

## Over-wintering bats

**Kim Wallis** gives us an insight into her work providing treatment and winter lodgings for bats in care

At this time of year bats are generally in extended torpor (hibernation) and those that are permanent captives, are new in, are still recovering or, for one reason or another, couldn't be released before winter, have to remain in care and be 'overwintered'. The majority of bats I have are pipistrelles, both common and soprano but (as a few of you know) I also have a Leisler's bat and a serotine. Both are male and both are beautiful (as all bats are, obviously). The Leisler's came in without thumb nails but these have now grown back, so as soon as the weather improves and as long as he gets the all clear from the flight cage testing he can be released.

Bats in care are fed on mealworms which, although a good substitute, are obviously not their natural food source. Bats are also individuals, with individual needs and personalities. The medium sized Leisler's chap started losing his hair and developed dry skin, but some flax oil and increasing the humidity in the 'bat room' thankfully seems to have sorted that out. We keep the bats over winter in flexariums, which are primarily designed for reptiles, and in a cool place to encourage them to go into torpor. This is more important for the females as there is a possibility they may be pregnant and we don't really want them to give birth early or in captivity if we can avoid it. A heater is placed in one corner, lots of towels and dusters fixed around the sides and a wooden box with a couple of chambers, one for sleeping and one for eating, is also placed in the flex. These set-ups allow the bats to move around and also find the temperature they want. It also means that, for the most part, we can leave them be, feeding and checking up on them as and when.

The serotine, named Sir Sero, has an interesting story. Picked up by Lauren, one of our 'ambulance drivers', he came in with a very swollen wrist and a severe infection which had spread throughout his wing. We thought his forearm had been crushed and might be fractured but the swelling made this difficult to determine.

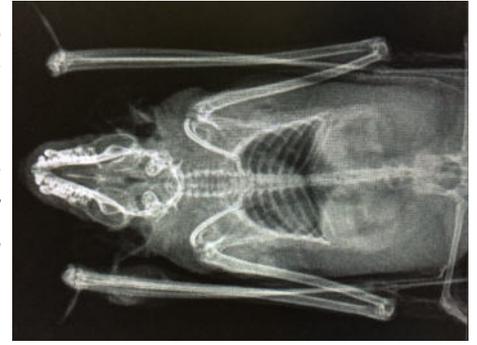


The serotine with a swollen, infected forearm (left) and, a few weeks ago, healing nicely [Photos: Kim Wallis]



Mr Leisler's bat in his flexarium  
[Photo: Kim Wallis]

He had two courses of antibiotics. However, the infection proved resistant and returned whilst he was hibernating. At this point I took him to the South Essex Wildlife Hospital, who were absolutely fantastic. They X-rayed him, revealing that, while it wasn't fractured, he did have a nasty abscess. They gave me some different antibiotics, cleaned it up and he is now making great progress. Fingers crossed he can be released!



Serotine X-ray

The weather this winter has been odd and remarkably warm.

We will soon be exercising bats in the flight cage in the hope of releasing as many as possible... providing they pass the tests and food is available of course.

If you would like to get involved with any of the bat care aspects, be it ambulance driving, training as a carer or helping with the flight cage, your help would be greatly appreciated. Since the sad loss of our friend and bat care guru Jan, we are looking for assistance and I have no doubt that you too will find it very rewarding. We will be running an introduction to bat care event on 5th March at Sandon Valley House (Essex & Suffolk Water HQ), East Hanningfield CM3 8BD. If you are interested in coming along or finding out more, please contact Kim at [kimrwallis@hotmail.com](mailto:kimrwallis@hotmail.com) or Steve at [coppeliusd@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:coppeliusd@yahoo.co.uk). For those who attend the event and decide they would like to get involved in the work of our Bat Care Network, we will be running a training workshop during the following few weeks.

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**Researcher required!** We are looking for a volunteer to carry out some research for our hibernation project. We are keen to identify both existing communal hibernation sites and places which might be suitable for conversion into hibernacula. The kind of features we are looking for include ice houses, bunkers and air raid shelters, church crypts and other partially sunken buildings, such as boiler rooms and cellars. The job of our volunteer would be to identify such features from various sources, such as the internet, maps and archive photographs, and draw up a list. This information would then be used to identify target sites, after which the process of contacting owners, arranging site visits and exploring possibilities could begin. We have a list of sources of information and can provide further guidance on where to look. If you think this might appeal to you, please contact Pat at [pathatch@live.co.uk](mailto:pathatch@live.co.uk).

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# News In brief

- The Bat Group committee has decided to dedicate an annual event to the memory of Jan Ragg, our friend and bat care mentor, who died unexpectedly last summer. Our first Jan Ragg Memorial Lecture will be held in winter 2016. A plaque will also be installed at Parndon Wood, Harlow, home to the Bat Care Network's flight cage.

- The committee would like to thank Kim Wallis for her sterling work as Treasurer. Kim is stepping down from the Committee and handing over the financial reins to Andrew Palmer, who has also been granted the title of Fundraising Officer in recognition of the fact that he is. Kim will be sorely missed on the Committee but will be continuing her involvement in the group, including as a bat carer and Voluntary Bat Roost Visitor.

# Essex Woodland Bat Project

Essex Bat Group is starting a new project looking at the bat communities of the county's woods. Woodland is one of our oldest and possibly least altered habitats, and yet most of our woods have never been surveyed for bats and we know little about which species occur here.



Broaks Wood, near Halstead

Surveys have been carried out at our largest sites (Epping Forest and Hatfield Forest), at Weald Country Park, at clusters of woods in west Uttlesford, Marks Hall Estate, Writtle Forest, Langdon Hills and the Roman River valley and several smaller sites. Most of these have been undertaken by volunteers using hand-held detectors, although trapping sessions have also been carried out at Epping, Hatfield and Weald. Last year we also used static detectors, which were left in position for up to a week, at Hatfield and Writtle Forests.

Over the past few years, our surveys have found all ten of the currently known Essex species at Hatfield Forest and Weald, although the presence here of other habitats (such as wood pasture and lakes) may account for the high number of species. Targeted surveys for barbastelle at west Uttlesford and Writtle Forest were recently successful in finding this species in clusters of smaller woods.

There are several good reasons for organising a systematic county-wide survey to add to what knowledge we have. The new project will aim to identify as many species as possible in the surveyed woods, so enabling us to compare bat communities between sites and perhaps even guess at why they differ and what can be done to enhance habitats.

Some woodland bat communities may be of particular interest because of their location. For example, we might wonder which species occur in isolated woods, such as the cluster of sites between Rayleigh and Leigh-on-Sea, which are largely surrounded by built-up areas. We know we have noctule here. At the other end of the county, Stour Wood and Copperas Wood sit on the estuary of the River Stour, with trees lining the upper shore above tidal mudflats and scraps of saltmarsh. It is highly likely that bats forage at this inter-section of habitats and it would be interesting to find out if they do and which species are present.

Intensive woodland surveys may also provide our best chance of locating unknown populations of certain species for which we have no reliable modern records but which might be expected (or hoped!) to occur in Essex. These are the bats known collectively as 'small *Myotis*' or WABs - whiskered bat, Brandt's bat and Alcathe bat. There are a few records of whiskered/



Weeleyhall Wood, Tendring

Brandt's from neighbouring counties and Alcathe bat was only recently discovered to be resident in Britain. Confirming presence of any of these species in Essex would be a fantastic result.

The Committee has set up a Sub-Group to make plans. There is a lot to think about and a lot of planning to be done if we are to make the most of our woodland study. We have to decide on survey protocols, methods, aims, objectives and priorities.

We also have to be realistic in assessing time scales and the availability of volunteers, bearing in mind that this will be an additional project to several the Bat Group is already engaged in. Static detectors will be our primary means of gathering records and our progress will depend largely on the availability of volunteers to deploy and retrieve the machines, move them around the county and analyse the recordings.



Linford Wood, Thurrock

Inevitably we will generate very significant amounts of recorded bat echolocation and social calls. Increasingly these can be used to make confident identification. However, it is likely that to confirm the presence of cryptic *Myotis* species we will need to supplement acoustic surveys with trapping sessions. This would require an application to Natural England for a project-specific licence and an additional level of volunteer involvement.

Rather than adopt any particular protocol from the outset, and to avoid pre-judging the most effective methodology, we intend to start with a short-term objective. This will ensure that the project delivers valuable results during the time we are familiarising ourselves with the equipment, finding additional funding, testing protocols, making contact with land owners and encouraging participation. This initial phase will last two years and will enable us to better plan for the future. The Bat Conservation Trust is trying out a new woodland survey protocol and we may end up using it if it seems suitable, but we are keen to get our own project underway in the mean time.

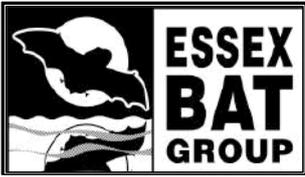
The project will start with a systematic examination of barbastelle distribution, with particular focus on surveying areas where we do not have records, but where we might reasonably expect them to occur. This species is readily identified using time expansion and full spectrum detectors, we have had recent success in locating them in Writtle Forest and Uttlesford and there is a wide enough geographical spread of existing records for target sites to be easily identified. The current distribution map shows records from the north and west, west of the A12, with no records from the south and east. So we will focus our initial efforts there, at sites such as Langdon Hills, Thorndon Country Park, Hadleigh Great Wood, Daws Heath, Danbury and Stour Wood.

We are grateful to Essex Recorders' partnership for funding the purchase of two static detectors for the project. Further funds are being sought to purchase more detectors, which will enable us to extend the scope of the project. We are also fortunate in having good working relations with key woodland owners, such as Essex Wildlife Trust and the National Trust. Nevertheless, the success of our efforts and the rate at which we can make progress will depend on Bat Group members and others getting involved.

Please let us know if you would like to take part in this exciting new project. We are planning an introductory workshop for potential participants and training in the use of equipment and sound analysis. Please contact Pat (pathatch@live.co.uk) if you are interested.



Swan Wood, near Billericay



## Committee members and other contacts

Bat Conservation Trust  
Partner Group



### EBG Committee

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### Other Contacts

Bat Care Network (to report a grounded bat): See EBG web site for contact phone numbers.  
 Bat Care Network (general enquiries): Steve Donovan [coppeliusd@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:coppeliusd@yahoo.co.uk) or Kim Wallis [kimrwallis@hotmail.com](mailto:kimrwallis@hotmail.com)

# Membership Form

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

Send to: Helen Miller, 176 Abbotsbury Road, Morden, SM4 5JS

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 2016.