



Newsletter Autumn 2018

Research Project Updates

Cast your mind back through the heat haze and you may recall that spring was delayed this year - first an unseasonably cold period, holding back the buds, then wet with localised flooding. Licences were also late in arriving, with Natural England failing to issue project licences in time for the new season, which caused a regrettable delay to this year's Nathusius' pipistrelle project and our new project searching for small Myotis species.

In spite of such obstacles, detector surveys got underway at Thorndon Country Park and other sites near Brentwood in May as part of our woodland project and Danbury Common was added to the growing list of local sites at which we have recorded barbastelle, so aiding our efforts to establish its distribution in Essex. Danbury is an area worthy of its own project and plans are being made in that regard as I write.

Meanwhile, we had to cancel our spring Bat Camp at Hatfield Forest, which was to have been the launch of our new small Myotis project, for lack of a licence, which was finally issued more than a month late. By the time this and the national Nathusius' pipistrelle licence were issued, we were well into May, so the decision was taken to prioritise Nathusius' trapping and the Myotis project was shelved until later in the summer. With the prospect of catching heavily pregnant bats increasing as the maternity period drew closer, we only trapped for two weeks, the highlight being a record catch of eight Nathusius' at EWT Chigborough Lakes during our final session. Five females had been found in a bat box at the same site in April.

Then summer burst into life at last with the long-anticipated arrival of warmth and sunshine. Woodland detector surveys continued and plans were made for a concerted effort on post-maternity trapping sessions.

Now autumn draws nigh and we have trapped at a dozen sites since late July. Most were woods, from Shadwell in the north west to Stour in the north east to Weald Country Park in the south. Small Myotis remain elusive, but it is early days yet and too soon to draw conclusions. Nevertheless, we have had some notable catches, confirming the presence at several sites of 'quiet' species (long-eared and Natterer's bats) whose echolocation calls are not always readily identifiable on recordings.

Meanwhile, the ringing of Nathusius' pipistrelles has continued at a steady rate, with successful surveys at Lee Valley, Weald, Danbury Country Park, Braxted Park and of course Chigborough Lakes, which is rapidly turning into a study site for this species, the only site at which we find them in bat boxes. We have now ringed 100 bats over the course of the project. Unfortunately 2018 is yet to yield a bat ringed on the continent, as happened last year when a migrant from Latvia was caught at Chigborough.

And finally, so far at least, possibly the most exciting news of all. Some while ago we thought of visiting the end of Southend pier with bat detectors, with migrating Nathusius' pipistrelles in mind, knowing they have been found on wind turbines and boats in the Thames estuary and suspecting that they use the river as a migration route. This month (September), Roland Taylor, an EBG member from Leigh-on-Sea, has done so, deploying a static detector right at the end of the pier. Not only did he record the target species, but also noctule, a species known to migrate over long distances in continental Europe, but for which migration to Britain has never been proven. Needless to say, we haven't proved it, yet, but these bats may well have been migrating. Pier deployments will continue into October and no doubt the winter will be spent devising methods to investigate further.



A chilly spring evening at Thorndon
[Graham Hart]

We are indebted to Essex Recorders' partnership for funding equipment used in these projects, along with Essex & Suffolk Water, Essex Wildlife Trust and Essex Biodiversity Project. Also to all of the site owners, organisations and individuals who give us their support.

Deadline for next issue, Winter 2018/2019: 15th December 2018. pathatch@live.co.uk

The Acoustic Remote Roost Monitoring Project and 'Bats in Churches'

Ralph Cordey reports on recent church surveys and a new project

Essex Bat Group and a new national "Bats in Churches" project have been co-operating on acoustic surveys of churches in Essex. Results show a wide range of acoustic activity and the identification of five species, including barbastelle. These add to the body of knowledge being built up with other church surveys conducted by the EBG in the last four years.

Since 2015, Essex Bat Group has been conducting acoustic surveys in churches across Essex using static ultrasonic recording equipment. It is known as the Remote Roost Monitoring Project (RRMP) and its equipment was purchased with funding from Essex Field Club. To date, thirty three churches have been surveyed.



In 2017, the Heritage Lottery Fund approved first stage funding for a 5-year "Bats in Churches" partnership project including Natural England, the Church of England, the Bat Conservation Trust, Historic England and the Churches Conservation Trust. The project aims to: trial and perfect new techniques to enable bats and church congregations to live together; build up professional expertise and volunteer skills; bring together church communities and bat enthusiasts. Essex Bat Group has been pleased to provide the Bats in Churches (BiC) project with a supporting letter and advice as it seeks confirmation of its full project funding.

A number of churches in Essex are planned to form part of the BiC project. Some of these have already been the subject of Essex Bat Group surveys, including surveys with the static acoustic detector. For the 2018 season, it was agreed to include further Essex BiC churches in our RRMP surveys, in order to provide additional contextual information on bat use of those churches ahead of activities that the BiC project hopes to undertake starting in 2019. Here we summarise results of our static detector surveys for churches included within the BiC Essex list. In all cases we are grateful for the co-operation of wardens and authorities at each church for facilitating access and recording.

Table 1: Summary survey results. Recordings were made during two time periods each day: from 2 hours before sunrise to 30 minutes after, and the reverse around sunset. The recorder was a Wildlife Acoustics SM3, fed from two microphones (SM3-U1 & SMM-U1) in a 2-channel arrangement. In the surveys reported here, they were positioned within the nave / chancel of each church.

BiC Church	Number of call sequences recorded in the survey period	Recorded species and comments
All Saints, Great Horkesley	2,045	Myotis nattereri; Pipistrellus pipistrellus; P. pygmaeus. <i>Natterer's were the most common recorded bat. Some possible non-Natterer's myotis species present.</i>
St Nicholas, Chignal Smealy	562	P. pipistrellus; Plecotus auritus; M. nattereri. <i>Common pipistrelles were the dominant recorded bat. Natterer's were only recorded on a single evening. A microphone also recorded within the vestry but no bats were detected.</i>
All Saints, Wimbish	1688	P. pipistrellus; P. pygmaeus; M. nattereri; P. auritus; Barbastelle barbastellus. <i>There were a small number of recordings of Barbastelle calls but they were clear. Possibly another myotis species was present.</i>
St John the Baptist, Pebmarsh	315	P. pipistrellus; P. pygmaeus; M. nattereri <i>All three species appeared to contribute significantly to the acoustic detections</i>
All Saints, Wrabness	19	P. pipistrellus <i>Low level of acoustic activity</i>

BiC Church	RRMP Survey Dates
St Nicholas, Elmdon	
All Saints, Great Horkesley	12-18 th September, 2015
St Peter ad Vincula, Coggeshall	
*St Nicholas, Chignal Smealy	30 th June-6 th July 2016
*All Saints, Wimbish	14-22 nd June 2018
*St John the Baptist, Pebmarsh	23-30 th June 2018
*All Saints, Wrabness	6-10 th August 2018

Table 2. The BiC churches in Essex and corresponding RRMP static acoustic survey dates. The churches marked * are those planned to be the first to start BiC action plans, subject to confirmation of funding for BiC.

A deployment in a nave, here at St John the Baptist, Pebmarsh



The RRMP SM3 detector and microphones preparing for set-up at All Saints, Wrabness

News In Brief

Bat Group members Steve and Frances Donovan have been recognised for their voluntary work by Harlow Council. The Chair of the Council presented the pair with a Civic Award at a recent ceremony, “for their contribution as volunteers to the Parndon Wood Bat Sanctuary”.

The Donovans are long-standing stalwarts of our Bat Care Network who also give talks, lead walks, run stalls and are about to embark on a bat box project in their local town park. Well done to them both, and to Harlow Council for publicly expressing the community’s appreciation.



Frances and Steve receiving their award [Harlow Star]



The new care room at Hanningfield [Kim Wallis]

A new bat care facility, including a flight cage and care room, is now up and running at Hanningfield. Kim Wallis, whose father kindly allowed the facility to be built on his farm, said, “It’s amazing to have an entire room just for bat care. One of the other benefits is being able to train ambulance drivers and new carers to handle in an environment where it doesn’t matter if the bat gets away!” The new facility is a welcome addition to the flight cage at Parndon Wood, Harlow, not to mention the various sheds, living rooms and spare rooms utilised by recovering bats and their carers around the county.

Our esteemed Treasurer and Fundraising Officer, Andrew Palmer, will be standing down at next year’s AGM (March 2019). Andrew has been a valued member of our Committee for several years, a very good treasurer and successful fundraiser. He has also been a key plotter and planner for major projects, set up our new website, established a bat box scheme at Lee Valley Regional Park and contributed in many other ways, not least as a Voluntary Bat Roost Visitor and trainer. We hope to continue to draw on his experience and wisdom in the future. If you would like to volunteer for the role of Treasurer, please let us know. Andrew will provide any advice and guidance required to ease your passage into this important role.

We are also looking for a new Publicity Officer following the departure of Nathan Jenkinson, who has moved out of the county. The role includes liaising with the local press and publicising the Bat Group through social media. This is a relatively new role and is open to your own input in terms of exploring options and avenues.

If neither of these roles appeals to you, there may still be a place on the Committee if you would like to contribute in that way. We meet four times a year to discuss and decide on all things Bat Group related, from events and projects to spending and joint working with other organisations.

Deneholes Hibernation Count

Jenny Wrayton recounts her first descent into the bowels of Thurrock

Essex does not always conjure up images of secret underground caverns, but in an unassuming wood on the outskirts of Grays lies the remnants of what is thought to be a medieval chalk mine. Long abandoned by miners, three species of bat have taken up residence. Daubenton's, Natterer's and brown long-eared bat hibernate here.

Never have I entered into a survey with such trepidation and excitement. ID fact sheets and quizzes were nothing compared to the fear of the climb out. Having taken quite nicely to the sedentary lifestyle of a student I am afraid to say my upper body strength left something to be desired.

The chalk and our bats lay beneath a layer of Thanet Beds; finely grained silty sands. Under the guidance of Kent Underground Research Group, we abseiled down the 20 metre shaft into the first chamber. Each chamber has six lobes radiating out where the chalk had been mined. The network of chambers were linked together by explorers in the 1950s and '60s. These explorers believed there may have been as many as seventy two shafts, or deneholes, on the site. Most have been filled in with rubbish and rubble; my favourite was an old bike, but the instruction to wait by the toy car was not without its charms.

After entering the first lobe I found my first hibernating bat; a Natterer's quite prominent against the white chalky background with its pale face and long ears in full view. Not all of them were this obliging. We checked the first lobe together. Kim confirmed the ID of the Natterer's and a few more that were partially hidden. In the same chamber we found our first Daubenton's bat, a fine chap with small dark ears, and briefly familiarised ourselves with the differences.

To minimise disturbance to the bats we split into two pairs and began checking the remaining lobes, searching every surface, every gap and every crack in the chalk. An amazing spot came from Phil, our navigator. High up on the face of the chalk was a bat with just its head visible, its body tucked inside a small crevice. Binoculars were a must for this one.

A crawl was up next. Three chambers lay at the end of a tunnel begging to be explored. We went on our hands and knees into the unknown, seeing only as far as our head torches would allow and certainly not to the end of the tunnel. With an impressive collection of tree roots hanging from the ceiling it was easy to forget quite how far underground we were. No bats in this one so it was time to crawl back. The spaces got narrower and my small size became a distinct advantage. I felt quite at home within this underground world. We were rewarded with a glistening Natterer's covered in dew droplets hanging on the ceiling and another that had managed to reverse 20 centimetres down a drill hole. There was plenty of evidence of bats; the soft rock had been scratched and smoothed by bats entering and exiting their favoured crevices. And some more evidence of explorers in the form of some very old graffiti.

As the climbing ladder descended the nerves were back! Geoff and Sarah made it look easy, but I was not convinced. With a bit of determination and a rest stop half way up I emerged victorious and very grateful to KURG for navigating the tunnels and operating the safety harness, and Pat who allowed me to attend and waited at the top even as it began to snow.

The final count was 32 Natterer's, 15 Daubenton's, 1 unidentified bat, and some rather dirty trousers.



Natterer's bat on chalk
[Jenny Wrayton]



Plan view of a central shaft with
six chambers



[Jenny Wrayton]



Committee members and other contacts



EBG Committee

Ella Barnett	Events Secretary	events@essexbatgroup.org
Frances Donovan	Minutes Secretary	chad2giles@yahoo.co.uk
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Andrew Palmer	Treasurer & Fundraising Officer	arpalmer@talk21.com
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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:	hannersbats@gmail.com
Woodland Project:	woodlandbats@essexbatgroup.org
Weald Project/Thorndon Project:	wealdbats@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 2019 / 2020 / 2021 (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 2019