



Kent Bat Group Newsletter

July 2024

This Issue

Editorial..... 1

Kent Bat Group News

Experiences of a bat carer in training2

Membership renewals and the new website2

Nathusius' pipistrelle tagging at Dungeness3

Bat box update3

Bat opportunism4

Living Land at the County Show-ground5

Kent Bats in Churches Project.....6

National Bat News

National Bat Monitoring Programme7

And finally

How alarming!7

Diary dates

Upcoming events and meetings8

Welcome to the new look Kent Bat Group Newsletter; we hope you like the new design which builds on our recently updated website (www.kentbatgroup.org.uk). Whilst the spring and summer so far has been a bit unpredictable, for us and wildlife, I hope you have been able to enjoy seeing bats as they are more active at this time of year. It is always a welcome sight to sport the pair of common pipistrelles that fly around our garden each night before heading further afield to feed .

If you do see any bats when you are out and about this summer, please do send us details of your sighting via our website at <https://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/recording>.



© Sean Hanna

The Kent Bat Group Newsletter is produced quarterly and circulated to members. This issue was edited by Sean Hanna. October edition deadline: 15th September 2024

Please send correspondence and future contributions to info@kentbatgroup.org.uk

We would like to thank all of those who contribute to the Kent Bat Group Newsletter. The opinions are those of the contributors.

If you would like to amend your contact preferences, including to opt out of receiving future communications from us, please let us know by emailing info@kentbatgroup.org.uk

We will be helping partner organisations with a few bat walks over the summer months – please do keep an eye out on our website and social media, they are a great way to learn more about bats and build up confidence to help take part in some of the surveys as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme. There will also hopefully be some opportunities for Bat Group volunteers to help us with some surveys over the coming months too (if you are interested and haven't already signed up as a volunteer, please register at <https://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/volunteering>

As always, I hope you enjoy the articles in this edition of the Newsletter, contributions from readers for future editions are always welcome which can be submitted to info@kentbatgroup.org.uk. Many thanks.

Experiences of a bat carer in training

At the end of November 2023, by a convoluted route, news of a bat needing care reached Liz Vinson. She put the message out around 9pm on the Kent Bat Ambulance Driver WhatsApp group that it needed collecting from Borden near Sittingbourne, less than 10 miles from me. The temporary carer had already gone to bed so I'd have to wait until the morning to make contact.

The next day I did just that and made arrangements to collect the bat within the hour. The kit was already in the car - gloves, face mask, hand sanitiser, recording sheet, carrying container and cloths. I didn't need water, the bat had access to some overnight. It turns out that the lady looking after the bat was no stranger to wild animals, she was a retired RSPCA nurse and was still continuing her vocation beyond retirement, there were at least three hedgehogs in the house, one was AWOL and later located with the aid of a trail camera!

Donning my gloves and mask she asked me if I was afraid of catching something from the bat, I explained it was more for the bat's protection than mine. There's a certain amount of trepidation when first checking over a bat, you don't know what you will encounter and the thought of finding a badly injured bat that needs euthanising can't be ruled out. Fortunately, this wasn't the case with this bat. It was a male common pipistrelle and there was nothing obviously wrong with him. It turned out that he'd been found in a hi-vis jacket at a food distribution centre. A woman had put the jacket on before realising it had a hitchhiker, she wasn't a fan and was glad to pass the bat on to her mother-in-law the ex-nurse. I'd get him home and have a more thorough check and discuss options with the experienced bat carer team.

Once I'd got him home, I weighed him, he was 4.2g which made him underweight, he needed to be at least 6g before release. His forearm length was 31.9mm making him fully grown. A closer look at his wings, feet and thumbs and there was nothing amiss and he'd been hanging up in a cat basket when I collected him, a good sign. He just needed feeding up and his flight checked before he could go back to where he was found. This turned out to be some 20 miles from where I'd collected him, he was used to being driven around! It only took a week to get Borden up to a good weight and it was an easy job as he fed himself. Unfortunately, the weather had taken a turn for the worse by now with heavy rain, strong winds or low temperatures. I had to wait for a break in the weather, preferably a couple of days in a row. It was February before the opportunity arose, just over ten weeks later! I'm pleased to say that he did go and it looked to my inexperienced eyes like he knew where he was going; after a couple of overhead circuits, he made a bat-line south. Amanda Brookman

Membership renewal and the new website

Dear Member, the roll-out of our new website and the automation of membership renewal was on the whole relatively smooth sailing, but not without a few teething issues and we apologise if you were affected. One of the problems encountered was that it wasn't obvious how to donate more than the suggested £6 if you renewed via the website and PayPal, this has now been changed and is much clearer. If anyone wanted to donate more for their subscription though, it's not too late by visiting <https://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/support-us> It has also come to light that some members renewed via the link in the renewal reminder email but did not cancel any existing instructions with their bank and have paid twice. These payments have been treated as extra donations at the moment, but if you are one of these people and would like your extra payment to be used for a membership extension or to be reimbursed instead, please let Amanda our treasurer know at accounts@kentbatgroup.org.uk. You need do nothing if you are happy for us to treat the extra as a further donation and we thank you very much for it. Amanda Brookman



Nathusius' pipistrelle tagging at Dungeness

The EDF licence to trap bats at Dungeness was late in being approved, hence we were delayed in the trapping session for female Nathusius' pipistrelles returning to eastern Europe. Jane Harris has the appropriate Natural England licence and the equipment and radio-tags. The Motus tags can last up to forty days on the animal and give a good idea of the route the bats have travelled. The emitted radio signal is picked up by Motus receiving stations, so far we have just two in Kent, one at Dungeness and one at Sandwich Bay bird observatories. Many more are positioned along the near continent in Holland and Germany.

We gathered a team of volunteers who helped with the setting up of traps and lures along the northeastern shore of the Long Pits at Dungeness on the evening of Friday 17th of May. We were asked to avoid our usual trapping sites along the opposite shingle spur to avoid disturbance to breeding birds. The evening was calm and moderately warm appearing to favour migration. We caught several pregnant female soprano pipistrelle which were released immediately after processing and just a single male Nathusius' pipistrelle. Jane decided to tag this male as very little is known about male migration.

In conclusion Jane felt that the warm mild winter had prompted an early return for the females and we had missed that window. We have vowed to apply to EDF much earlier next year. Hopefully this project will provide much more information about cross channel migration for this species and may better inform future positioning of wind farms around the southern coast thus avoiding deaths of this fascinating species. John Puckett



© Callum Wallace

Bat box follow-up

Some of you may remember from a previous newsletter (July 2022), that in March 2022 my husband and I had accidentally disturbed two roosting bats while doing some tree work. They were a brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*) and a Natterer's (*Myotis nattereri*), which were briefly taken into care before later being released.

After the incident in April that same year, we hung three Vivara pro, multi-chamber, woodstone bat boxes in the wood, one in the small clearing where the two bats were found. We were quite pleased the following July to see that something had been using this box; there were droppings in the entrance hole. Not being licensed to disturb bats, I called upon John Puckett to check the box and a few weeks later he came out to take a look. Disappointingly, there were no actual bats in the box at that time, but there were plenty of droppings and they didn't appear to be that old. I was interested to learn that it's possible to have them analysed to identify the species that had produced them, so I collected some and sent them off. Within a few days I heard back and was notified that the droppings had been left by soprano pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*). It's no surprise that this species is in the woods, they're a common species and woodland is a preferred habitat for them, but I wasn't expecting the quick uptake of the box.



Bat box follow-up (continued)

They'd taken to using the box within 17 months. Our little bit of woodland is part of a complex of about 1000 acres in size and I expected there to be so many natural roosting locations for them that they wouldn't need the boxes; hanging the boxes was a longshot borne from curiosity. Whether they come back and use the box again is yet to be seen. A spring visit to the woods and a visual check of the boxes has revealed that the tree with the previously used box on had partially come down and the box has now been rehung nearby.



We'd love to hear from anyone with a success story of a box they've put up. Kent bat boxes <https://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/images/content/downloads/kent-bat-box.pdf> are particularly useful in that you don't need to open them to see if bats are using them, so no licence is required to check them. Once they have started to be used though it's important not to disturb them by continually checking the boxes. Bat sightings of any kind can be entered on the Kent Bat Group website at <https://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/recording>.
Amanda Brookman

Bat opportunism

In my experience, bats are extremely opportunistic, and this spring has provided yet more evidence. The professional meteorologists tell us that May was the warmest on record but on the ground here in east Kent the spring has been anything but. The jet stream has been stuck directly above us and has been driving low pressure systems at us the whole spring. This has dramatically reduced feeding opportunities for bats. Their ecology is based around energy conservation as flying and growing a baby is extremely energy expensive. Thus, maternity colonies search out our artificial heat and cluster together to reduce their energy use.

My regular visit to check on the serotine maternity colony at Barham crematorium saw twenty- three adult females emerge from the air brick at the base of the cavity wall chimney above the furnace. This is my maximum count. They were reliant on the furnace heat and have usually moved into the chapel attic by now for birthing.

I have been counting my only known whiskered maternity roost in east Kent for almost thirty years. They normally roost under the 'gappy' hanging tiles of an old property close to my home. This year the owner has not had a fire to heat her chimney breast this spring and it is a cold house. The bats normally roost directly adjacent to this chimney breast. Adjudging by the droppings beneath the tiles the owner says they returned for just a couple of days in late May, then disappeared. I know the owner of the adjacent property about 100yds away and asked if she had any evidence of bats. Droppings on the balcony she said, so I set out with detector on the evening of June 6th hoping to find the maternity colony. Whiskered bats are less vocal than common pipistrelle on emergence but of a similar size and can easily be mistaken for pipistrelle. They also have a slightly different flight pattern. I counted 31 individuals out which tallies with my previous counts at the neighbouring house pre-birthing. Interestingly, the householder here has a heat pump for heating but still uses an oil boiler to heat the water and it 'fires up' every morning.



Bat opportunism (continued)

The vertical flue pipe runs directly behind the hanging tiles used as the roost. Bats certainly know their home territory and how to exploit that knowledge to cope with the varying weather conditions. If we have a heat wave next spring, I'm sure they will return to their original roost.

Little is known of the niche separation of the three cryptic small *Myotis* species and their ecologies. It is an area currently being worked on by Dan Whitby. I think this roost is exploiting the insects of the "wood pasture" habitat of the surrounding properties plus the tree and hedge line connections to the surrounding

extensive Blean woodlands. The current roost has three surrounding horse paddocks. I have found male whiskered using the ridge tiles of the old property for roosting, appearing to favour being close to the females around weaning time. This colony would make a good project for someone to start a long-term study. John Puckett



© John Puckett

Living Land at the County Showground

On the 2nd May, despite the best efforts of road works, Val, Mary and I arrived bright and early at the County Showground near Detling for the annual Living Land event.

Living Land is a free event, organised by the Kent Agricultural Society, for Kent school children in years 3 and 4 to learn more about food, farming and countryside life. It allows children to learn through interactive activities such as touching farm animals, tasting produce and other demonstrations.



© Sean Hanna

The weather was kind to us this year and the children, teachers and helpers all seemed to enjoy themselves. Despite the distraction for children of the owls and paddle boarding activities on stands next to us, we managed to talk to many school groups about bats and were pleased that so many have seen them or have wildlife areas in their school grounds which will hopefully benefit them. Fortunately the long-term captive bats we were able to take were as big a draw as the paddle boarding in the end. Sean Hanna



Kent Bats in Churches Project

Following on from the huge success of the Bat Conservation Trust's two year Bats in Churches Project, Kent Bat Group decided to continue the identification of bat roosts within churches throughout Kent. This idea was boosted further by interest from Kent Wildlife Trust's Local Wildlife Sites team, who are keen to ensure that bats are sufficiently included within LWS management guidance provided to landowners.

Twelve churches were identified for surveys in 2024, 10 of which are Local Wildlife Sites. The additional two churches were identified as supporting bat roosts during the BCT project and the wardens are keen that monitoring continues. Following a call out to volunteers we now have at least two surveyors for nine of the sites which is brilliant – thank you very much to all of you who have volunteered your time. There is still more room for registered volunteers to assist though. Specifically we are yet to find anyone to cover the 12th site at Folkestone, and we also still need another surveyor for each of Cowden and Doddington – please contact Clair at records@kentbatgroup.org.uk if you are local to these sites (or happy to travel) and are available to help with a survey in June/July and/or August/September.

The aim of the surveys is twofold – firstly to identify churches where bat roosts are present and confirm the species and roost size/type. Secondly to specifically identify any churches which support serotine mating roosts. As a species on the north-western edge of its geographic range, serotine has become dependent on our heated homes and other buildings. While churches are not always heated, they are long term fixtures in the landscape, being of old construction (with warm slate roofs etc.) and located within or close to residential areas. As such they have good potential to function as long term locations for mating colonies to form. We hope that this project will provide additional serotine sites to be monitored for the long term under the National Bat Monitoring Program.

The first survey of Ide Hill Church has already been completed by our Volunteers Co-ordinator Mary Barnard and Steven Lofting; the weather has been on the cool side but they found evidence of brown long-eared and pipistrelle within the church and a possible serotine emergence occurred. Thank you to everyone taking part and I look forward to sharing more news on the project soon. Clair Thackray

Out and about

Shorne Woods Country Park very kindly invited the Bat Group to host a stand at their open day on 31st May and, of course, several of us gladly accepted. I can only say thank goodness there were four of us, as we stood, somewhat chilly in the very gusty wind and occasional drizzle, each holding on to one leg of the gazebo, two of us spreadeagled on several occasions whilst attempting to stop the display board from also taking flight. The display ended up on the ground in front of the table instead of on it - a good height for the smaller visitors. Despite the weather, the open day was well attended and it was a joy to see



so many young people enthusiastically taking part in activities such as pond dipping and many others, both inside and outside the visitor centre. We were sorely tempted to ask the very inventive face painter to adorn us with bat wings, but in the end decided to maintain a vigil next to our respective gazebo legs. A pleasing number of visitors stopped at our stand, all taking an interest in the photographs and either asking questions or chatting away about their experiences with bats, and it was satisfying to realise that some, both children and parents, had quite a good knowledge of bats already. As a newcomer to such an event I was interested that so many, when asked what they knew about bats, shyly replied "they suck your blood". Although I must admit to having a secret crush on Christopher Lee in his black cape, Hammer House of Horrors has much to answer for. Tricia Lawrence



National Bat Monitoring Programme

The 2023 National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) Annual Report for 2023 was released in May. The NBMP is a suite of annual surveys undertaken by dedicated volunteers across the country which provides important information on the changes in British bat populations. This provides important data that is used by the Government and conservation organisations to improve bat conservation and the 2023 report provides trends for 11 of the 17 breeding bat species in Great Britain based upon data collected up to summer 2023.

The report details that for the 11 species where population trends are possible, none have declined and five species have shown encouraging signs of initial recovery from historical declines prior to the start of the monitoring programme (some 25 years ago).

That said, for the first time the data has been used to examine population trends over a shorter period of five years. These trends are more worrying as they show that two of our key species have started to decline. The data (for summer roosts) shows that, over this shorter five year period, the brown long-eared bat has declined by 11.2% at the Great Britain level and the lesser horseshoe bat has declined by 12.3% in England (in contrast to an ongoing increase in Wales). Additionally, over the last five years increases in the populations of common pipistrelle and Natterer's bat in Great Britain and at country-level have slowed or stopped. The full report can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/4en9jaxy>.

There are a number of NBMP surveys that people can undertake, with different skill levels. If you are interested in contributing to this long-term project, full details of the various surveys and how to sign up can be found at <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/national-bat-monitoring-programme>. Please do also remember to send any records from surveys to the Bat Group via our website; thank you.

And finally...

How alarming!

On 15th April an engineer removed a burglar alarm box from a property in Challock and on inspection was surprised to find a tiny intruder clinging to the back of it.

He turned out to be a male common (almost named Bandit) pipistrelle. He was still very sleepy and underweight at 3.33g. He took 13 days to progress from taking fluids to feeding himself on mini mealworms. On 1st May he inaugurated Amanda's new flight cage, spending 25 minutes exploring every corner of it and on the 3rd, having gained more than a gram in weight, was released in the beautiful wildlife-friendly garden where he was found.

He delighted Ron and Sue with a couple of circuits before flying off into the trees.
Val Sutton



© Liz Vinson www.bizzyillustrations.co.uk



Diary Dates

Kent Bat Group Events

Bat Group trustees and volunteers will be supporting organisations across the County with bat walks this summer; some will be advertised on our website so please do keep an eye out and we may see you at one of them.

Indoor Meetings (hold the dates)

We have been busy planning our season of meetings for the autumn and winter season and are pleased to be able to confirm the following session:

Thursday October 3rd Short Annual General Meeting followed by a talk by Daisy Jowers (the title is to be confirmed). This will be an in-person event at Lenham Community Centre, 12 Groom Way, Lenham ME17 2QT

National Bat Conference

The annual National Bat Conference, organised by the Bat Conservation Trust, will be taking place over the weekend of the 13th to 15th September. This year, it will again be taking place as a hybrid event for people to attend online or in person at the University of Reading.

The keynote speaker this year will be naturalist, television presenter and President of the Bat Conservation Trust Chris Packham who will be presenting on the Saturday afternoon.

Details of the conference, including the programme, workshop topics and booking options are all available at <https://www.bats.org.uk/events/national-bat-conference-2023>.



Contacts

Kent Bat Group Contacts

Chairman: John Puckett

01227 793 864 | john.puckett@talk21.com

Secretary: Val Sutton

Kingsgate Cottage, Frensham Road,
Rolvenden Layne, Cranbrook TN17 4NJ
01580 241 392 | vsutton@btconnect.com

Membership Secretary: Jim Labisko

membership@kentbatgroup.org.uk

Treasurer: Amanda Brookman

accounts@kentbatgroup.org.uk

Ordinary Members : Mary Barnard, Sean Hanna, Jim Labisko, Hazel Ryan, Victoria Smith, Clair Thackray

County Contact : Val Sutton

County Recorder : Clair Thackray

records@kentbatgroup.org.uk

Bat Care coordinator : Hazel Ryan

01227 793 864

Volunteer coordinator : Mary Barnard

volunteers@kentbatgroup.org.uk

General contact details :

info@kentbatgroup.org.uk |
www.kentbatgroup.org.uk

National Bat Contacts

Natural England 0300 060 3900

Bat Conservation Trust

National Bat Helpline for enquiries:

0345 1300 228

enquiries@bats.org.uk | www.bats.org.uk



The Bat Conservation Trust produce monthly Newsletters for Partner Groups. These are available at www.bats.org.uk/resources/resources-for-bat-groups/bat-group-bulletin

Kent Bat Group is a registered charity (charity number 1079767)

