

Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project

Essex Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project got underway last year with the capture and radio tracking of a female at Hanningfield Reservoir in September (see Autumn 2013 newsletter). Since then, a national pilot study of the species has been set up by the Bat Conservation Trust. This covers four areas at present (Northumberland, Lancashire, Derbyshire/Leicestershire and Kent), with our own project and others running in tandem with the national study.



[A. Palmer]

ENPP trapping sessions resumed this year with the help of Daniel Hargreaves and his traps and acoustic lures. The spring brought us a little success, with two male Nathusius' pipistrelles caught and ringed during three evenings at Hanningfield in April and May. Among the common and soprano pips, the other highlights were two Daubenton's bats and a brown long-eared.

Nathusius' Pipistrelle at Weald Country Park, August 2014

After a break during the maternity period, we returned to the reservoir in August and caught twenty five bats of five species in one evening, including four Nathusius (all adult males), six Daubenton's and a Natterer's bat, a new record for the site. We then tried our luck at Weald Country Park, where Nathusius' pips have been recorded in recent years. We were rewarded with a male Nathusius', plus the other two pipistrelle species and three Daubenton's.

In late August, a male Nathusius' was found during a survey of bat boxes at Chigborough Lakes EWT reserve at Heybridge, near Maldon, close to the coast of the Blackwater estuary. Naturally, this discovery resulted in further plotting and planning and we will be running a trapping session there soon.



[A. Palmer]

L - R:
Nathusius',
soprano
and
common
pipistrelle.
Gunpowder Park
August 2014

Our next nocturnal foray took us to Gunpowder Park, near Waltham Abbey. The Lea Valley Regional Park Authority, which looks after 10,000 acres of wetland along a 26 mile stretch of the London, Hertfordshire and Essex borders has agreed to purchase £2,000 worth of bat boxes at Essex Bat Group's request. These will be installed in wet woodland at Gunpowder Park in the near future, the aim being to use the boxes to monitor any local Nathusius population. With LVRPA staff present on the night, the pressure was on to find the target species! Luckily, the bats co-operated and we caught a record total of 35, including two male Nathusius, common pips, soprano pips and Daubenton's.



[T. Sapsford]

Nathusius at Chigborough Lakes,
August 2014

So far, we have caught and ringed ten Nathusius' pipistrelles as part of the Essex and national projects' investigation into the species' migration between Britain and Northern Europe. Fur and faecal samples are taken for analysis, which may also provide some clues as to the movements of these enigmatic little bats. The recovery of a bat ringed in Somerset in 2012 in the Netherlands last year was a milestone in this quest for knowledge and proved the worth of such research work.

Our radio tracked female also gave us a glimpse into use of habitat and an indication of the importance of Hanningfield Reservoir to the species.

Our recent work has also been successful in terms of the involvement of staff at all of our trapping sites, all of whom have committed themselves to continued support and participation in the project. We are very grateful to staff of Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex & Suffolk Water (Hanningfield), Essex County Council (Weald Country Park) and Lea Valley Park for their help, as well as our own EBG members and other volunteers.

The proposed detector surveys at coastal sites have not begun yet due to lack of time and equipment. The idea was to survey the Essex coast using hand held machines in the hope of finding Nathusius' pips and identifying any seasonal changes in their occurrence here, with use of remote detectors to follow once funds could be secured to buy the equipment. However, Essex Wildlife Trust has recently agreed to deploy several such machines at coastal nature reserves as part of the ENPP, which means that we can now proceed with remote data gathering sooner than we could have hoped.



[A. Palmer]

Nathusius fitted with ring.
Weald Country Park, August 2014

ENPP is evolving quickly, with site owners becoming willing partners and an increasing number of volunteers gaining invaluable experience in catching and handling bats and the use of harp traps. We are in regular communication with the other Nathusius researchers around the country. This kind of research is new to Essex Bat Group and almost all of the local project participants, but I think we are doing alright as we feel our way into it. We are greatly indebted to Daniel Hargreaves for the use of his equipment and for the training, inspiration and encouragement he has given us.

Langdon Hills Survey Team



Dunton Lake & Meadows [EWT]

Last year, EBG was approached by the Langdon Hills Living Landscape group to provide a costing for training and surveys aimed at establishing a bat survey team in the area. Following a successful funding bid by the local group, a training workshop in the use of heterodyne detectors was held at EWT's nature reserve, attendees including EWT staff and volunteers, Thurrock Council rangers and members of Basildon Natural History Society and Friends of Langdon Hills Country Park.

The new team's first evening survey recorded common and soprano pipistrelles at Dunton Lake. A second survey took in parts of the Country Park and succeeded in finding a foraging noctule over adjacent grassland. As well as leading these early surveys, the Bat Group recently ran a field workshop in bats and trees, including how to assess trees for their bat roost potential. One or two further surveys will be led by EBG this summer, following which members of the Living Landscape group will run their own surveys. A regular group of enthusiastic local volunteers has been established and several LHLL group members have joined EBG and taken part in other projects.

This is a new kind of venture for the Bat Group, helping to establish a local survey team from scratch, but the enthusiasm of the local team gives us every confidence that they will continue to improve their new found skills and enhance the value of their survey and site management work. The Bat Group will continue to support them with training and advice.

News

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Brief

- EBG Committee would like to express its gratitude to Lea Valley Regional Park Authority for funding the purchase of £2,000 worth of bat boxes for use as part of the Essex Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project at Gunpowder Park (see article, p1).
- Bat roosts have been retained during the recent replacement of fascia boards on a council estate in Colchester. After a pipistrelle was found during removal of the old wooden boards, notches were cut in the new boards to provide potential roost sites on several blocks of flats. Colchester Borough Homes are to be congratulated for going beyond the call of duty in providing numerous new roosts.
- We now have 122 members in our Facebook group. Most are EBG members, but we also have friends in other bat groups and some international members. A good number of people are contributing regularly and the site is proving very useful for sharing news, experiences, photographs and videos;
- An inspection of a known noctule roost in Colchester in mid-June found Daubenton's bats sharing the roost, which is located in a large cavity in a beech tree. Juvenile noctules were visible along with adults of both species.

Bats of the Amazon



Back in February I was fortunate enough to escape the English winter for a while and go looking for bats in the Amazon rainforest. I lived on board a boat with a group of fellow bat enthusiasts from the USA, Canada and Brazil, cruising the river and its backwaters and exploring flooded forest in canoes by day, and catching bats by night.

A typical day started with an early morning alarm call of very loud opera music, courtesy of our captain, followed by a trip up to the sun deck to watch grey and pink river dolphins. A pre-breakfast canoe trip was spent spotting proboscis bats roosting on waterside tree trunks, plus toucans, macaws and other exotic birds and all the sights and sounds of the forest. We would then motor along in the boat for several hours to our next destination, bird watching from the sun deck on the way. Once the boat was tied to a tree or anchored, we had lunch and headed off in the canoes to explore the rainforest and look for a spot to set the mist nets.

Night falls early in the tropics and we were generally trapping by six o'clock, typically catching about ten to twenty species a night in our nets. The diversity of Amazon bat species was evident every night and there were many highlights among our ten day total of forty three species. We caught frog-eating bats at small pools and nectar feeders in forest clearings. We caught disc-winged bats, with their suckers at wrist and ankles that enable them to roost inside furled leaves, and many species of fruit-eating bats (not to be confused with the Old World fruit bats), including some 'tent-making' bats, which modify the leaves they roost under.

Best of all perhaps, we caught a single spectral bat, or American false vampire, the largest bat in the Americas with a wingspan of ninety centimetres. These impressive beasts eat parrots, orioles and other medium-sized birds, among other things. The one we caught hung freely from the hand with no attempt at escape, regarding his admirers with an inquisitive stare. They have no known predators and I'm not surprised.

The alternative evening option was a canoe trip with spotlights, seeking nightjars, owls, tree snakes and caiman and watching fishing bats all around us. One night our captain demonstrated



Fish-eating Lesser Bulldog Bat
[F Reid]

his caiman catching technique, perching in the bow of a canoe as we edged quietly toward another pair of shining green eyes. If the caiman was less than a metre in length and allowed us to get close, he would leap into the swamp belly first in the hope of landing on top of the unfortunate reptile. It worked once. If the caiman was two metres or more, the canoe would be put in reverse. Among the other guests who spent a short time with us were a large hairy tarantula, a three-toed sloth and some larger than expected piranha, which are apparently 'mostly' harmless.

Current destinations for other bat related excursions include Trinidad, Cuba and Nicaragua. You won't be surprised to hear that these trips are not exactly cheap, but they are generally less expensive than other wildlife tours and include an element of research and support of local bat workers, as well as just being a 'bat tourist'! They offer unique opportunities to see some absolutely amazing bats in some incredibly beautiful places and to meet foreign bat folk and share experiences. Should you ever have the opportunity to go a bat trip to the tropics, I would recommend it, as you are bound to have a fantastic experience.

As an inspiring example of how such trips can help in the cause of local bat conservation, bat trips to Trinidad have played a part in gathering data and raising awareness of the value of bats, which has helped during recent work to have the law changed, so that bats are no longer classified as 'vermin'.

Scouting for Bats

Frances Donovan reports on a roost count near Epping

Gilwell Park, a 108 acre site on the Essex/London border, is the home of the National Scout & Guide Movement, where children, teenagers and leaders from all over the country come together for camping and training events - it is also home to a roost of soprano pipistrelles.



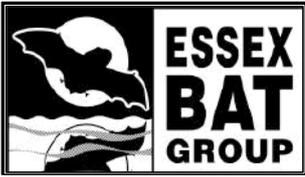
The White House - bats emerge from the top right hand corner of the building

On Friday 8th July 2014, Mick Westby, Betty Westby, Chester Jones, Steve Donovan and myself, from the Essex Bat Group, traveled there to conduct a roost count. Although the evening was cold and showery, the little pips soon started popping out from under the eaves of the Grade II listed 17th century White House and we managed to record a total of 252 (having recorded 773 a couple of years previously). At the same time, we successfully released a juvenile that had been brought in to Jan Ragg's bat hospital in Harlow, one of several from this location.

We had also been fortunate enough to be invited along to the Association's "Gilwell 24" on Saturday 12th July, a twenty four hour marathon of activities for scouts and guides, at which we had a bat talk and walk scheduled for the evening. The rain kept off for us and, after the talk from Steve, bat detectors were handed out and we took around 20 interested scout leaders to the front of the White House to watch the emerging bats and the release of yet another juvenile. Following this, Steve, Mick and myself led the bat walk around the woods, to the lake, where we had a fantastic show from Daubenton's skimming over the water, as well as soprano and common pips flitting overhead. A larger bat, possibly a noctule, was also detected.

The feedback from everyone was very encouraging, with some of the Leaders proposing to hold similar events in their local areas. After all the bad press recently, it was good to show bats in a good light and everyone commented that they had learnt lots about our little friends.

Next stop, hopefully, will be an invitation to their Scarefest in November!



Committee members and other contacts

Bat Conservation Trust
Partner Group



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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 31st December 2014.