



Kent Bat Group Newsletter

October 2021

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Good practice guidelines mean we need to regularly review how we manage our mailing list for members and volunteers. 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 - thank you.

We had a bit of a hit and miss summer, weather wise, which affected the number of bats I recorded during my National Bat Monitoring Programme surveys but it is always a joy to see bats circling over head, even if there weren't as many as normal.

Bat Carers have continued to be busy this summer with a significant number of underweight bats and a few unusual bat rescues including some from Port Lympne Wild Animal Park and Allington Castle.

Despite us not being able to undertake our usual programme of surveys and bat walks this summer, there have been some exciting bat finds both locally and nationally including records of Kuhl's pipistrelle in Sussex and a record breaking Nathusius' pipistrelle that was ringed near Heathrow being found in Russia.



As the nights draw in, our autumn and winter talk session got off to a great start in September with an engaging and thought provoking talk from Adrian Bicker on Nathusius' pipistrelle migration and AudioMoths on the south coast of England (hopefully we will have a summary in the next Newsletter). This will be followed in November by David Hill's talk on the rapid assessment of bat diversity in woodlands which I am sure will be equally engaging so hopefully we will 'see' many of you there.

As always, I hope you find this edition of the Newsletter an interesting read and please do remember to send any bat sightings to us via records@kentbatgroup.org.uk and any articles for inclusion in future editions of the Newsletter to info@kentbatgroup.org.uk - thank you.



Bats at Port Lympne Wild Animal Park

On Sunday 4th July I received a call from the Head of Primates at Port Lympne. He had found a baby bat in the langurs' shed at the zoo. The baby bat was on a shelf in the shed where the langurs shelter at the back of their enclosure. The head keeper knew that a bat roost had been present in previous years. The shed is single storey and made of plywood with vertical wood cladding and a flat roof with a void beneath.



Droppings were obvious below the bat access at the back of the shed. The baby was a male soprano pipistrelle with suede fur and weighing 3.0 grams. Assessment back at home showed he was in good condition and still had some of mum's milk in his stomach, reassuring us that he was simply a lost baby. The next day I returned him to the roost, amidst much chattering from his roost mates. The zoo is closed at night so an emergence count was not possible.

The Ordnance Survey map indicated why the habitat was favourable to this species. To the south of the zoo is the Royal Military Canal and the low-lying Romney Marsh with its myriad of drainage ditches, ideal for breeding chironomid flies, the sopranos' favoured food source. Add to that the langur shed has thermostatically controlled heating to keep it at 25°Celsius all year. A baby bat's paradise!

The Aspinall Foundation which owns both Howletts and Port Lympne Wild Animal Parks specialises in breeding endangered tropical animal species with the intention of reintroduction in their home territories. My keeper contact had already been to Java to reintroduce Port Lympne bred langurs.

The Foundation supports conservation charities in the home countries and works very closely with them on the reintroduction of species such as Western Lowland Gorillas
John Puckett

Leisler's in Kent

I regard Leisler's as an extremely rare bat in east Kent. Since the early 1980s I have only seen and handled two grounded Leisler's in the east of the county, one in Herne Bay and the second rescued by Shirley Thompson from The Castle, Whitstable. The majority of my records are from the Medway westwards towards London along the north Kent marshes and south west along the River Medway as far as Edenbridge.

Most of my recoveries have been from the Medway towns and the village of Cuxton. This is where I have recorded maybe four or five roosts. The species seems to move roosts frequently – possibly every few days. I suspect that when the young are too heavy to carry, if the adult females move roosts, they return after their night feed to continue breast feeding their pup.

On 5th July I was called to a house on the busy Watling Street A2 at Strood. A very young male baby Leisler's had been found in a plant pot below the back gable. The baby weighed 4.7 grams and appeared in good condition in spite of its adventure. That evening Hazel and I returned to the house shortly after dusk. In spite of the fairly heavy rain we watched with the family as at least fifteen adult Leisler's emerged from the gable apex in an attempt to feed. I suspect we may have missed the early bats and the adult count could have been around twenty bats. The baby was returned successfully via the attic gable. They are in the cavity and possibly between tiles and roofing felt. Droppings on the attic floor under the gable would indicate that the bats have used this roost for many years though the owners were not aware of them.

Fortunately, the owners are extremely tolerant and happy to help "their" bats. I have asked the son to watch in order to determine how long the adults remain and to give an idea of numbers. I will attempt to watch this roost in future.

John Puckett.



Litter lout saves bat!

'Litter lout saves bat' is not a headline you are likely to see again, but just this once a thrown-away item saved a life. On the evening of 25th July, Lauren and her mother were out for a walk near Penenden Heath when Lauren spotted something clinging to a roadside curb and realised that it was a bat in need of rescue. Unfortunately, they had nothing to contain it in so Mum scoured the nearby hedge and found a discarded cup from a well known fast food outlet and persuaded the bat to crawl in. They took her to Newnham Court vets, who took all the details and contacted me the next morning.

She was a feisty little common pipistrelle, probably grounded on her first flight. She progressed from a few drops of BabyDog milk via mealworm innards to soft minis, eventually feeding herself on 25 mini mealworms. She even managed to squeeze out of her tank and test fly herself around the spare bedroom – obviously ready for release! On 4th August I met Lauren, her parents and several friends near where the pipistrelle had been found. She flew very strongly and put on a wonderful display, hunting above our heads for several minutes to everyone's delight and a round of applause. Val Sutton



The photograph is of a baby common pipistrelle (not the Penenden Heath bat), approximately 2 weeks old, dwarfed by a milk bottle top. He was rescued, eyes still closed, on 11th July and released where he had been found, flying and hunting with another bat (possibly Mum) on 9th August.

Whilst Kent Bat Group in no way endorses litter dumping, which causes untold damage to wildlife, this seemed too good a story not to share - Ed

Bats in the Castle...

A baby bat was found on a log pile in a fireplace below a chimney at Allington Castle, near Maidstone, on Friday 25th June. I am always sceptical of baby bat calls as most turn out to be adult pipistrelles. However, this was genuine. The fireplace and chimney are in the outer wall of the courtyard, the remains of what was the old hall which was built in 1026. The castle sits on the River Medway and has both a moat and a lake.

The habitat surrounding the castle would be ideal for many bat species. The grounded bat proved to be a baby female Daubenton's. The castle is built of locally quarried Kentish ragstone. The fireplace and chimney are an example of dry stone building with no mortar. This allows plenty of accessible gaps for bats. Staining about 20ft up the chimney indicated the Daubenton's roost. Early the next evening, accompanied by a young ecologist who had her own infra-red camera, we attempted to reunite baby with mum. Hazel had to climb a long ladder in order to get the baby safely to the roost entrance. Other Daubenton's were clearly visible. The infra-red camera was invaluable in estimating roost numbers. The first camera covered the chimney and the bat access. We also had a second camera covering the fireplace. The bats were emerging and flying around the internal chimney apex with some returning to the roost. Those emerging from the fireplace were flying around the courtyard presumably light sampling as some returned to the chimney space.

Counting those that emerged and subtracting those that returned gave a figure of approximately 120 adult females from both cameras. Water foraging grounds in the form of moat, lake and river were just yards from the castle. Daubenton's roosts are notoriously difficult to find and I know of just one other that is active in Kent. That is at Cliff Fort on the Hoo Peninsula and it is protected by 3ft of water.

The Allington Castle grounds would be well worth surveying for bats sometime in the future. The owner is obviously wildlife friendly and hopefully will permit us access. He was enthralled by the infra-red recordings and now has several clips of the bats. I was pleased to also record a hedgehog foraging on the lawns in front of the castle, not a common sight nowadays. John Puckett



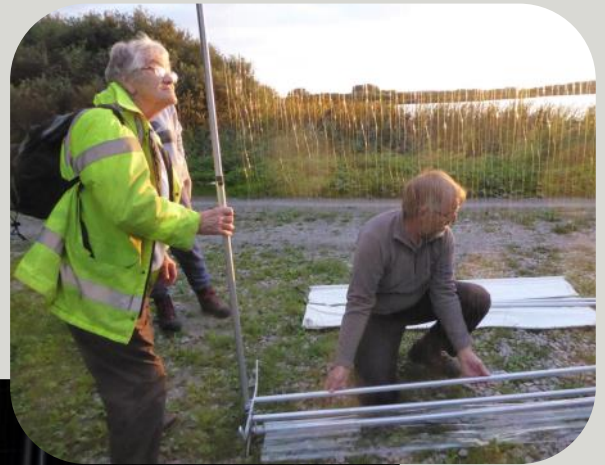
A huge 'Thank you'

As members who attended the Bat Group Annual General Meeting in September will be aware, Shirley Thompson has recently retired as a Trustee of the Kent Bat Group having been a Trustee since the Group was formed in 1983.

We are really pleased that Shirley will continue to support the Bat Group with our various activities and will still be the County Recorder but we wanted to acknowledge and celebrate the huge contribution that Shirley has made to bat conservation in the county be it inspiring hundreds of school children and adults to think about bats through talks and walks, training many Natural England roost visitors, creating engaging and informative displays, editing the Newsletter and leading many of our surveys (to name a few).

Shirley's passion, energy and enthusiasm for bats and her amazing ability to enthuse and engage people are infectious and long may this continue.

Thank you Shirley, you are an amazing role model.



© Jill Tardivel

Bats in the News

Kuhl's pipistrelle recorded in Sussex

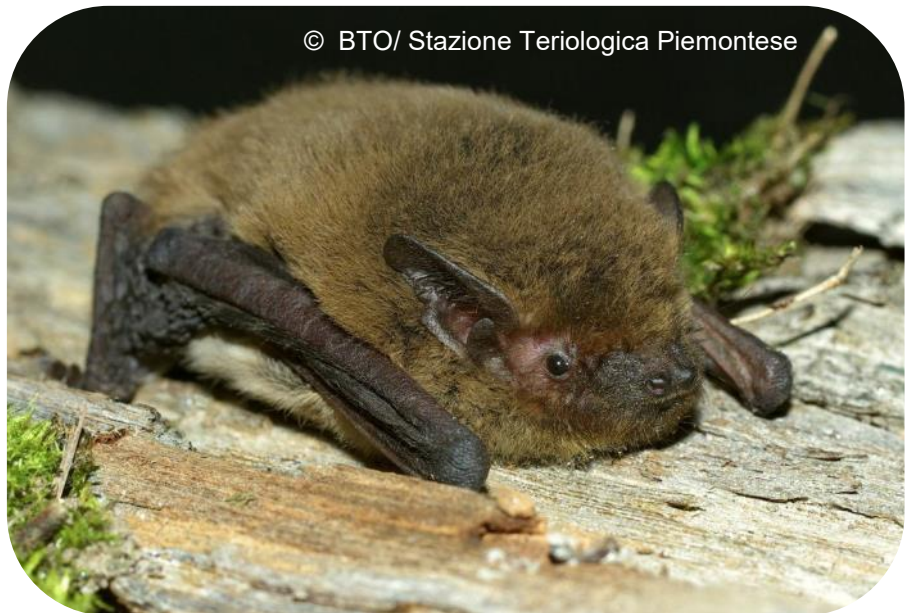
In August, a passive bat detector, which automatically triggers and records bat calls as they fly over, that was set up in a garden in West Sussex as part of the Chichester Bat Recording Project recorded the social calls of the Kuhl's pipistrelle.

The Kuhl's pipistrelle is more commonly found around the Mediterranean extending into north-western France with occasional records from the southeast and southwest of England.

Ken and Linda Smith, co-ordinators of the bat recording project for Chichester Natural History Society, said, 'We started using the bat

detector four years ago, leaving it overnight in the gardens of Society members and their friends and have been amazed by the number of bat records at every garden. Coming across this rare bat is very exciting and shows how much more there is to learn about these fascinating animals.' Dr Stuart Newson, lead scientist on bat monitoring at the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), said 'I am really excited by this finding. It is thought that the range of Kuhl's pipistrelle is expanding northwards, so it is interesting to speculate whether this represents a vagrant or an establishing population'.

Further details and the press release are available at <https://tinyurl.com/34ppetf> and details of the Chichester Bat Recording Project are available at <http://www.chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk/>



© BTO/ Stazione Teriologica Piemontese



Sussex Bat Appeal

Regular readers will recall our ongoing search for greater horseshoe bats in east Kent along with the exciting discovery of a hibernating lesser horseshoe bat in Dover Castle last winter. Sussex Bat Group also have exciting horseshoe bat news and have launched an urgent appeal to purchase a greater horseshoe maternity roost. Kent Bat Group has made a donation to the project - wouldn't it be great if we could confirm breeding horseshoe bats in Kent too. The Sussex Bat Group press release is copied below which provides more details on the find and the project.



An urgent appeal has been launched to help save the home of a pioneering breeding colony of greater horseshoe bats recently discovered in West Sussex. The site, currently up for sale, is some 100 kilometres east of the bats' current stronghold in Devon and Dorset — an enormously encouraging sign for a bat that suffered an estimated 90% decline in Britain in the 20th century.

'With help, this small but hugely significant colony of greater horseshoe bats could become a real biodiversity success story — a species on the road to recovery and now returning to one of its former haunts after an absence of more than a century', said Dr Lucy Rogers, CEO with wildlife charity Vincent Wildlife Trust. The Sussex Bat Appeal has been launched by Vincent Wildlife Trust and Sussex Bat Group to buy the derelict stable block being used by the bats before it is placed on the open market. The two organisations have been given nine months by the owners to raise the purchase price. £200,000 will secure ownership of the stable block and a further £150,000 will fund the renovation work and the building enhancements needed to allow the bat colony to expand.

'Once the site is enhanced for the bats, we would expect over time to see good levels of survival and reproductive success, resulting in a growing, thriving maternity colony. It is also hoped that this site will act as a honeypot, attracting further pioneers to this area' said Dr Henry Schofield, Head of Conservation for the Trust. Vincent Wildlife Trust currently looks after the roost sites of some 50% of Britain's greater horseshoe bat population and has been instrumental in driving the recovery of this bat species, helped too by legal protection given to all bat species in 1981.

The greater horseshoe bat is one of the largest bats found in Britain and one of the easier bats to identify, with its horseshoe-shaped 'nose' and a preference to dangle upside down from a beam or ceiling, held on by its spindly legs and cloaked with its wings when asleep. Other than its tiny cousin, the lesser horseshoe bat, no other British bat hangs in this way. By the latter half of the 20th century, the species was heading for possible extinction, following a loss of insect-rich pasture and semi-natural woodlands over which to feed, a lack of suitable, undisturbed sites for breeding and hibernation, and the use of now-banned timber treatment chemicals.

Until now, the greater horseshoe bat has been largely confined to south-west England and parts of Wales. From a 20th century low of some 4,000, the current estimated population is around 13,000 (to put this in context, there is an estimated three million pipistrelles - our most common bat). This rise in its population may have helped fuel this eastward quest to plant new roots in an old home. The West Sussex site will be owned by Vincent Wildlife Trust as a bat roost in perpetuity. It will be managed by the Trust in conjunction with the Sussex Bat Group. 'Right now, this is probably the most important greater horseshoe bat roost site in Britain and the most significant find since the group was formed in 1984. It was discovered by a member of Sussex Bat Group in 2019 and we are determined to raise the funds needed to secure the building for this vitally important bat colony. As well as wardening and managing the site, there will also be opportunities for volunteers to help with the monitoring of the bats' said Sheila Wright, Secretary to the Sussex Bat Group. More information about greater horseshoe bats, the Sussex Bat Appeal and ways to donate can be found at www.vwt.org.uk/sussex-bat-appeal



Record breaking Nathusius' pipistrelle



During the summer it wasn't only the athletes at the Olympics and Paralympics that were setting new records; a Nathusius' pipistrelle broke the British record for long-distance migration.

The Nathusius' pipistrelle, which was nicknamed the 'Olympic Bat' due to her amazing efforts, flew 2,018 kilometres (or approximately 1,253 miles) across Europe which is one of the longest ever recorded distances flown by a bat. This astonishing distance is only beaten by one other bat in Europe; in 2019 a Nathusius' pipistrelle was recorded migrating from Latvia to Spain covering a record

breaking 2,224 kilometres (or 1,381 miles)!

The 2021 bat was found in the small Russian village of Molgino in the Pskov region by local resident Svetlana Lapina. Svetlana noticed that the bat had a ring on its arm with London Zoo stamped on it. This allowed the bat to be identified as one that had been ringed at Bedfont Lakes Country Park, near Heathrow in London, by Brian Briggs back in 2016. In a press release issued by the Bat Conservation Trust, Brian said 'This is very exciting. It's great to be able to contribute to the international conservation work to protect these extraordinary animals and learn more about their fascinating lives'.

Whilst we have reported a number of Nathusius' pipistrelle sightings and migrations in the Newsletter, this is the furthest known distance travelled by a bat from Britain to Europe, travelling west to east.

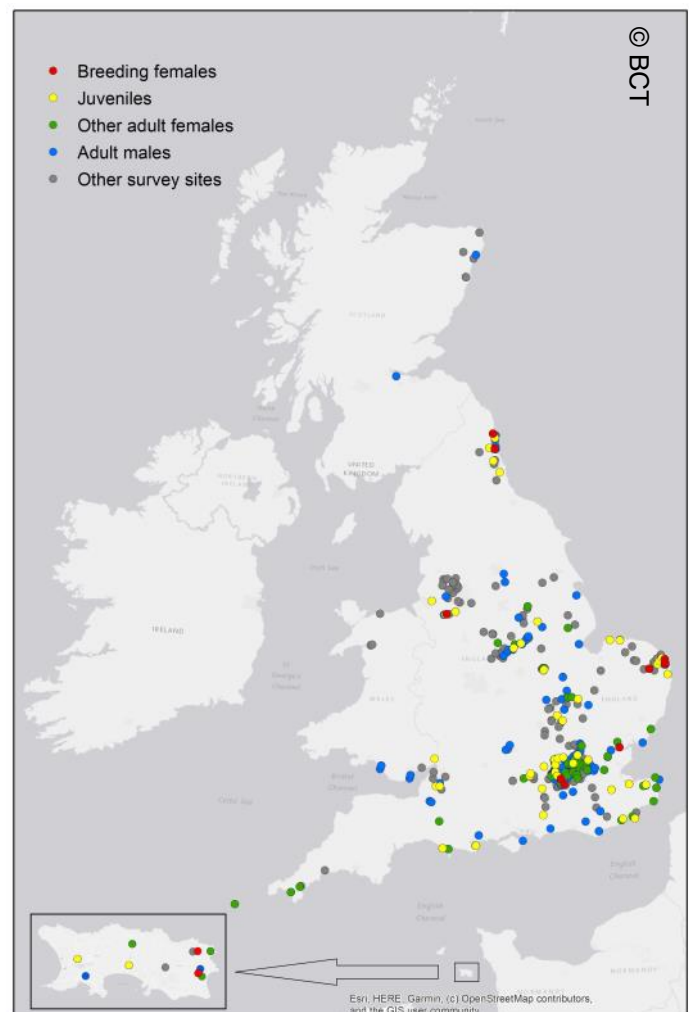
Unfortunately despite the heroic distance travelled by this bat, she fell prey to a cat and was found injured on the ground. Despite being rescued by a Russian bat rehabilitation group she sadly died but leaves an amazing legacy in helping us understand more about these amazing creatures and adds another piece to help us understand long-distance migrations.

Further details of the 'Olympic Bat' can be found at <https://www.bats.org.uk/news/2021/08/olympian-bat-smashes-british-record-for-long-distance-migration>

Whilst surveys have understandably been restricted again this summer, this record shows the value of the National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Survey coordinated by the Bat Conservation Trust and supported by many local groups including Kent Bat Group.

The map to the right shows the distribution of Nathusius' pipistrelle records across the country between 2011 and 2019 when some 2,689 bats were caught (including some recaptures).

Full details of the Nathusius' Pipistrelle Survey are available at <https://tinyurl.com/s63hrzew>

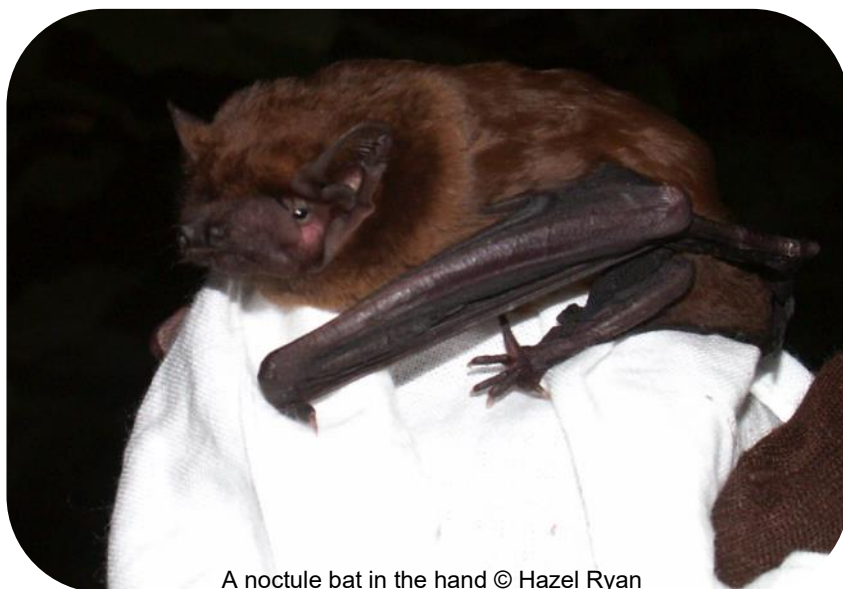


Bats at Stodmarsh

On 18th July our info@kentbatgroup.org.uk email account received this enquiry from Khirstie who lives near Canterbury and has a view over the National Nature Reserve at Stodmarsh:

'I'm contacting the Kent bat group as I'm fortunate to have a few bats which appear to be roosting in my property - I'd really like to learn more about them, identify which type they are (I understand that it's possible to identify based on frequency) and how best to ensure they have the best opportunity to thrive here. Appreciate any advice/direction you can offer, many thanks.'

Jill, armed with her bat detector, went out to visit her and reported 'Two common pips were roosting in the slit like window frames. They had a plethora of noctules passing over, I suspect from a roost to the north and going on to the marsh to feed. And a couple of soprano pips just to add to the mix.'



A noctule bat in the hand © Hazel Ryan

Batman lights up city landmarks



To celebrate Batman Day 2021 (yes there is apparently such a day), buildings across Britain were illuminated with the Batman Logo on Saturday 18th September.

The logo was projected on to the sides of buildings in Glasgow's George Square, the Odeon Luxe in Leicester Square, London and St George's Hall in Liverpool.

All three cities were chosen for the event as they were all used as filming locations for the upcoming Batman film.

And finally...

Milkshake Monkey meets a bat in Kielder Forest

During the summer, the Milkshake Monkey went on a adventure to see if it was possible to find any bats in Kielder Forest. Fortunately, with a little bit of help, they managed to find a noctule bat whilst learning about why woodlands are so important for wildlife.

The episode is still available to watch on the Channel 5 'My5' website at <https://tinyurl.com/kbp7fy8a>

Happy viewing!



Diary dates

Following our first talk of the autumn season in September, we are looking forward to the rest of our winter indoor meetings and have some great speakers lined up to help make sure they will be informative and enjoyable.

Given the uncertainties and to give as much notice to the Venue, we have taken the decision to hold the November and January indoor meetings by Zoom. This follows the success of the 2020/21 talks which were well attended. We hope that the March meeting will be face to face at Lenham Community Centre but we will make a decision nearer the time.

Details of the dial in and access codes will be shared with members a week or so before the meeting.

18th November 2021 at 7:30pm

David Hill will be providing us with a talk entitled 'The 'Rapid' assessment of bat diversity in woodlands: Stage 1 – sites managed for nature conservation'.

Thursday 27th January 2022 at 7:30pm

Hazel Ryan will provide us with an overview of bat care work in Kent highlighting the success stories and ways for people to support this work.

Thursday 24 March 2022 at 7:30pm

Speaker to be confirmed

The **National Bat Conference** organised by the Bat Conservation Trust will be held online again this year over the weekend of the **29-31 October**. Bookings are now open along with a draft programme and details of the virtual workshops. Further information and how to book can be found online at <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/conferences-symposia/national-bat-conference>

On the 27th October, between 1:00-2:00pm, the Bats in Churches project will be hosting an online 'Bats in Sacred Places' talk.

The session will put the topic of Bats in Churches into a global context for International Bat Week. They will be journeying around the globe to look at bats' use of places of spiritual significance, from Christian churches to Hindu temples, to sacred caves of Madagascar. The talk will explore how important these structures are for the bats, as well as looking at the interactions between them and the people who cherish these religious sites.

Full details including how to book are available at https://batsinchurches.org.uk/events/bats_in_sacred_spaces/

BATS IN CHURCHES



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The Kent Bat Group Newsletter is produced quarterly and circulated to members.

This issue was edited by Sean Hanna. Please send correspondence and future contributions to info@kentbatgroup.org.uk

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We would like to thank all of those who contribute to the Kent Bat Group Newsletter. The opinions are those of the contributors. Kent Bat Group is a registered charity (charity number 1079767)

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