

The Northern Natterer



Central Scotland Bat Group Newsletter 49

Autumn 2007

Programme 2007/8

November 1st "After Halloween, the Real Vampires"

Presentation by John Haddow on his Mexican bats experience in Churches House, main building (not our usual Leighton House), 1 Kirk St., Dunblane at 7.30pm.

November 17th Scottish Bat Conference at Stirling University. This is an all day event with talks and workshops. You should have received an email about this recently. As we have to pay for the facilities this year, the cost is higher than at Battleby. CSBG will subsidise newish group members paying for themselves by £10.00 each. *You pay the reduced amount £25 or £30 depending on whether or not you also belong to BCT. Contact Ian Pascoe to see if you qualify!!*

December 6th Social evening at the Allan Park Hotel, Stirling from 8.00pm. This is an informal get together with no set programme.

February 3rd, Doune and Aberfoyle Hibernation sites. Meet at Doune Castle car park at 10am or the coach park section of David Marshall Lodge at 10.45.am (turn right **before** the barrier) This is to arrange shared transport up to the site where parking is very limited. (February 10th will be a reserve date in case weather is bad)

April 21st AGM, 7:30 pm at Scottish Churches House, the Leighton House Building. Go past the main Churches House, turn left and park in the car park at the end of the street.

Leighton House is the building entered through the arch next door to the car park. The meeting will include a talk by Anne Youngman, the Scottish Officer of the Bat Conservation Trust on "the Dundee City Bat Project".

Please note that this is a change of date

Late April/early May - Visit to Aberfoyle Bat House to check on Natterer's Bats. Details to be arranged.

May 1st - A training session for those interested in the Car Bat Survey. Probably held in Dunblane, details to be arranged.

Late July - A bat handling and detector training session to be held, probably at Doune. Organiser: Anne Youngman. Details to be arranged

June, July, and August counts and surveys for the National Bat Monitoring Programme
Activities include counting bats emerging from roosts, surveying waterways for Daubenton's bats and field surveys. More volunteers are always welcome.

HIBERNACULUM VISITS

In case you are wondering whether this is something for you, here is a report from member Anne Marie Campbell who took part for the first time last year:

Never having visited an hibernation site before I had no idea what to expect. I did not make a good start by arriving late having been diverted off the motorway. Anyway, John Haddow was very kind and had waited patiently for me. The first site visited was an abandoned tunnel into a slate mine near Aberfoyle. The entrance was surprisingly small and low down and was secured by a locked gate. Once we were in the tunnel I realised that neither of my torches were much good but I consoled myself as I understood that very bright torches shining on the bats might warm them up and disturb them. I found it very interesting to see how the tunnel had been excavated and was glad that my boots were high enough to keep out the water that had gathered in a 'sump' in our path. As I really did not know what to look for it was good for me to be with experts. I was genuinely thrilled to see the 2 long-eared bats that were pointed out to me and amazed how small they were. It seemed incredible that such small,

seemingly vulnerable creatures could survive all by themselves. The only other bat roosts I had seen were on television where naturally, I suppose, thousands of bats make a better programme. It seemed even more amazing and skilful to find 2 individuals. The second site we visited was Doune Castle. Again it was plain that I needed to be with an expert to see anything! Although I have been told that Pipistrelles like to hibernate in small narrow spaces I did not realise how small. At this site I managed to see 4 of the 19 found by John and realised I would possibly do better if I was a little taller. One has to be right in line with the opening or it is very easy to miss them. I was particularly surprised to see the bat tucked in behind a notice board, in what seemed to me to be a very exposed position. I must thank John for what was a very memorable experience.

BATS IN THE DOCK

In June this year John Haddow was scheduled to be an expert witness in a case where two bat roosts at Dunmore House in Airth had been demolished. This was a particularly heinous offence as they seem to have been maternity roosts. The Sheriff could have fined CMI Demolition £50,000, but in fact the fine was only £2,000. The SSPCA was loud in their condemnation of such a small fine being imposed – paying this is much cheaper than delaying building work and does not act as deterrent to what is in fact a criminal act. The demolition firm had continued with the work even after seeing bats flying out of the building. The firm pleaded guilty, so in fact John was cheated out of his debut expert witness court appearance.

AND IN THE SOUP (spot the BCT logo)



Where will they get to next? Read on....

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Mexican free-tailed bats are one of the most successful mammalian species in the world. They inhabit most of the temperate and tropical areas in the Western Hemisphere. These bats roost in colonies that can be as large as several million individuals in places like Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. In other places, they form colonies of a few dozen individuals.

These bat colonies are noted for their distinctive musk-like odour. William Wood and Joseph Szewczak of Humboldt State University identified the chemicals that produce this scent and their results are reported in the September issue *Biochemical Systematics and Ecology* (volume 35, pp. 566-568). These researchers carefully removed a few milligrams of hair from each bat and then identified the compounds responsible for the strong odour.

The major compound they identified is known to inhibit the fungus that causes athlete's foot in humans. This fungus infects many different mammals besides humans. In bat hair, the concentration of this compound, nonanal, was six times stronger than need to stem the growth of this fungus. This substance also inhibits the growth of the pathogenic skin yeast that has been implicated in causing human dandruff. Two other substances in bat hair, heptanal and octanal, also have antifungal activity. Unfortunately, there is little likelihood of these chemicals being used on humans, since no one would want to smell like a musky bat colony.

Besides protecting the bats from fungi, the three active substances in bat hair have been shown to be effective tick and mosquito repellents. The protective effects of these chemicals may be why these bats can roost in such large colonies. Without this chemical protection, disease and/or external parasites might disable bats in large colonies.

Well now you know... try asking for an extract of Mexican freetailed bat hair at the chemists next time your toes go soggy!

As this is Page Three, this is a good place to put in this photo of Becky Osborn, partner Brad Connor, with baby Jamie, born on the 12th of October and weighing in at 8lbs 3ozs. (Can't do baby weights in metric, sorry!)



Many congratulations to all concerned on producing our newest recruit (*the first baby born to a CSBG member since 2001 – unless you know different?*)

TALKING OF MEMBERS

Welcome to the 12 new members who have joined CSBG this year, which is a measure of the success of our website. It has been great to see the enthusiasm that these people have put into their bat work – and we acknowledge that they have reduced the average of the group by a considerable number of years!

ERRATIC AND GRACELESS – MOI?

Their motions may seem erratic and graceless but bats are more efficient fliers than birds, thanks to an airlift mechanism that is unique among aerial creatures, new wind tunnel experiments show. Previous studies that compared oxygen consumption among birds, insects and bats of similar sizes - a hummingbird, a small bat and a large moth, for example – found that bats use less energy to fly, but ‘no one’s really had an explanation for this phenomenon’, said study team member Sharon Swartz, an associate professor in ecology and evolutionary biology at Brown University (USA).

The wind tunnel tests suggest the secret to efficient bat flight lies in the furry creatures’ flexible skin membrane and its many jointed wings, which together create a shape shifting

structure that provides more lift, less drag and greater manoeuvrability.

For more information go to the website of MSBNC. Thanks to Toby Clark for this extract.

BATS IN THE NEWS

The British Trust for Ornithology reports in its magazine, **BTO News** issue 271, that bird feathers have been found in the faecal pellets of the Giant Noctule Bat, a rare Mediterranean aerial hawking bat (*sic*). Much argument ensued as to whether these were ingested by accident or reflected true hunting. Subsequent research tracking the diets of the bats over time revealed a clear switch from insects towards birds in the autumn and to a lesser extent in spring.

The SWT August edition of **Scottish Wildlife** reveals that whiskered bats have been found on the Falls of Clyde reserve, possibly sharing a roost with Daubenton’s bats.

In the autumn 2007 edition of **The Organic Way**, the magazine for organic gardeners devotes a double page spread to encouraging bat friendly gardening, pointing out that droppings are very useful on the compost heap, being a good source of nitrogen, phosphates, and potassium and containing microbes that can help remove toxins from the soil. They give BCT a good mention too – as well as Alana Ecology.

Try to beg, borrow or steal a copy of **National Geographic** for June 2007. It has a great article with superb photographs of bats on Barro Colorado Island in Lake Gatun in the Panama Canal. This tiny island is reputed to have more than 74 bat species. Spix’s disc winged bats curl up inside a furred leaf, and the fringe lipped bat eats frogs – but only edible ones, disdaining those that are poisonous.

But now for the **bad news**: a newspaper extract sent in (*from Anne Duncombe, I think*) tells us that horseshoe bats were the source of the Sars disease outbreak that killed hundreds of people in Asia a couple of years ago. Horsehair bats are sold for human food in some Chinese markets. Other diseases for which bats have been responsible are said to be Hendra fever which has killed people in Australia, and they have even been implicated in the spread of the Ebola

and Marburg fever outbreaks. It does however go on to say that there may be an intermediate mammalian vector which then passes the virus to humans.

The Observer 15/07/07 featured an article headed 'Lights out on Britain's bats' suggesting that one of the reasons for the decline in some species may be due to the enormous increase in light pollution, (*24% in the last seven years – when did you last see the Milky Way?*) and the development of areas like London's docklands which for many years contained only derelict buildings which were ideal for roosting and hunting bats. Recently, it is said that campaigners fought off plans to light up Richmond Bridge because of the danger to wildlife. Fortunately plans are afoot to draw up national guidelines to make all future building developments more bat friendly. Those of you who attended the National bat Conference in York at the end of August were treated to a fascinating talk about these possibilities – which would also favour swifts, the speaker's main interest.

And in the same paper 29/07/07, in the Property pages, we are told that an estate being built in Wellington, Somerset (*where your secretary went to school, but you probably don't want to know that*) has had a special bat house built 'the size of an ensuite bathroom' in a sealed attic after finding long eared bats in one of the existing cottages.

AND SCOTTISH BAT OFFICER IN THE NEWS TOO!

Anne Youngman had a full page spread about her work featured in the Allanwater News of August 2nd



She also featured in Moscow News Weekly on the web, in their 'Diary of a Planet' section!!

Bats Suffer Cold Summer A cold and damp summer across many parts of the United Kingdom has forced bats to abandon their young to survive, according to the country's leading experts on the flying mammals. A shortage of insects due to the soggy conditions has left adults competing to find enough food. The Bat Conservation Trust says reports of grounded or injured bats soared over the summer months. "People have been noticing babies which have been abandoned because there is not enough food," trust **Scottish Officer Anne Youngman** told the BBC. "Some have found five babies walking about the floor. It's heartbreaking." Youngman says she fears that the region has lost a good portion of this year's newborns.

BUT WORSE THINGS CAN HAPPEN TO A BAT ...



Ozzy Osbourne on biting a bat's head off
"A fan threw it on stage and I thought it was a toy. It must have been stunned by the lights because it looked dead when I picked it up. I put it in my mouth as a joke. Its wings started flapping and I ripped it out of my mouth but its head came off. The worst part was the anti-rabies injections in my backside. They were so painful."

(someone must have got the caption wrong – it looks to me as if he is about to bite the head off a parrot - also please note you **do not get an anti rabies jag in the 'backside!'**)

READ ON FOR MORE SERIOUS STUFF:

NATIONAL BAT CONFERENCE, YORK AUGUST 2007

Several CSBG members attended this conference, which had some excellent presentations and socialising. (*some of this socialising involved a mobile phone, room keys, a certain amount of memory loss and red wine – yes *****, this does mean you! Sorry, this had to be censored*)

One very topical subject with relevance for Scotland was:

Bats and windfarms. It is thought that bats might be affected by a) collision with turbine blades, b) loss of foraging habitats, c) blocking commuting or migration routes and d) ultrasound emission by wind turbines.

Most of the data so far comes from the USA, and mainland Europe and shows most collisions in mid July to September, which suggests that the bats affected are migrating. When numbers of dead bats have been found near turbines, this appears to be correlated with insect prey abundance bats do not remain in an area when there are fewer than 300 insects per 1000m³. As bats prefer foraging along woodland edges, it is not surprising that turbines near such areas have shown increased bat mortality. No evidence has been found to suggest that the noise of the turbines is interfering with echolocation.

John Haddow sends us this report:

First known windfarm bat casualty in Scotland?

Since the Braes of Doune windfarm came into service this year it has been monitored on behalf of the operator for bird fatalities by a group called Natural Research Projects. There has been a well publicised death of a red kite there this summer, picked up by the regular monitoring. On the 6th October I was asked to look at a dead bat found 5m from the base of one of the turbines. Although well eaten by blowfly maggots, it was recognisable as a soprano pipistrelle. From the condition I estimated it to have died in the last two weeks of September. The broken left forearm suggested impact with something, and the position it was found, at 450m altitude on high moorland and close to a large wind turbine gives little room for doubt as to how it sustained the injury. It shows how little we know about pipistrelle behaviour that this bat was anywhere near one of these high turbines. To my knowledge this is the first known bat

fatality at a windfarm in Scotland, but does anyone know of another?

It is interesting to know that bats must now be taken into consideration for any EIA for a new windfarm, such as the one mooted for Ballindalloch Muir near Balfon.

Status of Nathusius' Pipistrelle in the UK

There are now 171 records of the species 'in the hand' and from bat detector records a further 154 have been identified in Britain and Ireland. There are clear peaks in autumn and spring. Five maternity colonies and four mating roosts have been identified. For more information go to www.nathusius.org.uk

Population ecology of Daubenton's bat

Females are found only at low and intermediate elevations. A minority of dominant males monopolise these breeding females and father disproportionately more offspring than the larger group living upstream. The latter have lowered body condition, so are less fit and probably only mate during autumn swarming.

Bat rehabilitation and care

This was from the RSPCA's perspective; they have produced a bat protocol unfortunately I cannot find this on the internet! Potential bat carers should get hold of a copy of the Bat Rescue Manual from the West Yorkshire Bat Hospital, who also publish a quarterly newsletter. Contact: Bryan or Maggie Brown, 10 North Avenue, Otley, West Yorkshire, LS21 1AJ. CSBG might be able to help with initial funding – just ask.

Lighting and ecosystems

See also 'Lights out for Britain's Bats' on page 4. The level of impact and consciousness of the harm that industrial and domestic lighting has on wildlife has only recently been investigated. This talk gave a fascinating insight into different kinds of light and lighting and how their effects on wildlife could be minimised. Light pollution is something that also affects astronomers and even the amateur who just wishes to look at the stars. It was emphasised that lighting should be kept to a minimum and directed only to an area where and when it is needed

For further information on these topics and others addressed at the conference, please contact John Haddow

Terror of gran after invasion of bats

By Stefan Morkis and Jennifer Cosgrove

A RESIDENT of Barnhill in Dundee fears her 85-year-old grandmother will be frightened to death by bats that have infested her home.

Susan Parfitt said her grandmother Jessie Cushnie had suffered a heart attack two years ago, and the last thing she needed was more worry.

Mrs Cushnie was feeling too unwell to discuss the situation, but Ms Parfitt said the creatures had managed to gain access to the house, and that her grandmother had been screaming and was terrified to go to sleep at night.

Bats are protected under the Nature Conservation Act (2004) and their roost cannot be sealed off unless permission is granted by Scottish Natural Heritage. In this case it might not be possible for the bats to be shut out until the young have matured, which might take a further two months.

"We had bats last year and they were coming in through the cupboard in the hall," Ms Parfitt said. "We contacted Scottish Natural Heritage, and they told us to seal up the hole. The council did this, but they've come back again this year.

"For weeks, we found one bat every night in the house between 11pm and midnight. When my grandmother first saw one on the wall she screamed at the top of her lungs.

"Our neighbours have been helping us to get the bats out of the house, and we've had another visit from the SNH who advised us to seal up all the other holes they had been coming in through.

"We just don't want them to come back, and I'm so scared that my grandmother has another heart attack."

It is believed that the nocturnal creatures are roosting behind the wall cladding of the two-storey house in the Barnhill cul-de-sac.

Continued on Page 11

But life with bats can be fun too – Anne Y and friends at the Doune and Dunblane Fling (thanks Beccy)



ON A BAT'S WING

This is the title of a book of bat poems, which was on sale at the National Conference.

Compiled by Michael Baron with a preface by John Altringham, you can get this for £7.99 from www.fiveleaves.co.uk – an ideal batty present, just in time for Christmas.

One of my favourites is by Ogden Nash:

"Myself, I rather like the bat.
It's not a mouse, it's not a rat.
It has no feathers, yet has wings,
It's quite inaudible when it sings.
It zigzags through the evening air
And never lands on ladies' hair.
A fact of which men spend their lives
Attempting to convince their wives"

Other contributions range from Shakespeare to Ted Hughes, Roger McGough and Edward Lear – John Altringham himself has even written one.

Make your fortune on Amazon – sell John Altringham's bat bible the New Naturalist 'British Bats'. Used copies start at £200!! (cost originally £25 in March 2003. Previously one was spotted at over £1,000!!!)

THE FUTURE OF CSBG

Thanks to so many new, younger, keen members your group is now flourishing with 32 people paid up to date, so the time is ripe for a few changes. Come the AGM in 2008, Ian

From Beccy Osborn, spotted in 'The Courier'

Pascoe will be stepping down as Secretary, so we will be looking for some new blood on the committee. It is likely that the Secretary's job will be split into two – Membership Secretary, who will work closely with the Treasurer to keep everything up to date, deal with new memberships etc, and Meetings Secretary, responsible for organising meetings, both of the committee and the whole group, and keeping records where necessary.

Fay Pascoe, who compiles the newsletter with John Haddow putting it into an emailable form would also be happy to pass this over to someone else. Both Ian and Fay have been doing these jobs since time immemorial – and they will be moving house next year (after 22 years) so will have lots of other things to do with their time – though of course, they will remain active CSBG members.

We know there is lots of talent out there – please do not be afraid to offer your help, you will not be left to flounder on your own. And if you don't offer, there will be lots of arm twisting going on in the New Year!

2007 ROOST COUNTS

Beccy Osborn was collating this year's roost reports, but she seems to have had other things on her mind this summer! (see page 3!)

COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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CSBG is given much help by Anne Youngman, Scottish Bat Officer with BCT

