



Newsletter

Winter
2016/17

Winter Dreaming

Bats are hibernating and bat people are making plans for the summer. A fortunate few get to go on hibernation surveys but overall activity levels are low, leaving time for thought and reflection, planning the next stages of our projects, discussing ideas and conspiring on possible new activities. Our Bat Group is a busy one but there's always more we could do, given the resources, and the winter time is when dreams of what might be take flight in our imaginations. Some time ago, someone suggested it would be great to run a local study of serotines. Within days a project plan had been written, the prospects of carrying it out were assessed and the plan consigned to the 'pending' file. There was just too much happening already for our existing active members to take it on. Leisler's bat is another species which could do with its own project, with the recent discovery by our Bat Care Network of maternity roosts in Laindon and Thurrock providing a very good starting point. This one hasn't made it on to the drawing board, but it would take me about half an hour to draw up a workable plan.



[Kate Mann]

In fact, of course, the list of potential new surveys and projects is pretty much endless. Other species also deserve their own studies. Surveys of rivers, parks, nature reserves, coastal sites, the Chelmer & Blackwater Canal, of bridges, underpasses beneath major roads, hedgerows, lakes and ponds. All these worthwhile things are waiting to be done.

So what do we need to be able to fulfil our ambitions to do even more? We need you! We need members who might be willing to run such projects to give it some serious thought. We can discuss ideas and options and, if you are still interested, provide you with all the help you need. You don't have to be a bat expert and you won't be left to do it all on your own. Running a survey or research project can be very rewarding, so please consider it.

As well as dreaming, we have been busy planning and preparing. A sound analysis workshop was held in December, with the aim of increasing the number of people who can help with this aspect of our woodland project and others. We are planning to host a get together for bat groups involved in the national Nathusius' pipistrelle project in the spring. This year in Essex we will be looking for maternity roosts, monitoring a roost we found last year and then trapping at sites on the Thames in the autumn migration season.



We will also be helping Suffolk Bat Group with some joint trapping nights over the border. Meanwhile, our Care Network will soon receive a major boost (page 2), Graham Hart is starting a new site-based project to rival Weald (page 3) and we hope to announce a new one soon, broadening bat recording beyond the Bat Group to include other organisations and individuals.

Deadline for next issue, Spring 2017: 15th April 2017. pathatch@live.co.uk

New Care Facility Gets the Green Light

Kim Wallis with great news for bat care in Essex

After checking the council's planning website every day for news it was finally there - planning permission granted to construct a bat care facility. What a great Christmas present! As I'm sure most of you know, the EBG Bat Care Network consists of a handful of us that take in bats, but also a crucial support network made up of ambulance drivers and people who take the calls and organise logistics. Bat care is incredibly rewarding, but it is also hard work and requires space. I currently keep the bats I look after in my old bedroom at my parents' house - understanding and tolerant parents I hear you say! Yes, in fact they are and, although they have an appreciation for bats and the work we do, they would also quite like their room back! My batty antics are also causing damage. It's an old house and the windows are single glazed with wooden frames. To enable the bats being over-wintered to go into torpor I drop the temperature in the room and increase the humidity with the aid of a humidifier. This is all great for the bats, but the increase in humidity is also slowly rotting the window frames... not ideal! Over-wintered bats are also kept in different and much larger enclosures and this requires space! They are kept in flexariums lined with dusters, towels and a hibernating box with two chambers for sleeping and eating.

These are just a couple of reasons justifying the construction of a new building 😊. It will also enable me to take in more bats over the winter, to keep mealworms away from a residential dwelling, have the space to train up volunteers without bothering my parents and have sufficient room to store equipment. The icing on the cake, however, is that the new building will also have a room set aside as a flight cage. This will be a massive advantage, not only to me and the bats in my care but to other carers nearby who are welcome to use the room. It may also mean that some bats which are ready for flying trials will be assessed more quickly, as there will be two flight cages in which to test them rather than all the bats having to go to our existing cage at Harlow. The amount of travelling involved will also be reduced. Rarely do bats get signed off on their first attempt, so currently they stay with Steve and Frances in Harlow while they are in the system. This places massive pressure on the Harlow team, especially as only a certain number of bats can go to the cage at any one time.

The new building is actually dual purpose - one half will be a couple of stables and tack room and the other half will be for bats. Construction will begin later this year, once I have completed my studies, and the batty side will primarily consist of a care room (without wooden window frames!) and a flight room. It will also have a small kitchen area so I can, most importantly, make tea for myself and my helpers and visitors! I also hope to have an isolation area to keep any infected/parasitic bats away from the others and obviously need a dedicated area for Mr Serotine (how can I not mention him!) so he will be happy. I am very fortunate to be in a position to do this and hope this facility will be of benefit to the care network, allowing us to grow and ultimately better care for the bats of Essex. It's very sad I can't pick Jan's brain about a few of the details but as a team we are all working together better than ever and I'm sure she would be very proud of the progress and direction we are taking.



[K Wallis]

Everyone loves a baby snap. These common pips were released last year

Graham Hart announces a new survey project...

...and new plans for an old one

Thorndon Bat Project



Thorndon Country Park is owned and managed by Essex County Council but also incorporates land acquired by the Woodland Trust.

This large open space is a popular spot for locals as well as those seeking a day out from the urban environments of east London. The park is a beautiful mosaic of different woodland types, lakes, ponds and grasslands and mature hedgerows with links to neighbouring countryside typical of south Essex. Over the years there have been a number of bat walks and one-off surveys which have given us an insight into its potential as a bat hot spot. In 2016, Thorndon was included as a priority site for the inaugural year of our new Woodland Bat Project. However, the park itself is so large and varied in its landscape and habitats that the Bat Group feels it is deserving of its own stand-alone project. So, in 2017, I will be starting up a brand new project at Thorndon using some of the techniques and protocols employed over recent years at Weald Country Park.

We will be running detector surveys from April onwards, with the main priority for 2017 being to find out whether barbastelle, a woodland specialist, is present at the site. However, we will also be hoping to gain a more detailed picture of all bat activity as well looking for tree roosts. To register your interest, contact Graham at: woodlandbats@essexbatgroup.org.

Weald Rolls On...

This is the 9th year of our regular surveys and workshops at Weald Country Park in Brentwood. The Weald Bat Project was set up by Graham Hart and Duncan Fisher (who has now moved to Berkshire). Graham has kept the project going with the help of a number of regular volunteers and it has provided many new Bat Group members their first taste of woodland bat surveys.



For those of you who have never visited, Weald is a beautiful 700-year-old, 500 acre (2 km²) site, owned and managed by Essex County Council as public open space. Essex Bat Group has developed a strong partnership with the Ranger Service, allowing access for a number of activities. The park is primarily a mixture of woodland types alongside traditional wood pasture, rough grassland, lakes and ponds. There are a number of buildings of various ages, a visitor centre, rangers' houses and a yard. The ancient village of South Weald borders the park with properties of different ages, a church and pub, currently closed but once a favourite for post-survey debriefs! A number of country roads encircle the site and beyond these is a hedged undulating landscape with smaller woods. All of the 10 Essex species for which we have reliable records have been found here and some tree roosts have been located, including Nathusius' pipistrelle mating roosts. Much has been achieved but there's scope for more.

This year we will concentrate on the north west area, which is less disturbed by people. The woodland has a lot of potential roost features and borders lightly grazed rough grassland with hedgerows and horse pasture beyond. An ancient green lane runs along its eastern edge.

Transect surveys in this area in 2015 recorded a number of species, with serotine being a notable discovery. We will be keeping an eye on the grassland and woodland edges in the hope of finding out more about how this species makes use of the site. The habitat appears perfect for them and we will also be looking out for Leisler's bat and noctule, as well as seeking out barbastelle and following up on potential roost features recently identified in the trees here. There are also a number of bat boxes here which we will start checking as part of the project.

Transect surveys can only give a limited amount of information so this year we will be following up with 'zonal' surveys (wandering around) and static surveys (potentially sitting on a bench all evening!) and hoping for some direct observations of bat behaviour over the grassland.

With the new general survey starting at nearby Thorndon, it is only fitting that the venerable Weald Project begins to focus on some of the specifics of this diverse site and ventures into new survey methods and protocols. It will also be interesting to compare the bat communities of the two sites once Thorndon has yielded some of its Chiropteran secrets. Essex Bat Group is very grateful for the help, support and active participation of Essex County Council staff at both parks and, of course, to all those who have helped at Weald since 2009.

If you would like to help Graham spin the plates of two projects at once, e-mail him at woodlandbats@essexbatgroup.org.

Hibernation Survey Round Up

Our largest hibernation sites are all quite different. Tunnels joining disused pits at Grays chalk quarries, the underground chalk mines of the nearby deneholes and converted air raid shelters at Coggeshall. We also monitor a few smaller sites, including a church crypt and several converted pill boxes. Low temperatures in January saw high counts at our largest sites. The Grays tunnels yielded a record 29 common pipistrelles, plus 18 Daubenton's bats and 12 Natterer's bats. The deneholes count was the highest January count since 1998, with 38 Daubenton's bats, 33 Natterer's and two brown long-eared bats.



Daubenton's bat covered in condensation [A Palmer]

The seventeen air raid shelters at Coggeshall yielded 21 Daubenton's, 22 Natterer's bats, a very impressive 21 brown long-eared bats and six barbastelles.

This year for the first time, finding ourselves in possession of some static detectors kindly funded by Essex Recorders' partnership for our woodland project, we have been carrying out a winter detector survey! As you might expect, we have picked up very little activity, but barbastelle, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and a *Myotis* species have all been on the wing at Marks Hall Estate, flying in woodland in temperatures of 1° Celsius. One January evening, the first three species were recorded at one location in the space of thirty minutes.

Meanwhile, Kate Mann has volunteered to carry out some research for our hibernation project, looking for previously unknown sites and others with the potential to be converted or enhanced for winter use. Bunkers, cellars, ice houses, pill boxes and tunnels are all of potential interest. Kate will be reporting on her progress in the next newsletter.



Committee members and other contacts



EBG Committee

Ella Barnett	Minutes Secretary & Publicity Officer	ebgpublicity@gmail.com
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Tim Sapsford	Conservation & Records Officer	records@essexbatgroup.org

Other Contacts

Bat Care Network (to report a grounded bat): See EBG website for contact phone numbers

Bat Care Network (other enquiries): batcare@essexbatgroup.org

Hanningfield Roost Counts: pete.claughton@btinternet.com

Woodland Project: woodlandbats@essexbatgroup.org

Weald Project/Thorndon Project: woodlandbats@essexbatgroup.org

Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project: pathatch@live.co.uk

Other enquiries: enquiries@essexbatgroup.org

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

Yes, I would love to become a member of EBG for 2017*/ 2018 / 2019 (delete as appropriate)

Name _____ Address _____

Email _____ Telephone _____

Using e-mail means we can send your newsletter and 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 £12 for 3 years

Group / organisation membership is available for a minimum subscription of £30

I would also like to make a donation of £_____

I enclose a cheque for £_____ made payable to Essex Bat Group

If you wish to pay by BACS please contact Helen at membership@essexbatgroup.org

*Your first year's membership will run until 31st December 2017