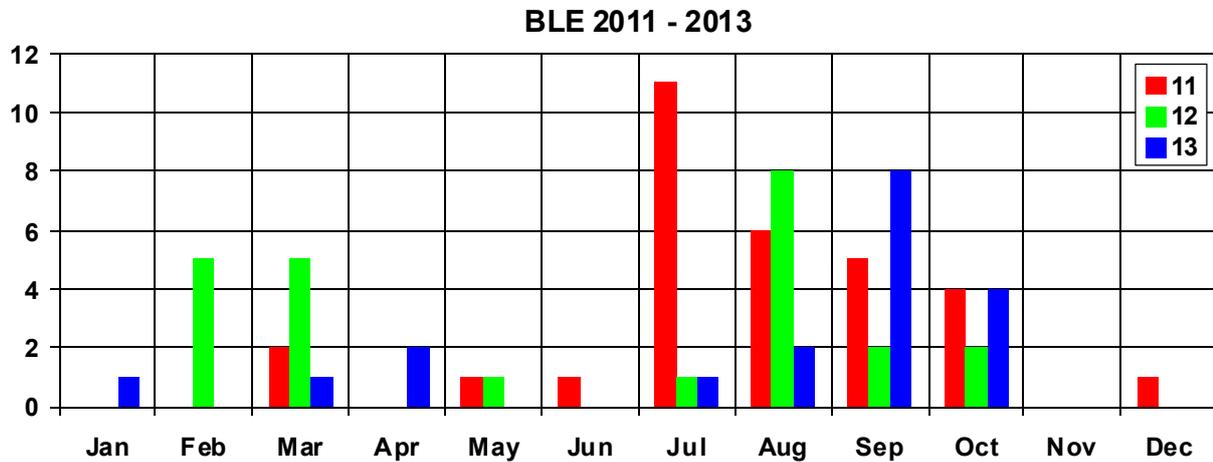
At the bottom of this gap was a skirting board with a Pipistrelle sized gap beneath it. It took two days for help to arrive. Before it did, the bat had been named Bert by the householder's daughter. Bert did not take advantage of the roller towel that was lowered down to him so the only solution was to carefully remove the chipboard panel. Once released from under the skirting board, re-hydrated and fed, Bert was none the worse for his adventure. The following day he flew for half an hour in a small indoor cage. It might take a little longer for the wardrobe to recover.

## News in brief

- The EBG Committee is pleased to welcome two new members. Emma England takes on the role of Programme Secretary vacated by Becky Gibson last year. Emma works as an ecologist on Foulness Island and is currently training for her Voluntary Bat Roost Visitor licence. Tim Sapsford will be our Conservation Officer - a new role designed to ensure EBG has a greater input into site management and habitat enhancement for bats. More on this in the next edition. Tim is a co-ordinator of the Dengie Bat Project and will shortly begin training for a VBRV licence.
- EBG ran stalls and displays at eight public events during the summer. As usual, Tendring Show was the highlight in terms of numbers of people, but most events yielded new members, useful contacts, roosts to visit and/or requests for habitat enhancement advice.
- EBG took part in a wildlife survey at Colchester Zoo in June, with six species recorded in the zoo's 'nature area' and Brown Long-eared Bats found roosting in the tiger tunnel. We subsequently helped out with two evening events, during which we used detectors to show bats to members of the public.

# Brown Long-eared Bats - Are they in trouble? Jan Ragg

These bar charts show the number of BLEs coming into the bat hospital in the last 3 years compared to the numbers arriving in the previous 3 years.



The total number of BLEs admitted to the hospital in the period covering 2011 to 2013 has more than doubled from the number seen in the previous 3 years. The casualties have been 40% female in the later period - an increase from 20% in the earlier period. Males have always been found right through the year, but with 65% of them arriving between July and October. However 80% of females are found in the same 4 month period, and they are rarely found in the winter.

Most of the BLEs that are admitted in the autumn are starving, yet there was an abundance of moths in September this year. A few are juveniles who have not got the hang of catching moths, but most are adults. Perhaps they are concentrating too much on trying to attract the ladies!

Are there more BLEs around now, or is there a higher proportion getting into trouble?



## Committee members and other contacts

Bat Conservation Trust  
Partner Group



### EBG Committee

Sue Burton, Press and Publicity Officer 01277 356191 Remusoffice@aol.com  
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### Other Contacts

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**Bat Care Network** Jan Ragg 01279 418393 / 07734 265571 jan.ragg@talk21.com

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

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



## Membership Form

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

Send to: Helen Miller, 16 Hogarth Avenue, Brentwood, Essex CM15 8BE

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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.