

The Belfry

Newsletter of the Sussex Bat Group



Spring 2014

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Page 1: Notes from the chair
Pages 2-4: Hibernation survey results
Page 5: Tiny bat crosses the sea
Page 6: Guess who?
Page 7: Jewels in the Sussex crown
Page 8: Alan Titchmarsh
Page 9: Cats and bats advice
Page 10: Local bat news



Brandts bat. Photo courtesy of Hugh Clark

Notes from the Chair

By Amanda Millar

Well it has been a relatively quiet time since the last Belfry up to now – thankfully – and I have had a chance to catch up. Not very many casualties in the Bat Hospital at Hurstpierpoint; just a few pips disturbed during window replacement. The autumn was fairly kind in the end and most of the bats in the Batzebo were released although it was getting a bit colder towards the end and for the first time ever a bat (Brown long-eared) returned back to the Batzebo a couple of days after he released himself and decided to settle down where there were free mealworms so I had to bring him in for the winter.

Actually it has not been that quiet in an audible sense as most days there seems to have been wind and rain battering the windows. Apparently January was the wettest January since records began. There has not been much let-up in February either as I write this. It has not been particularly cold so I wonder how deep a hibernation the bats have been able to have, they will have not been able to go out for a top up in the last 6 weeks or so.

The only sad news is that Steve Hewitt, our very efficient Secretary for the last year or so, has recently had to move out of Sussex. He hopes to keep in touch but has had to pass his role to someone else (we hope we to get someone lined up soon). We wish him all the best in his new home and job. Thank you Steve.

Sheila and I are gearing up to do our annual Bat First Aid and Care Course and I have been asked to take a few bats to London for an Alan Titchmarsh Show. (Probably taking up most of the

day for about a minute of fame!). Then a new course for the Sussex Wildlife Trust called the Wonderful World of Bats to prepare, so I have a feeling my winter semi-hibernation is rather suddenly over.

There have been notices in the media that some bat populations in Europe are up by 43% between 1993 and 2011. On the face of it this sounds good. However we must not forget that the populations had declined steeply by the early 1990's, so it is only an increase on these record low figures. Also these are figures from hibernation sites, not actual populations, and only captures data from certain species and a few countries. The cynic in me wonders; what if there has been a loss of suitable hibernation sites and they are all crowding in to the few remaining? The report cautions that the combining of data from different countries and 27 different species can mask contrasting trends from species or country level. It also indicates that several countries have no monitoring system in place. Check out the full report at: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/european-bat-population-trends-2013> Sadly the trends in UK bats does not seem to be so good <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4271> but we must thank the BCT, NBMP and our own Sussex hibernation surveys who have contributed to the data we have. I must say I have not noticed an increase in the bats flying round my house. I have a pip roost at the back and have only noticed a decline.

Fingers crossed for a steady improvement in the weather into a pleasant spring for everyone.



Hibernation site checks in Mid and East Sussex



I've just been to the village shop, where I overheard a conversation which went like this: question (cheerily): 'hello, how are you, you having a good day or a bad day?', answer (morbidly): 'a good day, every day above ground is a good day'! I think I know what he meant, but he's missing out if he doesn't know that one can spend interesting and useful days underground (and still alive)!

About 16 underground or semi-underground sites are regularly monitored for hibernating bats in Mid- and East Sussex (more or less central Sussex) with the data contributing to the National Bat Monitoring Scheme. These are mainly rather small sites but between them help to monitor the distribution and numbers of hibernating bats. The whole round of a core of 14 sites is done over one weekend in January and one in February, Mid-Sussex on Saturday and East Sussex on Sunday. I do a couple of other sites separately, and Roger Jones and Sally-Ann Hurry do four or five more in far East Sussex. And a few other sites are done as opportunity arises. Because they are mainly small sites, many are not so immune to the effects of the external weather conditions and that may explain some of the wide variation in the counts.

We only get the standard species, brown long-eared, Natterer's, Daubenton's and whiskered/Brandt's, with the proportion of whiskered/Brandt's bats in these sites often quite high.

This winter produced the usual mixed results, although overall counts were on the low side and certainly lower than last year. The maximum for any one site in Mid-Sussex was 19 (in January) and for East Sussex was 12 (in February). Numbers of all species were down, but it was particularly the low numbers of Natterer's that affected the counts. Of course, where the bats are if they are not in these hibernation sites is a bit of a mystery, and the fluctuations mean that it can take some time to detect a real trend in population numbers.

But at least this year, overall, the weather wasn't too bad on the day (too warm, but not too wet), which is just as well since perhaps a higher proportion of the day is spent on the surface getting to these sites than is spent underground (doing the West Sussex sites, one has only occasional samples of what the weather is like outside)

Being mostly small sites, these sites offer good opportunity to see the species close up, but also they are a strange mixture of sites that demonstrate the ingenuity of people down the ages in building underground structures for a variety of purposes – even if, in at least one case, we have no idea what that purpose was. In terms of numbers and species diversity, this is the poor-person's hibernation site monitoring, compared with the West Sussex sites, but we are very happy for people to help with the surveys. Dates and contact details will be in The Belfry in the autumn for next winter's tours, although numbers of participants is very restricted.

Location	Mid-Sussex		East Sussex	
Species	January	February	January	February
Natterer's	17	11	9	7
Daubenton's	5	7	4	9
Whiskered/ Brandt's	6	5	1	1
Brown long-eared			3	1
total	28	23	17	18

Sussex Bat Group Mid- and East Sussex hibernation site counts, 2014

By Tony Hutson

West Sussex - Hibernaculum Counts Winter 2013/14

As volunteers gathered in December to undertake the first of the winter hibernation counts in five disused railway tunnels and a sand mine in West Sussex, after a mild autumn and early winter, we thought that the number of hibernating bats would not be high. Little did we know that the mild weather would continue and we would have the wettest winter on record. Fortunately we were able to complete all of the planned counts although it was not without some anxiety and route diversions for the hardy volunteers to meet up to the north of Chichester getting around floods and fallen trees on the way.

The tunnels were wet but nowhere near as wet as we thought they might be. Temperatures varied within the tunnels but some were notably warm for hibernating bats during the counts.

In December we were delighted to find the Greater Mouse-eared bat (GM-e) was still alive and hibernating and he remained hibernating for the following two counts. For those of you who do not know the history of this bat which is ringed the following information may be of interest. There were a small number of this species known to roost in West Sussex with numbers dwindling until 1989 when the last known bat was found hibernating in a tunnel in the county. In 1990 the species was recorded as extinct in England although they are widespread across the channel in Europe. In December 2002 a young male was found hibernating in one of the tunnels where they had previously been found hibernating. After an extensive search to try to identify summer roosts no further information has been found but the solitary male has continued to hibernate each year in the same tunnel. There were no other rarities found in December.

One tunnel had had an attempted break in during the summer of 2013 but fortunately no one had gained access and the damage to the lock was rapidly resolved. The numbers in this tunnel had been increasing but this year they were low again but this may be due to the higher temperatures found in the tunnel.

A Bechsteins was found to have joined the GM-e in January and there was a Bechsteins in the same tunnel February. An exciting find was a Bechsteins, which was very much awake, found in a tunnel near Cocking which was a first for the tunnel in records from 1969.

Unfortunately there had clearly been some human activity in the sand mine between the December and January count which almost certainly would have caused disturbance to the hibernating bats. The count in December was one of the highest at 8 but only 4 were found in January.

The tiny spaces that we found bats never cease to amaze the groups counting. There was quite a deep but small crevice in which a natterer's had found a cosy spot to hibernate. The volunteers need to check carefully not only for very visible bats but for bats in crevices in the thick brick walls.

Boards were put into one of the smaller tunnels during some repairs in 2009. Since then the numbers, whilst remaining low, have shown an increase with most bats found under the boards. An example of the boards is shown in the following photo.

During 2013 the National Trust very kindly provided new timber to replace some of the deteriorating boards in the tunnel owned by the Trust. Daniel Whitby, assisted by



Martyn Phillis checking the boards with a mirror and torch

volunteers replaced some of the boards. Some of the new boards have already been found to be in use this winter. Many thanks to the National Trust and volunteers for assisting with this valuable work.

Many thanks also 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 and hence unfortunately it is not always possible to include everyone who would like to assist.

The numbers of bats counted this year were not the highest but neither were they the lowest.

By Sue Harris





SUSSEX BAT GROUP		BAT HIBERNACULA COUNTS															2013/2014		
Location Species	Tunnel 5			Tunnel 3			Tunnel 2			Sandmine			Tunnel 4			Tunnel 1			
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	
Daubenton's	3	4	7	15	11	13	26	48	88	1	1	1		2	1	14	19	41	
Natterers	3	4	4	7	31	37	37	79	75	5		2	2	2	1	22	32	39	
Brown Long-eared				2	2								2						
Whiskered / Brandt's /Alcathoe whiskered				11	15	14	2	5	4	2	1		1	2	1	2	4	2	
Bechstein's						1		1	1										
Barbastelle																			
Greater Horseshoe																			
Greater Mouse-eared							1	1	1										
Long-eared - sp													2	2	4	1			
Myotis - sp						1			1										
No ID						1					2	1					1		
Total	6	8	11	35	59	67	66	134	170	8	4	4	5	8	5	42	57	82	

Survey of bats at Markstakes Common, Chailey

Markstakes Common is an interesting area of mixed wealden woodland within other woodland areas in Chailey, East Sussex. There are old beech and hornbeam areas and more open woodland of old pasture with oaks and some glades and larger open areas, plus a few ponds and streams. The site is managed by the Friends of Markstakes Common in collaboration with Lewes District Council.

Wooden bat boxes and now woodcrete boxes have been installed and are now monitored about twice a year. These have produced brown long-eared bats (and a few dormice). Some trapping has been carried out and five species trapped, including Bechstein's bat. Casual bat detector survey has added a further two bat species.

The boxes will be checked again this year, but we also propose to organise at least three evenings of a more systematic summer bat detector survey by members of the Sussex Bat Group. And we plan to organise at least three evenings of summer bat trapping (managed by me and Steph Murphy) with the Sussex Bat Group. The bat detector survey and trapping will be run on the same evenings when possible.

We will then compile a report of the results of these surveys and the earlier work, with recommendations for site management and any further survey and/ or monitoring activity.

If anybody wants to help, experienced surveyors as well as those who want to learn, please contact me and I will get back to you when we have firmer dates.

Tony Hutson. Phone: 01273 890341. Email: hutson.t@btinternet.com

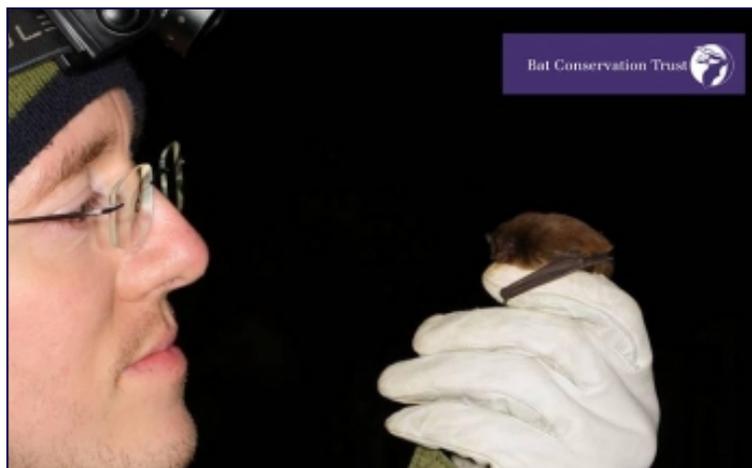
Tiny bat crosses the North Sea!



A tiny bat, ringed in the UK and found in the Netherlands, 600 kilometres (as the bat flies) from where it was ringed provides the first record of a bat crossing the sea from the UK to mainland Europe!

Bat experts in the Netherlands and the UK are working together to learn more about this remarkable journey and its implications for bat conservation and offshore windfarms. We believe the tiny bat, a *Nathusius' pipistrelle*, which typically weighs around 6-15g and is about the size of a human thumb, flew from Blagdon, near Bristol, in the South West of the UK across the country and on over The North Sea before settling in a farm building in the Netherlands about ½ km from the coast: a direct journey of 596 kilometres (370 miles).

The bat was found on 23rd December 2013 by Teddy Dolstra, from the Friesland Mammal Working Group who regularly monitors bats roosting at the site. The exact location of where the bat was found is Hoarnesstreek 2, Pietersbierum, Franekeradeel, Holland. Sadly, the animal had already died, but because it was carrying a miniature identity ring, he was able to discover that the remarkable creature had been found previously in the UK



The movements of *Nathusius' pipistrelles* both around the UK and between the UK and the continent, are currently a mystery. They are elusive creatures, and are too small to carry devices such as satellite trackers used to monitor bird migration. In some areas, like Blagdon, several male bats have been found, but females are either absent or scarce and are believed to visit only on their migration route elsewhere. On the continent some migration routes are well known and it is established these tiny bats can travel very long distances over land. There are several records of them bats landing on oil platforms or boats in the North Sea but this is an exciting find, showing that the bat not only made its way from one side of England to the other, but then crossed the sea.

Daniel Hargreaves, who ringed the bat back in 2010, says of the discovery: *"We have hypothesised for a long time about the migration of bats to and from the UK but it's very difficult to prove. This finding was a great surprise and is helping us to understand the huge journeys these bats can make. We have only ringed 34 bats at Blagdon lake so to receive a record like this is astonishing; it's incredible to think that this little bat has flown a distance of at least 600km, avoiding hazards like roads and wind turbines, and for it to safely cross the sea is remarkable."* BBC website



Guess Who?!



Who says bat enthusiasts are not fashionable?? I'm not sure what David King is doing to that bat!



Ebernoe Common and the Mens: Jewels in the Sussex Crown

Breeding barbastelles were confirmed to be present at Ebernoe Common in 1997. Subsequent ringing and radio-tracking studies in the area have provided detailed information on roost locations, flight lines and foraging areas of the colony. The study showed bats used a number of shared flightlines to travel from their roosts to foraging areas.

A single transect was set up at this site and completed by Philip Briggs from BCT in 2009. This transect is located in the centre of the SAC on Ebernoe Common. Barbastelles were recorded on this transect in August 2009 but not in September 2009. This transect was retained and surveyed in 2010. A second transect was set up in the northern part of Ebernoe SAC in 2010. The transect route was designed taking into account known barbastelle locations and flightlines from radio-tracking studies¹, and ensuring the route was accessible based on local knowledge from Sussex Wildlife Trust and the volunteers taking part in the survey. Since 2010, the aim has been to survey both transects simultaneously on both evenings where possible, or on closely consecutive evenings.

The presence of breeding barbastelles was confirmed in The Mens in 2001. Radio-tracking was carried out in 1998 to investigate roost locations, flight lines and foraging areas of bats in this area¹. The study showed that bats remained in the woodland for only 45 minutes before leaving to travel to foraging areas further afield and that the bats travelled at high speeds along commuting routes as they left the woodland. *Excerpt from a Frank Greenaway report*



Ebernoe Common

The Mens

Year	Pe-riod	Date	Transect 1	Transect 2
			% samples with barb	% samples with barb
2009	2	13-Aug-09	0.7*	-
	3	07-Sep-09	0	-
2010	2	12-Aug-10	0	0
	3	02-Sep-10	0.4	1.4
2011	1	03-Aug-11	0.8	0.8
	2	15-Aug-11	-	0.5
		16-Aug-11	0.8	-
3	30-Aug-11	1.2	0.4	
2012	1	25-Jul-12	0.0	1.9
	2	14-Aug-12	1.3	1.6
	3	28-Aug-12	0.0	-
		06-Sep-12	-	0.0

Year	Period	Date	Transect 1	Transect 2
			% samples with barb	% samples with barb
2010	3	02-Sep-10	2.3	1.5
2011	1	25-Jul-11	1.8	4.4
	2	15-Aug-11	0.5	1.0
2012	1	26-Jul-12	2.1	0.9
	2	22-Aug-12	0.0	0.0



A day not to remember



With just three days notice I was asked to bring some bats up to the ITV studios to appear on the Alan Titchmarsh show as they wanted to do an item on the apparent increase in bat populations. Knowing that I would probably need to concentrate completely on the bats who might have been unpredictable in the large, warm, noisy, bright recording studio with live studio audience; I insisted on having someone else to help answer questions and I am delighted Shirley Thompson was able to make it. It was a nightmare though and I am glad that is over. Just about everything that could possibly go wrong, did.

There was a two hour tedious taxi ride each way as they both got lost. On the way up I gave him the wrong postcode by mistake (sorry!), not realising until we were just about to go through the Blackwall tunnel (The ITV studio was on the Southbank), back over again by Tower Bridge only to find the road we wanted was closed and we had to cross the Thames again, (Blackfriars Bridge this time), and back (via Waterloo Bridge) to approach from the other side. The poor Burgess Hill taxi driver was stressed out by the time we arrived mid morning especially when ITV argued over the congestion charge fee. I left them to it only to find as walking into the immaculate, crowded reception area that the smart leather shoes I had on, but not worn for several years, the rubber sole had perished and I left a trail of chunks of sole and black crumbs behind me - acute embarrassment! Fortunately I managed to borrow some slip-ons from 'wardrobe', Then I lost a button on my sleeve so had to role them up. Oh, I did not mention they insisted on clothes

which were neither black, nor white nor striped or checked and no logos, which left me with hardly anything to wear anyway, and plastered me with make-up which made my eyes look bloodshot.

The bats were brilliant though, but very awake all day. The Noctule sat and echolocated to the bat detector, baby Bilbo (BLE) hung and fluttered and grabbed at mealworms while I fed him and the pips (which could fly) just sat quietly on my hand. They got some super shots of Bilbo. I was so nervous I cannot remember what we did or said but think they were happy with the filming and I think Shirley got some of our message over in the short 4 minutes we had. Other guests in the studio were Adam Ant and some leggy birds from DCI Banks and Eastenders. On the way back (via Blackfriars and Tower Bridges for some strange reason) the taxi satnav lost satellite just before our turning off the M23 (I had to go direct to a bee meeting in Uckfield I was Charing, for which I was 10 mins late) and we overshot and ended up taking the windy backroads through Turners Hill, West Hoathly and Nutley and hit a huge pothole.

Got home after 10pm to find no power; the circuit breaker had popped but it was inaccessible behind a huge tower of hives up to the ceiling and not easy in the dark so I skipped supper and we had a beer by candlelight and went to bed. In the morning: warm milk, cold house, no hot water and did not sleep a wink for tossing and turning re-living the whole horrible experience. Never again. They had better give a decent donation to SBG for all that stress.

Available on ITV player:

<https://www.itv.com/itvplayer/the-alan-titchmarsh-show/21-03-2014> The feature is about half way through.

By Amanda Millar



Bats and Cats

Advice For Responsible Cat Owners



Thank you for calling the Bat Conservation Trust about the bat your cat caught.

Cats do not eat bats but they like to play with them. If a bat has been caught by a cat it will need expert help from a trained bat carer as soon as possible. Even a tiny amount of cat saliva in a bat's bloodstream can cause infection and without help they are likely to die. Cats will often learn where a bat roost is and catch bats as they leave the roost, putting a whole colony at risk.

By following a few simple steps responsible cat owners can stop bats being harmed:

- Bring your cat indoors half an hour before sunset and keep it in all night when bats are most active (April – October).
- If you cannot keep your cat in all night, bring it in half an hour before sunset and keep it in for an hour after sunset.
- It is very important to keep cats indoors at night from mid-June until the end of August because bats will be looking after their babies.



If your cat often brings in bats he/she might have found a roost and may return to it.

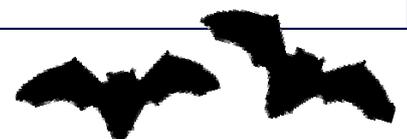


Bat Carers estimate that over 30% of bats they rescue have been attacked by cats.¹

Only 14% of bats injured by cats are released. Over half (56%) do not survive a cat attack and 30% cannot be returned to the wild.²

What should I do if I find a bat on the ground?

Only handle the bat if you have to; as with any wild animal use gloves or a tea towel to avoid getting bitten. Place the bat in a box with small air holes in and put in a small, shallow container with a few drops of water. Contact the Bat Conservation Trust Bat Helpline for advice on 0845 1300 228.



Bat first aid and care course

Tutors: Amanda Millar and Sheila Wright

Saturday 12th April 2014, 9.30am – 4pm

At Woods Mill, Horn Lane, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9SD. This is the Sussex Wildlife Trust Headquarters.

Topics to include:

- Biology
- Legislation
- Records, assessment
- Identification with live bats
- Treatment
- Housing
- Feeding
- Baby care
- Rehabilitation and release

Sussex Bat Group members £22, non-members £32.

Tea/coffee provided but please bring own lunch. Coffee and introduction starts at 9.30am.

There are a few spaces left; please contact Amanda if you would like to attend: chair@sussexbatgroup.org.uk

Urgent appeal for carers in East Sussex

We are particularly short of carers in the middle of East Sussex. Is there anyone in the Heathfield, Uckfield, Robertsbridge or Crowborough areas who would like to help out? At its simplest this could be a taxi service collecting bats and taking them to other carers. At the other end it involves looking after bats for a month or more until they are ready for release, and all stages of care in between.

Also anyone in the Chichester, Petworth area who could help, please contact Amanda Millar.



Helpers needed

I am writing on behalf of the Friends of Bersted Brooks, a conservation group that looks after a small Local Nature Reserve on the northern edge of Bognor Regis.

We have recently purchased some bat detectors, as we know we have at least 2 species of bat at the Brooks – possibly pipistrelle & Daubentons. Later in the year we would like to hold a bat walk & would love it if you or a couple of your members could come to help us learn how to use the detectors effectively (as we want to keep records of what we find) & to determine which species we do have. It might even lead us to discovering a previously unknown roost – who knows?

If the Sussex Bat Group is able to help us, please let me know when in the year would be our best opportunity of success, so that we can learn from your extensive knowledge & therefore protect 'our' local bat population.

If you can help please contact Sheila Wright: secretary@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



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