

The Belfry

Newsletter of the Sussex Bat Group



Spring 2013

Registered Charity No: 1103380

Page 1: Notes from the Chair and Editor

Page 2: Hibernation counts

Page 4: Volunteers needed

Page 5: Batlife Europe

Page 6: Knock down bats

Page 7: Nathusius pips & the 2013 bat care workshop

Page 8: Beware the bat mafia

Page 10: Thanks from the bat group and membership renewal



Photo courtesy of Hugh Clark

Notes from the Chair

By Amanda Millar

As I write this (7th March) we seem to be slipping back into a period of cold weather again but spring cannot be far away now; a few days ago my bees were busy on the crocus, there were some moths flying after dark and someone said they heard a bat! Yesterday I watched a Sparrowhawk dozing on a branch just outside my window for 20 minutes – bat predator I know. I must get my 4 pips fit for release soon.

I should like to welcome two new people to very important posts. Steve Hewitt is our new Secretary, taking over from Tania, and Gareth Williams who has the tricky job of producing this Belfry and persuading us to put pen to paper.... I should like to thank Tania and Tim for all their help.

This long winter has not been too busy on the bat rescue

front...thankfully, as it seems to have been very busy otherwise for me, with preparing the Bat first aid and care course a car accident and preparing beekeeping courses and talks. I hope I shall be able to do more batty things this summer though when I have all those behind me. I have only had 3 casualties in this year so far, a Natterer and two pips. Sadly only one survived and he is not releasable with a wrist problem.

There have been one or two issues such as the awful adverse publicity for bats published in the Telegraph recently. We are all going to have to work hard to promote bats to counter the damage that may have done. I have as yet no feel for any long term effects which last year's dreadful summer may have on our bats; what sort of condition did they go into hibernation? Will spring be good enough for them to make up? Will there be fewer pups this year? Time will tell. I am not sure whether the quiet winter is a good sign or bad. But with robin singing outside (in the drizzle) my spirits rise and fingers are crossed.

Introducing the editor...

Welcome to my first edition of the Belfry as editor. I have enjoyed reading through the many articles and news bites and trying with a struggle to fit them all into this Spring edition. I have been busy myself with bats already this year, carrying out roost visits to get my own license and rescuing bats around Brighton. Even breaks to my parents at their 16th century clergy house in Brittany keeps me busy, surrounded by woodland and a river running by it teems with bats, providing fantastic opportunities for any bat enthusiast.

I am very pleased to be taking on the belfry as the new editor and hope you enjoy this edition and many more to come. If you have any bat stories you would like included in future editions please send them to newsletter@sussexbatgroup.org.uk.

Best Wishes

Gareth



Hibernation counts in Mid and East Sussex

By Tony Hutson



About 16 sites are regularly monitored for hibernating bats in Mid and East Sussex, with the usual mixed results this winter. These are mainly small sites but between them help to monitor the distribution and numbers of hibernating bats. The whole round of sites is done over one weekend in January and one in February, Mid-Sussex on Saturday and East Sussex on Sunday. Because they are small sites, many are not so immune to the effects of the external weather conditions and that may explain some of the variation in the counts.

We only get the standard species, Brown long-eared, Natterer's, Daubenton's and Whiskered/Brandt's (nothing like an Alcatheo whiskered bat yet), but they offer good close views in a range of sites, and many of the sites are themselves of interest. One remarkable feature of this winter was that we only saw one long-eared bat, but a lack of long-eared bats was also a bit of a feature of some of the West Sussex sites. There is always a good spread of the other species and the proportion of Whiskered/Brandt's bats in these sites is generally quite high.

In January the overall count in the Mid-Sussex sites was quite high but we broke the record in February with 56, including 32 in one cold, draughty, wet and miserable site that has never had numbers like that before. In East Sussex, the count had been a bit low in January, but following the experience in Mid-Sussex the day before, we had high hopes for the February count. Wrong again, the count was again 21 – against 63 in the February count of the same sites last year. On top of that, the weather was absolutely dreadful that day and we all got thoroughly soaked and cold. But don't let me put you off; dates and contact details will be in *The Belfry* in the autumn for next winter's tour, although numbers of participants is very restricted.

Sussex Bat Group Mid and East Sussex hibernation site counts 2013

	Mid Sussex		East Sussex	
	January	February	January	February
Daubenton	6	13	7	4
Natterer	18	34	13	13
Whiskered/Brandt	12	9	1	3
Brown long-eared	0	0	0	1
Total	36	56	21	21

West Sussex - Hibernaculum crevices

By Sue Harris

During the winter hibernation counts we find bats in what appear to be tiny crevices. Volunteers look for any tell-tale signs as you can often see only a small part of a bat or just a hint of fur.

Small spaces between bricks where mortar has fallen out can be a very suitable spot. Natterer's bats are particularly adept at making themselves very cosy and on occasions you can just imagine the bat backing into the tiny crevice between bricks.

For those of you who have not seen hibernating bats the following may be of interest. The photos were taken without flash during the counts this winter.



Photo courtesy of Sue Harris: Bat in tiny gap in mortar



Photo courtesy of Sue Harris

The bat group managed to undertake the annual winter hibernaculum counts in West Sussex over the winter despite the challenges that the weather threw at us in January.

New members you may be interested to know that the bat group counts hibernating bats in five disused railway tunnels and a disused sand mine each year. The counts take place once in December, January and February with the help of volunteers from the group and owners of the tunnels.

After a very wet summer and wet and relatively mild autumn we finally had a very cold spell just before the first count in December. The weather warmed a little the day before the count and torrential rain ensued so it was with interest that we commenced our first count of the year.

As always we had a hic-cup when we found the owner of one tunnel had changed the padlock and had not given us the correct code to enter but fortunately this alerted me to check other tunnels and I found another tunnel also had a padlock change but I was able to collect another key in time for us to complete the December counts.

Our December count was good although we had no rarities. The Greater mouse-eared was not found hibernating and as it is now ten years since he was found in a tunnel we wondered yet again if he had survived another summer.

WSCC had organised the replacement of rotten boards hung up in a tunnel they own during the summer. The boards provide hibernation opportunities and additional boards were also added to increase these opportunities in the tunnel. The brickwork is in relatively good condition in this particular tunnel and hence the boards provide the majority of hibernating. This was a great job organised by Simon Rowledge, Countryside Ranger from WSCC with volunteers with many thanks to Martyn Phillis, bat group member, who provided a great deal of input on the day of the work

providing on site advice.

During the week before the January count the forecast was for heavy snow and the forecasters unfortunately, on this occasion, got it right. Very reluctantly we decided to cancel the count due to the high levels of snow that fell but with some rapid re-organisation were able to undertake the count a week later. We were delighted to find the male Greater mouse-eared bat in residence once again and he was seen again during the February count.

The last count in February went without hitch. One group was delighted to find a Bechstein's.

The numbers of bats were not high this year with the exception of one tunnel near Cocking which had a high number in December, the second highest number recorded in the tunnel in January and the third highest count in February. The tunnel has no boards but lots of crevices in the brickwork making counting a painstaking process.

The shortest tunnel in the west has only been counted regularly since the winter of 2006/7 when only single bats were found. The number increased very slightly in later counts but timber boards were put into part of the tunnel to enhance roosting and the numbers have increased and were the highest this year with counts of 6, 9 and 8 bats. Brown long-eared seem to particularly favour the boards.

We kept a close eye out for the Geoffroy's bat after one was found amongst swarming bats outside the longest tunnel in the autumn but did not find any hibernating. We also kept a close eye out for ringed bats after finding a ringed Daubenton's and Natterer's during the winter count of 2011/12 but the only bat found ringed was the Greater mouse-eared.

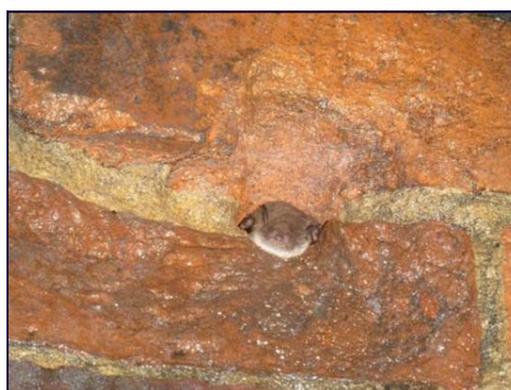


Photo courtesy of Sue Harris

Many thanks to all those who gave so much time to assisting with the count and apologies if I was not able to include you this year. The counts are undertaken very sensitively and numbers are restricted so it is not always possible to include everyone who would like to assist.



Volunteers Needed!!!



Floral Fringe Fair

June 1st and 2nd from 10.30am - 5pm. Knepp Castle, Shipley, West Sussex

This is a great two-day event in a wonderful setting: The beautiful Knepp Castle Estate. The group help a stand at the fair in 2012, and it was so popular they've asked if we'd like to come back again in 2013. The fair aims to encourage wildlife friendly gardening, so will have many different wildlife charities and a number of specialist nurseries. It will also have contemporary crafts, woodland products, and many local food producers. The private gardens, designed by Georgia Langton, will be open for the event. Our stand will be promoting the work of the group, talking to the public about bats and hopefully raising a bit of money.

Pulborough Harvest Fair

September 28th. East Glebe Field, Pulborough

The Pulborough Harvest Fair brings together the best of Sussex food & drink and rural crafts, along with local farmers and the village churches to create a unique event celebrating rural village life. Other attractions will include a traditional early 20th century fun fair, arena events and demonstrations, vintage tractors, displays of local history and artefacts, farm animals, a scarecrow competition, live music and much, much more. Our stand will be promoting the work of the group and talking to the public about bats.

To register interest or for more details please email Ryan at events@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Barbastelles over the channel

By Sheila Wright

This is a photo of two Barbastelles I found hibernating behind a piece of old sackcloth on the wall inside the woodshed at our cottage in the Pays d'Auge, Normandy a couple of weeks ago. The woodshed is an old timber-framed building with lots of gaps where bats can fly in and out of. Although we don't seem to have any breeding colonies of bats in the house or outbuildings, we have small numbers of roosting 45kHz pipistrelles and Kuhl's pipistrelles, Brown long-eared bats, Natterer's bats and a visiting Greater mouse-eared bat.



Photo courtesy of Sheila Wright

BatLife Europe

By Tony Hutson

In 2002 at the IXth European Bat Research Symposium in Le Havre, I presented (on behalf of the IUCN Chiroptera Specialist Group) a proposal for a *BatLife Europe*. This was to be an international NGO comprising a partnership of national and wider NGOs around Europe involved with the conservation of bats. We were encouraged to take the idea forward, but to take on board some points raised from the audience.

Peter Lina (from The Netherlands), Paul Racey and I worked on a range of documents to outline the aims and working of such an organisation. This was based on other like organisations such as BirdLife International and discussion with potential partners.

In 2006, at the 11th Advisory Committee meeting of EUROBATS, government representatives from around Europe agreed that the work of the many European NGOs committed to bat conservation would be enhanced by trans-boundary communication and coordination and supported the concept of BatLife Europe. The BCT was encouraged to take things forward with a group of founding partners from The Netherlands, Germany, Romania and France.

Discussion continued, the governing documents were revised and the organisation was finally launched at the XIIIth European Bat Research Symposium in Lithuania in 2012. By that time a number of organisations were committed and over 20 were signed up then, including a number appointed to provide a team of 14 Trustees, who serve a fixed term.

You can find out more about BatLife Europe on its website at <http://www.batlife-europe.info>.



In a way we had set out to establish a global BatLife Partnership, but had decided to lower our target to start with Europe. There has been a co-ordinating group for South-East Asia for some years. There is a growing network for NGOs through the Americas, and just this year has seen a Proclamation for Bat Conservation Africa signed by 19 nations with a Steering Group established. At the moment all these organisations work in rather different ways depending on needs and resources, but let's hope that one day they can all become party to a grander (and more influential) global movement.

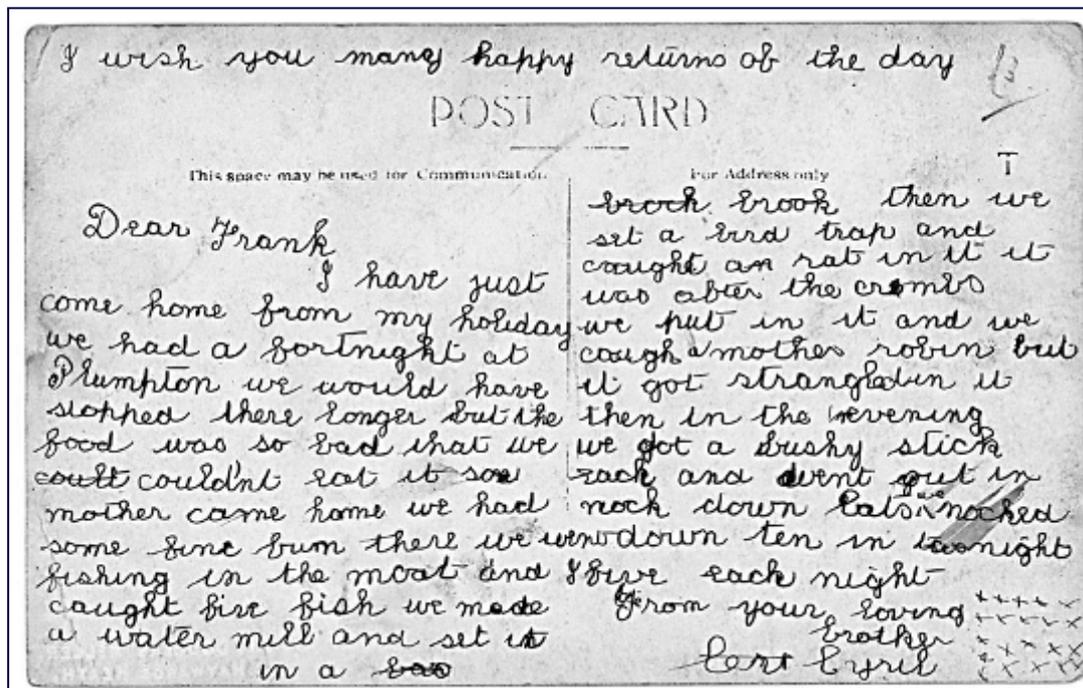
Meanwhile, one of the requirements of Partners to BatLife Europe is a subscription of 100 Euros per year. And this is where the Sussex Bat Group comes in. There are a number of countries in Europe that should be a party to such an organisation, but do not have the funds (in some countries NGOs are not allowed to hold funds, others just don't have that kind of money). So the Sussex Bat Group has agreed, in principle, to support one such organisation, whereby we would pay the annual subscription and would develop some 'twinning' relationship with the organisation we are supporting. But just at the moment I am having difficulties sorting out the arrangements for that. Watch this space!!



“Knock down bats”

By Tony Hutson

Plumpton Place - ideal site to 'knock down bats' on your holiday This postcard is of Plumpton Place in about 1905 and the message tells how, despite the awful food, Cyril had 'fine fun' there catching fish, a rat, a robin and some bats! Although I can only confirm Serotine and Soprano Pipistrelle for Plumpton Place these days, I haven't done a thorough survey there - with or without a 'bushy stick' (maybe this year!). Of course, it looks a bit different there now, but I would still expect a good range of species.



Nathusius' pipistrelle at Chichester

By Nik Night



On two occasions in August last year I encountered Nathusius' pipistrelle at Chichester. These were during my National Bat Monitoring Programme Waterways surveys along the Chichester Canal. On each occasion the bat or bats were heard in the northern arm of the canal, in one case at the canal basin within the city. I was able to make time expansion recordings which have been verified by Jon Russ and added to his national database (see www.nathusius.org.uk). I understand from SxBRC that this species was recorded in 2003 from the nearby Chichester Gravel Pits.

I have been carrying out waterways surveys at two sites along the Chichester canal since 2005 and have suspected in the past that there might be Nathusius' pipistrelles present. Both sites have good populations of Daubenton's and soprano pipistrelle bats, with common pipistrelle, serotine and noctule also recorded. One survey route was established by Mike Holmes in 1997 and the other by Martin Love in 1998.



The 2013 Bat Care Workshop

By Amanda Miller

Run by Amanda Millar, was a great success, with a number of the attendees eagerly signing up for further training. An enormous amount of time and effort went into preparing inspiring talks and demonstrations for the trainees, and everyone who came along agreed that it had been enjoyable as well as educational.

The event was held on the 2nd March in the classroom at Woods Mill which is perfectly placed for visitors from Sussex, although some of those attending had come from much further afield.

I did my best to be of assistance, but having been unavoidably 'out of action' for a few weeks, my input was minimal and restricted to organising refreshments and assistance with the hands on identification of dead bats (a great learning tool!)

We hope that those attending will remain as enthusiastic - they now have to organise rabies jabs and further bat handling training and then they will be ready to assist us for the coming season.



Beware the 'bat mafia'



There was a recent article about bats and development which featured in The Telegraph and Country Life magazine. Both gave bats a really bad press and was followed up by a statement issued by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) (see end of article for link).

The following is the article from The Telegraph online 'Holy bat protection! That's cost me £10,000' 25th January 2013.

Shortly after we applied for planning permission to repair an old barn, we received an enigmatic phone call from a withheld number. The voice had a strong Evesham accent.

"Is that Mr Coleridge? I was wondering if you'd like us to come over and sweep your barn for bats? Seeing as how you've gone for planning."

"Sorry, who is this please?"

"Never mind who we are," came the sinister reply. "We've got all the kit, industrial-strength vacuum cleaners, we can suck every trace of bat from your property, from every crevice. Four hundred quid. Cash."

Foolishly, I said no. The proposal felt dodgy, and at the time I had no concept of how the bat industry was about to invade my life and impose itself, like some malign parasite, for years to come.

The barn in question is part-medieval, part-Victorian; no architectural gem, but a nice example of a Worcestershire agricultural building. You can clearly see it from our house. And each time I looked the roof had subsided further, and more tiles had slipped to the ground, so there was a gaping hole open to the sky. It was obvious that, if we didn't do something soon, the walls would cave in and the barn be lost forever. I felt it would be shameful to allow this mellow old building, in parts 600 years old, to collapse during our ownership.

I applied for planning permission, and after the usual heritage inspections, all was looking good. The barn itself is only Grade II listed, but our house, Wolverton Hall, is Grade II*, so we have become accustomed to expert scrutiny. All that now stood between us and saving the barn was a bat licence – a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence – which had been required by the council's planning department. So began a four-year saga, costing almost £10,000 and counting, which was to offer us a fascinating but disturbing insight into the out-of-control world of the bat police, which many view as a scandal of British country life.

I have no issue with bats. Our part of Worcestershire is awash with them, and it is a pleasure to see them flitting along the treetops at dusk or swooping across the lawn. At least a hundred pipistrelle and horseshoe bats roost under the eaves of our house, which has been their favoured habitat for half a century, welcomed and undisturbed. No bat, however, has ever been spotted by us in the barn.

A requirement of obtaining a bat licence is to employ a licensed local ecologist – Natural England provides a list. Without one you are stymied, because you'll never get the licence or planning go-ahead. Our first bat man had lots of letters after his name (they relish these, as spurious professional camouflage). He arrived to inspect the barn and reported he'd found no initial evidence of bats at all.

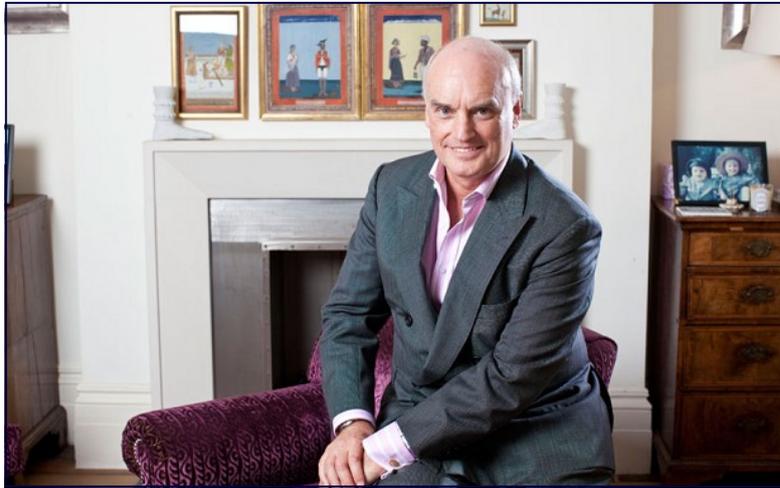
"That's a relief," I said. "Job done."

"Oh no, no," he chuckled caustically. "It means I'll have to come back several more times, in different seasons, to assess bat activity. And install recording devices that are triggered by bat squeaks. It's possible bats use the barn for ambulatory flight. And you'll need to employ my assistant, too, to see if a bat flies out of the end door."

Bills rapidly piled up. Bat consultants charge at a rate approaching that of a distinguished Harley Street GP, but work more slowly. A document consisting of no fewer than 114 pages ("The Method Statement") was compiled by a succession of bat men.

The "bat echolocation call analysis" arrived, and suggested that several different species of bat – common and soprano pipistrelles, natterer's, long-eared browns and lesser horseshoes – had been detected foraging at night close to our barn and "a single lesser horseshoe bat was recorded flying inside the barn on 17 September 2009 but had left before dawn".

None of this was particularly surprising but the ecologist was jubilant, and submitted a bill with a list of 80 legal bat requirements before any barn repairs could be countenanced. These included bat boxes and bat lofts (which have spoilt the architectural line of the roof, and were later complained about by county archaeologists) and 26 bat beams, all designed to lure our bats from their ancient roost in our attics and in to a new, custom-built, felt-lined bat sanctuary. Quite why we were grooming the poor bats to move home was never satisfactorily explained.



Holy bat protection! That's cost me £10,000

A second bat consultant (with even more letters after his name) joined the party and announced that, as part of his ongoing bat monitoring programme of Wolverton Hall, he was required by law to visit us regularly for the next nine years, each visit costing hundreds of pounds. I couldn't understand why I had received more than 100 emails on this seemingly simple project until I realised I was surcharged £25 for each one.

In one, he cautioned me that I was required by law to keep the Method Statement dossier on display at all times in a designated place, where it can be regularly consulted. I chose the piano top. Where it has sat, all 114 pages of it, unopened ever since. Another missive reminded me I faced a £5,000 fine or a prison sentence for disturbing a bat, or if I failed to comply with any detail of bat law.

In total, it took four years to get the barn repaired; four months of builders, 44 months of petty bat bureaucracy. As the saga progressed, delay upon delay, report upon report, bill upon bill, I realised I was not alone in my frustration.

From all over Britain, I kept hearing similar howls of protest from people thwarted by the bat police in their attempts to repair old buildings. A Gloucestershire landowner who has been through the process four times, converting granaries and outbuildings on his estate, boils with rage at the memory. "I am sorry to say I've come to regard it as a scam. The sheer pointlessness of what is achieved – or generally isn't achieved – the inflated bills, the sanctimoniousness and bogusness of all those involved strikes me as almost criminal. I see little difference between these self-appointed 'bat experts' and cowboy builders."

Even the Prince of Wales is said to be alarmed by the bat industry, and the delays and costs surrounding his community projects on the Duchy of Cornwall Estate.

The British bat expert Ben Gaskell, a world authority on the bats of Madagascar, Indonesia and Honduras, says, "What's going on really sticks in my craw. I've heard so many stories, it's become a little microcosm of regulation. These people aren't properly regulated. It's got out of hand. You don't have to pass a test to set up as a bat expert, you don't need a degree. They charge what they like. It's in all their interests to spin things out. Why not?"

It's easy to see what's gone wrong. From noble, well-meaning beginnings, intended to protect bat habitats in European countries where bats are scarce, mission creep has transformed the process into a full-blown industry. British bat experts wouldn't be the first group to seize the main chance when offered it, and invent a new career for themselves. How long Owen Paterson, the new Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in whose bailiwick Natural England and the bat bureaucracy sits, will allow this to continue is a matter of conjecture. He will certainly face stiff opposition from vested interests if he tries to address it.

Meanwhile, my first-hand experience has altered my view of English heritage. In the old days, when driving through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, I used to tut-tut at the sight of any tumbledown-barn, and declare, "Why on earth aren't the owners repairing it?" Now I understand: the bat hurdles and costs are too onerous. No wonder the bat-hooverers of Evesham are thriving. How many more buildings must collapse before this bat cartel is sorted out? And who is speaking up for the bats?

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) have responded to this article. View their website to read it: <http://www.cieem.net/news/87/ieems-formal-response-to-the-recent-articles-in-country-life-and-the-telegraph>

Bats, Churches and Communities



From the BCT

The new Bats, Churches and Communities pilot project aims to improve support available to churches with problem bat roosts, by identifying information gaps, improving guidance and making sure it is easily available to church communities. The project will also strengthen collaboration within the bat worker community specialising in church roosts, and work towards building new relationships between bat groups and churches that have bats. Laura Bambini is BCT's new Churches Officer. She will be working closely with individual churches and the Church of England, to make sure everyone has a voice and the needs of both people and bats can be met. This pilot project will focus in the East of England region, but BCT hopes to expand it to other regions in the future.

As part of this project, BCT is collating a UK-wide list of case study churches that have, or have in the past had, problems with bat roosts. Laura would like to hear from you if you know of such a church, or if you are working with a church in your area that has bats. You can email Laura at LBambini@bats.org.uk

Thanks from Sussex Bat Group

Many thanks to Ted Siggery from Godalming who donated three timber bat boxes he has made for the Group. The three boxes are fantastically well made and I am sure we will find the perfect place for them in order to house some homeless bats.



Membership renewal

Renewals are due on the 1st of December each year for the following year. There are quite a few membership renewals now overdue. We know December is a hectic time of year, however, if you are due to renew, please could you complete a renewal form as soon as possible and send to the Membership Secretary by the end of April 2013.

We now include an option of paying for a rolling membership via Standing Order.

We will send out forms with this Belfry to all those who are due to renew according to our records. If in doubt as to what your membership status is, please drop us a line at membership@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Are you Facebook or Twitter Savvy?

In an ever increasing digital world, it would be good to get the voice of Sussex bats out there. The group are looking for someone to manage and run our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Think you have the talent? Then get in touch with our website editor Helen Hodson at website@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Do we have your email address?

Electronic copies of the Belfry are now being sent out in order to save on costs and waste. Of our membership, approximately half have opted to receive the newsletter this way.

If you have received this as a paper copy and would prefer it in digital format from now on, please contact Louise Forder, Membership Secretary, with your current email address: membership@sussexbatgroup.org.uk.

As of 1st June 2013 we are making a small change in regards to who has access to the personal information that you have supplied. Under the Data Protection Act 1998 we are obliged to inform you that from this date we have deemed it appropriate that the Chair will also have access to your information. The person responsible for this information will remain as the Membership Secretary and there will be no change to the way in which we store it. We will continue to hold it securely and confidentially and the information will not be passed onto a third party. The decision to extend the access of information to the Chair has been taken in case of absence of the Membership Secretary.

Please note that under the Data Protection Act 1998, individuals are entitled (subject to certain exceptions) to request access to information held about them and can remove their details at any time. You must take reasonable steps to ensure that personal data we hold about you is accurate and updated as required, for example, if your personal circumstances change then please inform the Membership Secretary so that we can update your records.

Email Louise Forder at membership@sussexbatgroup.org.uk



Sussex Bat Group Contacts

Main Contact

Sheila Wright

Tel: 01903 810119

Email: contact@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Chair

Amanda Millar

Email: chair@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Secretary

Steve Hewitt

Email: secretary@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Treasurer

Stephanie Murphy

Email: treasurer@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Membership Secretary

Louise Forder

Email: membership@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Website Editor

Helen Hodson

Email: website@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Events Co-ordinator

Ryan Greaves

Email: events@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

NBMP Co-ordinator

Sarah Yarwood

Email: nbmp@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Records co-ordinator

Helen Hodson

Email: records@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Newsletter Editor

Gareth Williams

Email: newsletter@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Committee Members

Kim Dawson

Cath Laing

Tony Hutson

David King

Forest Row Bat Hospital

Jenny Clark

Tel: 01342 823189

Hurstpierpoint Bat Hospital

Amanda Millar

Tel: 01273 833258

Steyning Bat Hospital

Sheila Wright

Tel: 01903 816298