



Spring Newsletter 2022

This is our annual opportunity to provide a quick review of the activities and notable events from 2021. Hopefully this will give you a good view of some of the great things that have been going on in Wiltshire. We hope that you remain well and are looking forward to spring and the new bat season.



©Daniel Hargreaves

Bechstein's bat © Daniel Hargreaves

A welcome from the Committee

2021 was another difficult year with the pandemic still very much in the forefront of our daily lives, but members have still managed to get out and about and contribute to bat conservation across Wiltshire. Bat walks and lots of surveys have created a bumper data year for the County Recorder. Static detectors have been out constantly across the county, particularly in the central and south areas, with incredible numbers of sound files being generated. You'll be able to read a bit more about this as you browse through the newsletter.

Although we have to continue with caution and must adhere to IUCN and other national guidelines around close contact with bats, most of our projects were able to restart limited and covid compliant work with small experienced teams. However, to make up for the reduced fieldwork opportunities through our projects and to promote more acoustic monitoring, we were delighted to be able to organize online sound analysis training for members through Neil Middleton. Wiltshire is a big county and there are still lots of blank spaces where we have very little or no data. We have repeat online training booked in for this spring, again with Neil, so please keep an eye on your mailboxes.

Another return to semi-normality was our November 2021 meeting, the first time in two years that we've been able to meet in person. It was particularly nice to meet some new members and catch up with old friends. At this meeting we said goodbye to Laura, our Chair, who stepped down after three years, so a big thank you to Laura for getting us through a period of big change for the bat group. We also welcomed onto the committee Kelly Sheldrick as our Events Officer, and Oliver Ellis as BCT National Bat Monitoring Programme coordinator. Kelly and Oli are working closely together to provide amongst other things further training and a range of surveying opportunities for members.

One of our objectives is to refresh the committee more regularly and give our members the chance to contribute to running the bat group over the coming years. With this in mind the next phase will include asking for nominations for the Secretary role, and then shortly after the combined Treasurer and Membership Officer role. Relevant forms with all the necessary

Information and timings will be emailed out before the May meeting.

We hope the updates and articles in the newsletter inspire you to get out and about, or start a new career in bat care, or even start up your own monitoring project. There's a lot going on! Please rest assured that every penny contributed goes toward bat conservation in the county (and sometimes further afield) and is very much appreciated and gratefully received. Your support in 2021 was exceptional and our membership is the highest it has ever been, thank you!

As always, a big thank you to the contributors for taking the time to write articles and Ben Mitchell for taking the strain and editing the newsletter this year. It is also nice to see that members have a wide-ranging interest in all wildlife as reflected in the articles!

Here's to a good 2022. There is still so much to do and find out, so grab your detector, torch and wellies and enjoy the beautiful Wiltshire countryside.

Will Ponting



News, snippets and headlines in brief

2022 AGM

Put the 13th May 2022, at 1900 into your calendars. This will be a real in person meeting at Potterne Wick Scout Centre. As always, a full agenda, updates, speaker and free refreshments.

We will be advertising for a new Secretary in the run up to the May meeting, so hopefully we can vote on this at the May meeting.

Acoustic surveys and detectors

Last year the committee bought two SongMeter Mini-Bat static detectors. These have been used constantly, but are available for members to borrow, we'll provide guidance, instructions and processing.

Anyone interested will also be required to either analyse their own data or to find a willing volunteer to do this for them. The deployment of the detectors is the easy part and a large volume of records and therefore effort can be required to identify the recordings in a meaningful way with an acceptable level of accuracy. There is the possibility of using the bat group's BTO Acoustic Pipeline account to aid in the analysis of data but, like any auto-ID platform, the outputs still require some checking and data handling to ensure accurate records.

That said, please do not be discouraged if you have a potential area that you would like to investigate further please get in touch.

We also have eight detectors that can be borrowed for bat walks.

Acoustic pipeline

The bat group will continue to fund the processing of data through the BTO Acoustic Pipeline Service in 2022. This supports the increase in data from the monitoring of fixed sites.

Wiltshire Bat Care

WBC has had another busy year! Committee member Caitlin McCann is managing and coordinating the service, closely associated with WBG, BCT and the county wildlife hospitals. If you fancy a career in bat care, or just find out more then please contact Cait on wiltshirebatcare@gmail.com

South Wiltshire Greater Horseshoe Project

This new project based in the center and south of the county sets out its objectives for understanding greater horseshoe populations, maternity sites, the movements and associations with other populations in the county. Working closely with farmers groups and incorporating landscape level studies. Exciting developments throughout the year - more below.

Support to projects

The WBG always sets aside funds each year for match funding to projects, including DNA sampling and this year the proposed bat house development (see below). Just send an email to wiltsbg@gmail.com and the Committee will have a look.

The Cotswold Water Park

Plans are to resume more frequent checks of the bat boxes in 2022. We are working closely with the Cotswold Lakes Trust and Lower Mill Estate to get back

on track with the data collection at this great site.

Savernake Forest Project

The project continued in 2021 with the usual bat box checks, albeit with a reduced level of bat handling, but we encountered the usual Barbastelle bats, Natterer's etc. We'll be setting dates for 2022 box checks soon.....

Get back in touch

Obviously, the pandemic led to a reduction in the amount of fieldwork we could do in 2020 and 2021. Now is your opportunity to get back in touch with the project leaders. Hopefully you'll start to receive some communications again, but tell them you are still interested.

Data is still important

Please send any Wiltshire bat records into the County Recorder. This is still the major way in which we all contribute to bat conservation in Wiltshire. Knowing what species are where, or more importantly where they aren't is essential. We have 63K+ records and counting but still lots of blank space where we have no records at all.

Website

Our presence on the Wiltshire Mammal Portal is being refreshed and upgraded - huge thanks to Kelly Sheldrick for her time and efforts on this. Check it out when you get the chance.

Online events

We will be continuing online events in partnership with the Avon Bat Group in 2022. Kelly Sheldrick the WBG Events Officer is already lining up informative and training events during the year and will be working closely with Oli Ellis our BCT NBMP champion on a whole set of initiatives for our members.

These events are designed to engaged and educate participants and help raise money to support the work of the two bat groups and the projects/charities of choice of the speakers.

During October 2021, WBG also hosted Neil Middleton of BatAbility, as part of a members-only, group subsidized two-part training event on basic sound analysis for beginners. This was aimed very much at the hobbyist using kit at the cheaper end of the market – it sold out in only a few days and 20 people benefitted from this training. In fact, it was so well received that Neil is booked for another session in March 2022 – at time of writing its already fully booked!

WBG Events	Date	Whose it for	Booking/ Questions
African Bat Conservation Online Talk - Emma Stone	Mon 28th Feb	Everyone - talk will be recorded for those that can't make it.	Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com
Sound Analysis Training - Neil Middleton	7pm-9pm Wed 16th & 23rd March	WBG members - beginners/hobbyists, particularly anyone that's purchased an EMT and wants to learn how to analysis their bat calls.	Email was circulated to registered members. Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com
WBG National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) talk	WC 4th April	WBG members - for those that want to find out about NBMP and how to take part	Questions to nbmp-wiltsbg@gmail.com
Online Bat Walk/ NBMP Training - UK Bats	Wed 27th April	Those new to bats and that have offered to help assist with bat walks and/or take part in the NBMP.	Booking email will be circulated to bat walk helpers and those that have expressed an interest in taking part in the NBMP. Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com for bat walks and nbmp-wiltsbg@gmail.com for NBMP
Online Bat Walk/ NBMP Training - Using a Heterodyne	Wed 4th May	Those new to Heterodyne detectors and those who have offered to help assist with bat walks and/or take part in the NBMP.	Booking email will be circulated to bat walk helpers and those that have expressed an interest in taking part in the NBMP. Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com for bat walks and nbmp-wiltsbg@gmail.com for NBMP
AGM - plus talk on the Marlborough Tunnel	Thurs 12th May	WBG members	Questions to wiltsbg@gmail.com
Practical Bat Walk Training 1	Tues 17th May	For those interested in helping with bat walks. Location to be confirmed.	Booking email will be circulated to bat walk helpers Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com
Practical Bat Walk Training 2	Wed 25th May	For those interested in helping with bat walks. Location to be confirmed.	Booking email will be circulated to bat walk helpers Questions to events-wiltsbg@gmail.com
NBMP Waterway mock survey	WC 6th June	For those interested in taking part in the NBMP	Questions to nbmp-wiltsbg@gmail.com
Iford Manor Roost Count	TBC	WBG Members	TBC
WBG Bat Walk	Sat 10th Sept	TBC	TBC

The County Recorders' Report and highlights for 2021

2021, the pandemic continues, but chinks of light at the end of the tunnel

In the 2020 newsletter we outlined some of the challenges that arose in 2020 in response to the SARS-CoV-19 pandemic, whether the resultant restrictions in human activities in order to limit infection rates in humans, or the guidance published to minimise risks of infecting wild mammals, in particular bats. 2020 was massively challenging from a pure mammal survey and monitoring perspective, but of course, the human race had bigger things to worry about.

The downturn in activities in 2020 largely continued in 2021, but some activities were reviewed and recommenced, strictly following the necessary guidance for people and wildlife, limiting interactions wherever possible (by reducing durations of surveys, team sizes, training opportunities and handling). It's imperative that we safeguard the wildlife we study, and so all necessary precautions were taken – and of course, only absolutely essential work was undertaken, for example, trapping of bats in relation to sampling for research upon Covid-19 in wild mammals undertaken by a number of universities.

2021– AN UNSEASONABLY COOL AND WET SPRING

Spring 2021 was rubbish to say the least. A prolonged cold snap in February was followed by a warm but dry March, and then a cold but dry April, and then a monsoonal May.....the result of which was to make life exceedingly hard for our wildlife, whether amphibians, hazel dormice, nesting songbirds, or indeed bats. The cold, dry Spring, followed by the wet May resulted in a very low insect abundance it would appear – butterflies, dragonflies & damselflies, and other insects all seemed to be in very low abundance.

A series of dead greater horseshoe bats were encountered in May, often of low weight and presumably experiencing difficulties foraging. A greater horseshoe roost which is used as a pre-maternity gathering prior to bats departing in June to move to their maternity sites, still had 50 bats present in late June. Bechstein's bat maternity groups were late to form, and Barbastelle bats in the Savernake Forest bred a week or two later. It was a very tough

Spring for our bats.

Like 2020, 2021 was a very *different* year. Whilst the usual frequent bat box checks, or trapping surveys, or radiotracking, or underground hibernation checks, were often not possible in the way in which we have become accustomed, non-invasive survey techniques flourished instead.

A number of new bat group members and enthusiasts got the "bat bug", exploring their local villages and towns, conducting surveys and sharing their records. Some were encountered on bat walks and others made contact seeking advice. This led in autumn 2021 to WBG hosting another online training event with Neil Middleton of [BatAbility](#), to provide some training in bat detectors and sound analysis for the absolute novice. Restricted to bat group members only, 20 members participated. These attendees have already submitted several hundred bat records for 2021 by doing transect surveys and emergence counts. Particular mention should go to Alison Rymell and Emily Joachim in this regard. Great work everyone.

Survey work across South Wiltshire continued at pace, through the **South Wiltshire Greater Horseshoe Bat Project** (of which more elsewhere in this newsletter), as well as through Simon Smart's survey work with his **Chalke Valley Farm Cluster and Pewsey Downs Farmer Group**, with continued deployment of static detectors through these landscapes.



Completed repairs to small hibernation site, South Wiltshire © G. Harris

Landscape-scale static detector monitoring of the Salisbury Plain military training area and much of the Nadder Valley generated large numbers of sound files in areas previously lacking in good survey effort.

Work in the **Savernake Forest** (Lisa Wade and team) continued with low key bat box monitoring continuing

to ensure that boxes are maintained in a good state of repair, whilst disturbing/handling as few bats as possible. The Barbastelle bat maternity group was encountered once again, breeding a week or two later than in previous years, likely due to the unseasonably cool and wet spring. Sarah Jupp continued with BCT's trial of the British Bat Survey too, delivering acoustic surveys in the Forest.

Likewise, the monitoring of bats in the **Cotswold Water Park and Braydon Forest** continued, with fewer visits, fewer people and minimal handling, but ensuring that bat boxes were maintained in good repair and condition.

The Wiltshire Woodland Bat Project continued, likewise focusing upon acoustic surveys. The Barbastelle bat maternity group near Devizes, in the dwelling, was present once again in 2021, evidently in residence behind the timber cladding for much of the summer and autumn. A coordinated count of the building with the support of infra-red cameras ensured an accurate count.

Attendees of the bat group meeting in November 2021 heard the latest update from **Kieran O'Malley, PhD researcher** from the University of Sussex, Brighton, studying Barbastelle bat. A number of WBG members supported his work in 2021 deploying static detectors to selected sites. During the autumn, his methodology was tested further by trapping and radiotracking Barbastelle bats to locate their roosts.

Other species highlights included; continued study of a new swarming sites near Salisbury with additional acoustic records of horseshoes, Barbastelle, and even a passing Nathusius' pipistrelle; continued monitoring of the swarming site near Shaftesbury indicating good swarming activity during the autumn and mid-winter activity; Bechstein's bat and Brandt's bat trapped at two new locations (as part of commercial survey events); more Nathusius' pipistrelle records around the county, as well as a grounded bat in the Cotswold Water Park again.

I will keep on mentioning that Brandt's bat remains a rare bat in Wiltshire, poorly known and barely studied. Away from swarming sites and hibernation sites, there are still no known, and confirmed, maternity roosts.....so a plea to consultant ecologists and other fieldworkers; ANY records and roosts of Brandt's bat, if confirmed, are probably more significant than Bechstein's bat these days! If you record a suspected Brandt's bat, please take a DNA to get it confirmed, and

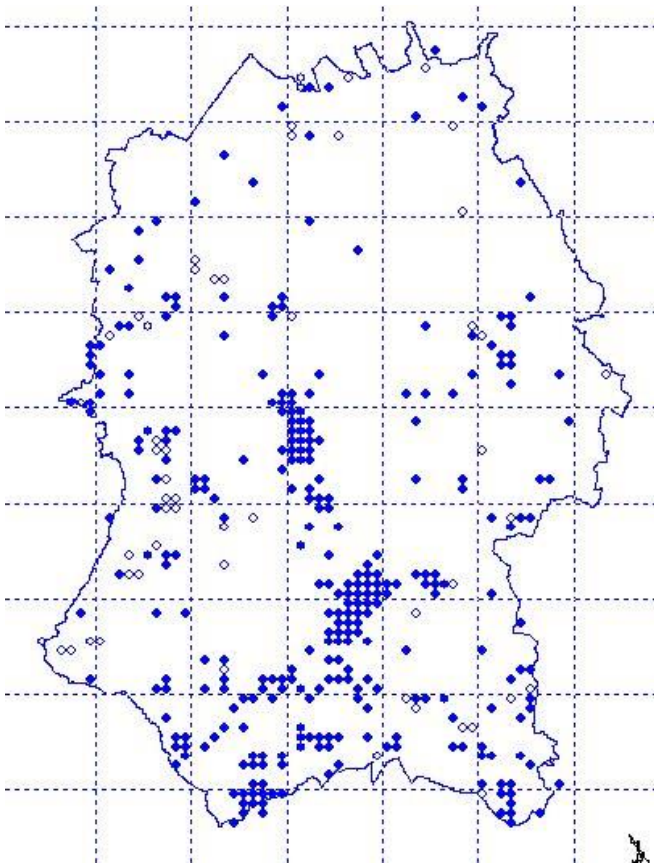
please record the biometrics and features you use to make your ID – because I will be in touch for further information to get the record verified. DNA confirmation is always welcomed because of the high potential for confusion with whiskered bat and also Alcathe bat....you don't want to be the person who overlooked the Alcathe bat!

Once again, Barbastelle bats were recorded in many many locations around the county – I still encounter ecologists and bat workers who still think that this species is so rare that its unlikely to be recorded during surveys! And so I will keep mentioning how frequently we record Barbastelle bat to continue raising the profile of how widespread this species is in Wiltshire. It is indeed typically found at a low density, but it is widely spread, and I don't know of anywhere in Wiltshire I wouldn't expect to encounter one (I have seen them foraging around streetlights in Trowbridge). It remains concerning that few fieldworkers (outside of WBG's projects) submit many, if any, Barbastelle records – so they ARE being overlooked. Please look harder.

INCOMING RECORDS

In all, another 10,000+ records were generated in 2021 and will be sent to WSBRC as part of our data sharing agreement. This is another increase on previous years. Well done everyone.

The vast majority of records submitted to Wiltshire Bat Group come from its projects coordinated by members, such as the Savernake Forest, Green Lane Wood & Biss Wood Trowbridge, Cotswold Water Park & Braydon Forest, South Wiltshire Greater Horseshoe Bat Project, Chalke Valley & Pewsey Downs and so on. Data is constantly arriving and amounts to many thousands of records each year. 2021 was a particular bumper year for records, primarily due to the increase in static detector work – bat group projects generated over 700,000 sound files.



The current distribution of occupied 1km squares for Barbastelle.....as of 17/2/2022 (Recorder 6 output, G. Harris).

Bat Group members and members of the public submit an increasing number of records too outside of the usual projects, and in recent years this has increased further, partly because of the popularity of the EchoMeter Touch bat detector for smartphones/tablets. We check and verify all of these records, amounting to several thousand sound files each year, generating superb verifiable records for areas otherwise infrequently recorded. Brilliant work everyone.

Verifying the records mentioned above is typically straightforward, being generated by experienced bat workers and with an abundance of supporting evidence such as sound files, DNA confirmation, biometrics etc.

Your county recorder also spends a large amount of time each year checking and verifying records submitted to online platforms such as iRecord (by far the greatest proportion), Living Record (some, but reducing as recorders move across to iRecord), and increasingly the Mammal Society's Mammal Mapper app (which feeds records onto iRecord for verification). Whilst the majority of these thousands of records relate to mammals other than bats, we're seeing an increasing number of bat records submitted to iRecord, particularly from consultant ecologists.

A rather frustrating development in 2021 related to iNaturalist. This global platform has gained popularity in the UK, culminating in 2021 in the upload of large volumes of iNaturalist data to iRecord, making it accessible for verification and available to other recording schemes for the first time. There are significant problems with the iNaturalist data which generate large amounts of work for the network of volunteer verifiers/county recorders across the country. A deconstruction of these issues here would be counter-productive; however, I would ask that anyone using iNaturalist to submit bat records get in touch to discuss how they can make the process easier.



Lesser horseshoe bat, in hibernation, South Wiltshire © G. Harris

Many of the records simply cannot be verified so it's currently a waste of everyone's time!

Ring movements and recoveries of note in 2021

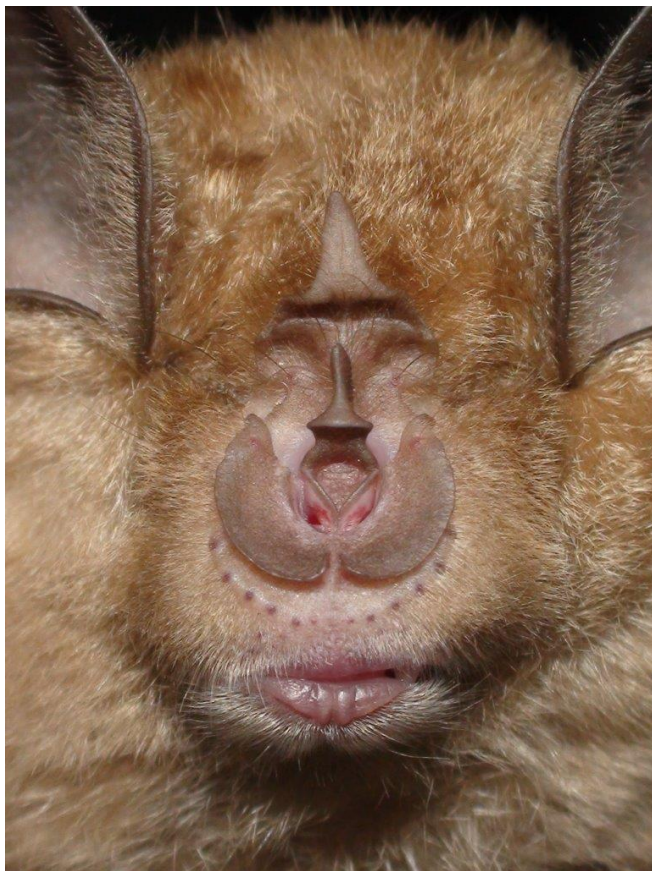
Each year the bat group receives reports of ringed bats being found, dead or alive, during surveys and roost visits. We're grateful to everyone who reports these bats, as they often comprise information useful in highlight landscape-scale linkages with roosting sites and foraging areas.

Additionally ringed bats will be retrapped and encountered in other projects, so just the ring movements of note are listed here for interest.

Greater horseshoe bat X3323 (recovered dead)

Found 27th May by Estate Manager, Neston Park, roosting on a hay bale.

Originally ringed 21/03/2009 at Box Mines SSSI by Fiona Mathews, recorded as non-breeding young male. It was found again 13/3/2012 also at Box, this time breeding. And last seen 02/03/2016 also at Box. This time in prime breeding condition “judging by the size of his genitals! So it seems like he’s had a productive life and was probably about 14 years old.” (3km movement).



Greater Horseshoe Bat © Daniel Hargreaves

Greater horseshoe bat B3378 & B4348 (recovered dead)

Both found dead 26/05/2021 Corsley, Warminster, (2 dead in a group of 7 – 6 were ringed) (Geoff Billington)

B3378 (F), ringed 07/01/2016 Winsley, and then retrapped Winsley 26/02/2016, 18/01/2017, 18/02/2017 (Movement, over 15km).

B4348 (F), ringed 24/03/2017 (withheld location, Somerset) and retrapped 23/03/2018 (same withheld location, Somerset) (Movement over 13km).

Greater horseshoe bat B1940 female (recovered dead)

07/06/2021, Found dead in roosting site, Westbury (Jenny Bennett)

Originally ringed by FM 14/01/2019 at Gripwood, Bradford-on-Avon. Retrapped Gripwood 23/02/2019.

Greater horseshoe bats, and probably all bats, clearly had a tough time in spring 2021 – weather conditions and low food abundance took their toll. (GH).

Greater horseshoe bats X4461 (f) and B3234 (f)

Retrapped 31st May 2021 – Westbury (long term study of major roost) (GH & LMW).

X4461, originally ringed Browns Folly SSSI 01/3/2009, retrapped 09/1/2011 at Brown’s Folly and then retrapped 28/3/2019 (withheld location, Somerset).

B3234: originally ringed 7/1/2016, Gripwood, and retrapped 22/2/2017 Gripwood (nonbreeding), and retrapped 21/2/2018. Gripwood (bred).

Greater horseshoe bat B3380

Encountered Chilmark Quarries March 2019 (recorded as non-breeding) and January 2022 (now breeding!) (GH & LMW)

Originally ringed Winsley Mine SSI 07/01/16 and seen Sally's Rift 14/01/17. (Movement 35km).

Daubenton's bat Z9474

Retrapped 19/05/2021, South side of Hambridge Lake, Newbury SU49245 67352 (Laura Holmes)

Ringed 21/08/2009 during swarming at Box Mines, Jacks Workings (Fiona Mathews) and retrapped 23/09/2017 at Box Mine, Lady Hamiltons (Keith Cohen).

Movement 66km! This is one of the largest movements known from Box Mines SSSI (perhaps THE largest?)

Gareth Harris, January 2022

Welcoming the new WBG NBMP Champion - Ollie Ellis

The [National Bat Monitoring Programme](#) offers a series of survey opportunities for all levels of bat worker, from detector surveys to hibernation counts, for novices to those more experienced and licenced. Although a number of surveys are undertaken in Wiltshire which contribute to NBMP, we've decided we'd like to encourage more participation in the NBMP.

Our new NBMP Champion, Ollie Ellis, was voted in at the November 2021 bat group meeting to coordinate our effort in the NBMP, particularly as a way to encourage and train the enthusiasts in the group, who may not receive the same opportunities as the consultant ecologists amongst the membership.

GET INVOLVED!

Are you wanting to contribute to bat conservation? Explore new skills? Enjoy bats in their natural habitat? National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) was created in 1996 and is coordinated by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. NBMP is a citizen science project, and thousands of volunteers have taken part since its inception. NBMP consists of a programme of surveys which allows BCT to calculate population trends annually. The data also allows BCT to assess significant changes in the base line data to help inform conservation policies. Consistent and long-term surveying can ensure data is reliable and valid, and this is where you can help!

[NBMP Annual Report - Reports - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](#)

There is a range of surveys which include:

- Waterway Surveys
- Field Surveys
- Roost Count
- Sunset Surveys

The surveys range in level of experience, and therefore there will be a survey that will suit your skill set. All beginners are welcome! All data arising from NBMP counts & surveys are shared with Wiltshire Bat Group and the local environmental records centre ensuring that they feed into wider work too.

Below is also a link to the surveys page, in which each

survey type is listed.

[Surveys - National Bat Monitoring Programme - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](#)

WBG is growing, with 200+ memberships and over 500 individuals in our Facebook group, giving the group a strong foundation to increase our NBMP surveys within the county. The NBMP surveys are a fantastic opportunity to be around nature and play a role in the conservation of bats. You can sign up to be a NBMP volunteer using the below link. You will start to receive emails from BCT which may include online training for different surveys. They also email updates, newsletters and preliminary data. After you have signed up, you will have access to the NBMP portal, in which the survey types will be listed. All data inputted into the NBMP database is shared with WBG, and therefore by supporting NBMP, you are enabling WBG to gain further knowledge of bat population trends in Wiltshire.

[Bat Conservation Trust - National Bat Monitoring Programme \(bats.org.uk\)](#)

2021 Preliminary Survey Data Key Points

Sunset Surveys

- 324 took part in sunset surveys
- 75% of records included bat species
- 27 roosts were found

Roost Counts

- 628 roosts were recorded, a 207 increase from 2020
- Common pipistrelle (157 records) and soprano pipistrelle (140 records) were the most common
- Horseshoe species and Bechstein bat roosts were the least recorded (1 each)

Field Surveys

- 198 surveys completed, a 49 increase from 2020
- 89% of surveys found common pipistrelle, 55% soprano pipistrelle, 49% noctule and 20% serotine

Waterway Survey

- 291 surveys completed, a 66 increase from 2020
- 84% of survey sites recorded Daubenton's bats

If you are interested in becoming a NBMP volunteer, or are already a volunteer and need support, you can contact me on nbmpwiltsgb@gmail.com.

Ollie Ellis, January 2022.

A strong year for public engagement

Bat Group members delivered a number of walks and talks in 2021;

Gareth Harris delivered two events at Coombe Bissett Down WWT Reserve in April, as well as an online talk in February, as part of WWT's HLF-funded project.

During May, a bat walk was delivered with Emily Best of the Aldbourne Wildlife Group, and in September Gareth and Lisa delivered a walk at Drews Pond Wood, Devizes for the Friends of Drews Pond volunteer group. The Devizes event attracted a large number of attendees and, thanks to the support from members Lisa Wade, Simon Smart, Michelle Maskell and Kelly Sheldrick, this enabled the group to be split into smaller groups to still allow the event to continue, whilst managing any Covid risk. All groups were treated to a great display of bats, especially Serotine bats, but also Noctule bats, pipistrelle bats and various Myotis bats.



Old Wardour Castle & lake, guided walk for Tisbury & District Natural History Society, April 2021. © G Harris

The SWGHB Project delivered events with the Tisbury & District Natural History Society at Old Wardour Castle, April 2021, and then the Nadder Valley Farm Group, Teffont Manor, in Sept 2021. Thank you to Jenny Bennett and Mariko Whyte for supporting this too.

Jenny Bennett & Lisa Wade supported the events with Sustainable Warminster in Sept 2021 for families, and Fran Tattersall assisted Anna Forbes (Action for River Kennet) in Marlborough with an event in October. Finally in October, we loaned our detectors to Laverstock Wildlife Group & Scouts for two events too.

Thank you to everyone who supported these events in 2021 – well in excess of 100 people attended these

events across the county, a great result at a time when bats need positive conservation messages more than ever before.....

.....Which is why we decided to recruit an Events Officer for the bat group, to lead on delivering more events and training up members to assist with walks and talks. Please extend Kelly Sheldrick a warm welcome when you see her, and please offer your help with events. Kelly can be contacted directly on eventswiltsbg@gmail.com.

Langford Lakes WWT Reserve – Red-footed falcons and Leislers' Bats

Lying in the Wylde Valley, in south Wiltshire, is Langford Lakes WWT Reserve. Comprising a complex of wetland habitats including chalk stream, gravel pits, wet meadows and reedbeds, and lying within a landscape dominated by chalk, it seems reasonable to assume that this site will be in use by a range of bats species, many drawn to forage on the high abundance of aquatic invertebrates.

Indeed, radiotracking for the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down (Stonehenge bypass) in 2017 radiotracked Barbastelle bats from the A303 corridor around Winterbourne Stoke, down the Till Valley, and to roosting sites in Grovelly Wood. These bats foraged around Langford Lakes.

In 2020, Lisa and I visited Langford Lakes to assist the reserves staff with a couple of soprano pipistrelle bats, which were making their way into the visitor centre and getting trapped inside. Whilst releasing these bats one evening, 1-2 Leisler's bats were foraging over the lakes at dusk.....



Langford Lakes ©Matt Burt

Leisler's bat is poorly known in Wiltshire – in recent decades there have been 1-2 unconfirmed roosting sites, and only a single confirmed in-the-hand record (a bat radiotracked by Jim Mullholland in South Glos, which flew into Wiltshire for a brief period one night!). Interestingly, the widespread use of static detectors is generating increasing number of acoustic records, particularly over the grasslands and open downland of central and south Wiltshire, so this species is hopefully more common than we assume.

Given the likely abundance of bats using Langford Lakes, we agreed to help the reserves staff with some detector surveys; two static detectors were deployed in July 2021 (our visit happily coinciding with a lovely vagrant red-footed falcon....), and two transect surveys were delivered in early August.

Over 33,000 bat passes were recorded over 7 nights at the two static detector locations. Foraging activity of pipistrelle bats and Daubenton's bat over the lakes and around the lake margins was incredibly high whilst over the wet meadows, there was notable activity of species which forage over grassland and in open space, such as Noctule, Serotine, Leisler's and also Barbastelle bat. Several passes of Leisler's bat were noted at both locations, whilst a small number of Nathusius' pipistrelle and Barbastelle bat were also noted.

Transect surveys were undertaken by bat group members and WWT reserves staff, with two teams conducting separate transects around each lake. Again, the activity of pipistrelle bats and Daubenton's bat dominated but additional species were also recorded, including Whiskered/Brandt's bat, Natterer's bat, Noctule, Serotine, Nathusius' pipistrelle, long-eared bats and Barbastelle bats. All too often, the quieter bats were totally drowned out by the large numbers of pipistrelle bats and Daubenton's bat, so they were often picked up during sound analysis after the survey!

This work was surprisingly useful and informative – its easy to presume that flagship nature reserves are already well-recorded, but in fact many nature reserves in Wiltshire (managed by a variety of organisations) are surprisingly poorly recorded or have quite dated records. This work at Langford Lakes has established a good baseline for this and provided a large number of up-to-date, good quality records. Maybe there's a nature reserve or green space near you deserving of some up-to-date bat surveys?

Huge thanks to WWT staff Matt Burt, Matt Callaway, Isaac Williams and Catherine Jones, and WBG members

Lisa Wade and Lis Weidt.

Gareth Harris, January 2022

South Wiltshire Greater Horseshoe Bat Project – 2021 Update

The South Wiltshire Greater Horseshoe Bat Project (SWGHP!) was launched in October 2020, to focus conservation action upon greater horseshoe bats in South Wiltshire, as well as other rare bats too – Barbastelle bat is widespread in south Wiltshire, and Bechstein's bats have been found at a number of sites too.

The project was set up in conjunction with Simon Smart (Black Sheep Countryside Management), in conjunction with Margaret Feneley (Natural England), Tracy Adams (Cranborne Chase AONB), Peter Shallcross (Chair of the Nadder Valley Farmer Group) and supported by Professor Fiona Mathews (University of Sussex, Brighton). We also enjoy the support of a large number of landowners, and organisations such as Defence Infrastructure Organisation, National Trust and Wessex Water.

Further information on the aims and objectives of the project may be [found on the website here](#). In the first year of the project, a considerable volume of work has been achieved, which I'll summarise as follows, as briefly as I can.....

SURVEY & MONITORING & ENHANCEMENT OF ROOSTING SITES

Chilmark Quarries SSSI & Fonthill Grottoes SSSI (the SAC)

In 2019 we received an induction and handover from the previous surveyor of these sites, and in 2020 (just before the pandemic) we undertook our first counts. These sites continue to support large numbers of hibernating bats, including greater horseshoe bat. Already we have encountered a ringed greater horseshoe bat, originally ringed at Winsley Mine SSSI, Bradford on Avon in 2016. We have been able to expand upon the monitoring of these sites.

A NEW HIBERNATION SITE

We began work on a new hibernation site for greater horseshoe bats in 2019, culminating in 2021 with the total replacement of the existing grille, thereby

enabling access for hibernation checks. With thanks to Colin Morris for leading on this particular project, and the generosity of two landowners, and Wiltshire Bat Group, who funded this work.



Location, location, location – New horseshoe roost (work yet to begin!) ©G. Harris

A NEW BAT HOUSE

With thanks to Natural England, and a small grant from Wiltshire Bat Group provided by wildlife photographer, Paul Colley, a small building will be restored and converted to a roosting site for horseshoe bats. The building is currently derelict and during February 2022 it will be repaired and refurbished.

Greater (and Lesser) horseshoe bats forage close by and commute past this building, so we're hopeful that this opportunity will be colonised quickly. Again, thank you to Colin Morris for designing the roost and assistance throughout this project. And thank you to the landowner for his unfailing warm welcome and interest in bats on his farm – we have been studying bats here since 2007! Thank you also to Charles Jackson, from Bath, who donated several tonnes of roofing tiles for this project, more than enough to complete this project.

DETECTOR SURVEYS

Thanks to equipment purchased by Wiltshire Bat Group, Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and Chilmark Estates/Natural England, we initiated large scale detector surveys in south Wiltshire, some of which was linked to the programme of dung beetle surveys funded by DIO and Wessex Water.

Eight sites were surveyed for dung beetles across the Salisbury Plain military training area in 2021, also deploying one or more static detectors at the same time. Jenny Bennett (WBG & DIO) was also able to use

her access to the training area to conduct additional monitoring of the Imber Ranges (SPTA-West) too. In all, detectors were deployed to at least 20 locations in 2021. Species of note included greater horseshoe bat, Leisler's bat and very high activity levels of Barbastelle. Over 150 nights of deployment.

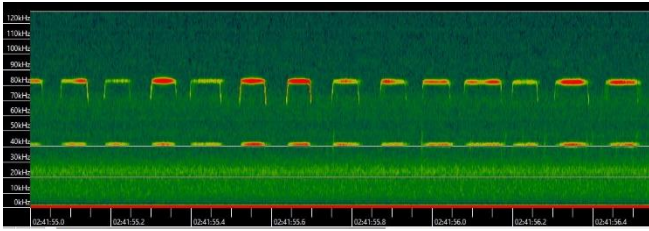
Readers may also be interested in publication of an [article in the MOD's Sanctuary magazine](#), in 2020 (Number 49), in relation to Barbastelle bats on Salisbury Plain.

Thanks to the use of equipment provided by Chilmark Estates/Natural England, I also conducted extensive surveys around the Chilmark Quarries area, which is an area of the county remarkably under-surveyed given its proximity to a bat SSSI/SAC. Over 98 nights of deployment was achieved at 11 locations, with highlights being high levels of summer activity of greater horseshoe bat, levels of Barbastelle activity so high as to suggest a likely maternity site, plus a wide range of other species too, including Nathusius pipistrelle and Leisler's bat.

Friend of the project, and all-round Top Bloke, Peter Thompson also deployed one of the Wiltshire Bat Group detectors to multiple locations in the Nadder Valley, throughout May to September, generating large volumes of data in an otherwise very under-recorded party of the county. Again, the usual and now expected high activity of Barbastelle bat with a supporting cast of horseshoe bats, Leisler's bat etc etc.....thank you Pete.

A series of additional sites were also surveyed, thanks to some funding from Wessex Water, as part of additional dung beetle surveys. Simon Smart also conducted similar surveys with his farmer groups in the Chalke Valley and Pewsey Downs.

Clearly this is a phenomenal volume of data, and so this work was greatly supported by the project's subscription to the [BTO Acoustic Pipeline](#), which not only helps with the collection and collation of data from multiple sources (because each surveyor was able to immediately upload their data), but of course the pipeline employs advanced bat classifiers and outputs detailed analyses. These data are currently being checked to ensure that identifications are correct prior to reporting and prior to sharing with partners such as the local environmental records centre. Crudely, this amounts to over 700,000 sound files. In due course, a more detailed output will be shared. I'm grateful to Stuart Newson, BTO for all his help and advice this year.



Greater horseshoe recording © G. Harris

DUNG BEETLE SURVEYS

An important food source for greater horseshoe bats



(and indeed other bat species that depend upon grasslands and pastures, such as serotine bat and Leisler’s bat) are the various species of dung beetle. These will be notably important for greater horseshoes in close proximity to their hibernation sites, as winter foraging opportunities are important.

We wished to assess dung beetle assemblage in these locations, but hit on the first stumbling block – few, if any, coordinated dung beetle surveys have been undertaken in Wiltshire, so it would be hard to assess this without some sort of baseline survey to compare

A hearty breakfast – dung beetle © G. Harris

to. So, we embarked upon dung beetle surveys on Salisbury Plain training area (thanks to a grant from DIO, who also wished to further understand the health of dung beetles on the chalk grassland of the training estate) and in doing so recorded foraging greater horseshoe bats on the northern edge of the Plain (not so far from Bratton and Easterton). Wessex Water supported this work further with a grant to survey additional areas, enabling us to survey pastures in the Chalke Valley, Nadder Valley, Avon valley and the Stonehenge World Heritage site. We’re scratching the surface, but generating some fascinating data.

Wessex Water featured us in their [Winter 2021 customer magazine](#), joining us when we visited meadows in the Avon valley near Downton.

What is that smell? Except from Wessex Water Customer Magazine 2021 © YTL Wessex water

Fieldwork was undertaken by myself, Simon Smart and Pete Thompson, with Marc Arbuckle (county recorder for Coleoptera in Wiltshire) delivering the identification work. This was a fairly large undertaking with some logistics to deal with, ranging from surveying on a military training estate (warm thanks to the MOD ecologists and the MOD training safety officers who facilitated our work, kept us safe and showed such interest), working alongside some amazing graziers and some brilliant livestock including some rather lively bulls, to dealing with an awful lot of cow poo! In particular, Marc had the added challenge of microscopic identification of a few thousand dung beetles, which is a very challenging group of beetles. It’s been a big team effort – thank you everyone.

The bat and dung beetle survey findings are too much to present here in a meaningful way, so in coming weeks and months we’ll share these findings in a series of blogs. So, watch this space!

PROMOTING THE IMPORTANCE OF DUNG BEETLES IN SOIL HEALTH & PASTURE MANAGEMENT

Another important aspect of our work with dung beetles, is engaging with the farming community to promote the importance of dung beetles in soil health, nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, and crucially their role in management of livestock endo-parasites. Many of the veterinary products used to combat “worms” in livestock have long-lasting affects in the environment once excreted in dung.

The farming community is acutely aware of this, and a number of projects and initiatives are underway to

Bats in Churches – A Volunteers' View

promote alternate means to treat worms. Dung beetles are one of the first species to suffer from veterinary anthelmintics in the environment, therefore with knock-on effect to the wider food chain (including bats).

The project has therefore been working with [Dung Beetles for Farmers](#) to coordinate and deliver online training events within the project area promoting dung beetles, and alternative ways to manage pastures and “worms” in livestock. The farming community is widely supportive of this, and the training was delivered by Max Anderson and Sally-Anne Spence to the Chalke Valley Farm Cluster and the Nadder Valley Farmer Group (some of whose members graze in close proximity to the bat SSSIs). Many of you will remember Max’s presentation at the [Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project Conference in 2020](#) on this same topic, as Max’s PhD is also supervised by Fiona Mathews.

Those of you interested in seeing this training may be interested in [Dung Beetles for Farmers’ presentation at the Oxford Real Farming Conference](#) in January 2022, which broadly covered the same discussion points.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Finally, we promised we’d do some people engagement as part of this project, and we were warmly welcomed at two events with the Nadder Valley Farmer Group, a walk with Tisbury & District Natural History Society (with warm thanks to Jenny Bennett & Mariko Whyte for assisting with these three events), as well as an evening talk with the Avon Valley Farmer group hosted by GWCT, and two guided walks and an online evening talk for Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, linked to their Heritage Lottery-funded project at Coombe Bissett Down (warmly hosted by Mel Evans). Around 80 people were engaged in these events, many of whom encountered some very funky bats, including a Barbastelle foraging on Coombe Bissett Down.

In year one we’ve achieved far more than I imagined, and that is largely thanks to the support and interest of a large community of people, in particular, Simon Smart, Margaret Feneley, Peter Shallcross, and many many more. The number of landowners and farmers involved in this work is extensive.

The funders of work in 2021 include Natural England, DIO, Wessex Water, Wiltshire Bat Group, Paul Colley and several landowners wishing to remain anonymous! Thank you to Daniel Hargreaves for generously sharing photos to help promote this project.

In Wiltshire, most of us live near an historic church. And old churches make excellent roosts for bats. If you have ever entered a church and noticed bat droppings and signs of urine on the walls, you will have already taken the first step towards surveying a church for the national Bats in Churches (BiC) Project (<https://batsinchurches.org.uk>).

In early 2021, my husband, Phil Atkin, and I volunteered as 'Bat Detectives' with Bats in Churches. We had recently moved to North Wiltshire from Cornwall and were keen to learn more about our new area. Becoming a Bat Detective would give us the chance to visit some beautiful old churches and also help the Bats in Churches project to better understand how bats use those sacred spaces.

BiC's survey season runs from June through August, which gave us plenty of time to survey the six churches in our local benefice. Bat Detective surveys are quite simple (and in fact, can be fun to do as a family): after selecting a church and getting approval from one of its representatives, you visit the building to look for evidence of bats. You then provide your records to the project, and they use that data to build up a picture of how bats use churches all over England.

But after only a couple of churches, Phil and I were so hooked on bat surveying that we decided to expand our efforts. We chose a range of churches within an hour's drive of our home from the National Bats in Churches Study (NBiCS) (<https://batsinchurches.bats.org.uk/Surveys.aspx#NBiCS>), and we set out to survey them. The NBiCS comprises a randomly selected group of 1,000 churches throughout England, and the project's aim is to survey them all before the end of the 2022 season. These national surveys are more ambitious than Bat Detective work: not only do you check for evidence of bats, but you also collect droppings for DNA analysis and place static detectors in the churches overnight, to record bat activity.

By the time we got to the end of the 2021 season, Phil and I had surveyed 15 churches in four counties (and we had a fantastic time doing it). Our efforts were recognised by the Bat Conservation Trust, which was a real honour – we were awarded Church Survey

Volunteers of the Year at an online ceremony in September.

Both Phil and I are continuing to volunteer with Bats in Churches over the winter. He is analysing data and I am working on an art project for an historic church in Somerset. Our plans for the summer season are to survey all 10 of the NBiCS churches in Wiltshire -- a big job but one we are very much looking forward to doing.

However, there are many more churches in Wiltshire that still need Bat Detective surveys, and that is where Wiltshire Bat Group members can help. If you are looking for a fun and easy way to contribute to bat research, have a look at the Bats in Churches volunteering page: <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-bat-survey/>. They are a wonderful organisation which values its volunteers and is doing great work. I hope you will get involved in their final season of research, so that Wiltshire's bats and churches can become part of this important national project.

Ilene Sterns, January 2022

Aldbourn Wildlife Group – WBG Bat Walk

2021 was an exciting year in our village with the establishment of Aldbourne Wildlife; a group for nature enthusiasts passionate about recording nature in all its forms, sharing the wonders of our local wildlife with others and inspiring one another to protect the natural world.

We thought that there could be no better way to begin to engage with the village community than by asking about the nation's favourite mammal, the hedgehog. Nationally, 50% of rural hedgehogs have been lost in the last decade so we were delighted to hear from 38 households in the village who have enjoyed visits from hedgehogs this year. We mapped sightings and provided updates on their whereabouts on Facebook and in the village magazine *The Dabchick*. One local resident commented "love it, what a wonderful way to watch wildlife" and there is even discussion of applying for a hedgehog road sign. Such a simple project was enjoyed by many and provided an opportunity to discuss things we can do to support hedgehogs such as putting out food and water, not using harmful slug pellets and connecting gardens through hedgehog

holes. By continuing to ask for sightings each year we will be able to monitor our local hog population.

In June we teamed up with the village EcoChurch group at St Michaels church to take part in "Churches Count on Nature", a national citizen-science event that aims to record the biodiversity in churchyards. We ran biodiversity monitoring workshops over 5 mornings for all 7 classes at St Michael's CofE school; each group



spent between 1-2.5 hours with us, being "wildlife detectives". Six hedgehog footprint tunnels and 4 small mammal footprint tunnels were baited with cat food between strips of masking tape painted with charcoal and vegetable oil paint. We found hedgehog footprints in all corners of the churchyard, and also numerous small mammal tracks (vole, mouse rat) as well as cats!

We set 10 Longworth mammal traps each night and found 2 wood mice and 2 bank voles, which the children were hugely excited to see. We are very grateful to Wiltshire mammal group for the loan of this equipment. Moth traps, mist net demonstrations for bird ringing and slowworm monitoring were also enjoyed. The week finished with a Saturday morning BioBlitz welcoming parents and community members to take part and in the evening more than 20 adults and children joined us for a bat talk and walk around the

churchyard, where we watched 4 or 5 Serotine bats hunting, sometimes swooping just overhead.

We wish to extend a massive thank you to Wiltshire Bat Group for deploying a static bat detector in the churchyard which detected Common Pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared bat, Serotine, Noctule and Leisler's bat, which incidentally neatly equates to the species we have recorded in other parts of the village this year.

A brief look through the brilliant "Mammals in Wiltshire" atlas is enough to see that there is a sparsity of mammal records in the top right of the county around Aldbourne. This autumn Aldbourne Wildlife has been on a mission to rectify this for one species in



Hedgehog Tracks outside the church © Emily Best



particular – the harvest mouse. Only a couple of historic records were known for the parish (30-40 years old), but after two very informative local survey training days, run in collaboration with Gareth Harris and the Wiltshire Mammal Group, we have found harvest mice nests in 14/16 2km survey square within the parish (the remaining two squares only dipped into the parish).

In total 25 different mammal species have been recorded this year (there are historic records of 8 others around Aldbourne- perhaps a challenge for the year ahead). If you are interested in finding out more about our projects and work with birds, insects,

reptiles and amphibians or are interested in getting involved please do check out our website AldbournWildlife.com or like our Facebook group.



Noctule bat found roosting on an electric fence © G. Harris

Emily Best, 2021

Unusual Sightings

The 2021 field season was, for me, one involving a lot of grasslands, pastures and livestock, whether for dung beetle or bat surveys (usually both!). We spent a lot of

Serotine bat found roosting in long grass © R. Hosier

time on the grasslands of Salisbury Plain, whether on the military training area or the Stonehenge World Heritage Site, to the south. Bat surveys on Salisbury Plain typically yield a high activity of species such as Serotine, Noctule, Barbastelle bat (yes – really) and Leisler's bat (I know!).

SEROTINE ROOSTING IN LONG GRASS

On the 30th June, one of our favourite farmers, with whom we've done bat work for several years, and then dung beetle surveys in 2021, found a bat in long grass on the downs just south of Stonehenge. The bat was

simply roosting in long grass – given the extent of the downland here, the odds of stumbling upon a bat hanging in long grass seems very small. Thankfully, Rachel was quick to take a photo, whereupon the bat stirred and flew off into the woodland adjacent. Rachel realised she wasn't looking at the usual pipistrelle bats



that she encounters around her home so sent the photo across later that day. Remarkably, it was a Serotine bat.

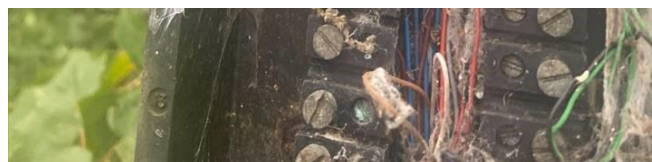
The dung beetle surveys undertaken some weeks later indicated a high abundance of dung beetles of a variety of species – was this Serotine simply foraging low over the pastures upon invertebrates such as dung beetles, and was caught out by a drop in temperatures at dawn? I wonder how often bats roost in long grass, albeit temporarily?

NOCTULE ON AN ELECTRIC FENCE

In late August, a message appeared on one of the national Facebook Groups for bat workers, seeking help with a bat found hanging from a fence on Salisbury Plain. The plain is a vast area and no precise location was given..... but coincidentally, the original report came from a grazier who happens to live in our village (Market Lavington) so I contacted her directly. Thankfully she was able to provide a precise location, and thankfully the location was only a 15 minute drive from home.....



Soprano pipistrelle in telecoms box © G. Harris



Sure enough, the bat could be seen hanging from the fence from quite some distance.....and it quickly became apparent that firstly, it was a Noctule bat, and secondly, the fence was electrified (and the power source was locked away to prevent theft). Putting my best “son of a dairy farmer” skills to practice, I shorted Telecoms box roost © G. Harris

out the fence either side of the bat, and then removed the bat, still getting a small electric shock in the process, but nothing too alarming. The bat was fine. It was a male, with very enlarged testes, clearly in breeding condition. Perhaps the exertions necessitated a rest?

Despite being sat there for perhaps 36 hours or more, the bat was fine – we fed it for 24 hours, rehydrated it and released it again in the same location, accompanied by the grazier and her family. It flew strongly off in the direction of a small copse in the middle of the military training area.

SOPRANO PIPISTRELLE IN A TELECOMS BOX

In October 2021, we received a request for help with (yet another) soprano pipistrelle found by a BT Engineer inside a telecoms box in Whiteparish. The adjacent home owner, Nikki, and the Engineer did a great job of ensuring the bat was left in situ, unharmed and undisturbed. Thank you both for helping with this,

and to Nikki for the photographs.

We often receive reports of bats found inside telecom boxes and exchanges by BT staff. Thankfully, BT have a policy and action plan in place for just such occasions. (GH).

HEAVILY PARASITISED BAT

In June, we received this report of a bat with a heavy parasite burden, in Whiteparish, from Trace and Allan.



Heavily parasitised bat (c) Allan Cooper Photography

“It flopped down into the honeysuckle growing up on the house wall and appeared to be flying weakly. We wondered at the time if it was a baby on a new flight. On closer inspection of the photo, you can see it was covered in mites, poor thing. Shame we did not see this at the moment it was on the bush, as [we could have rescued it]. As it was, it fell down through the bush and eventually flew weakly off out of the garden. It probably didn't last long by the look of its burden.”

Is this further evidence of the tough times our bats suffered in spring 2021 due to unseasonable weather

and low food abundance (or just an isolated incident?).

Thanks to Trace Williams & Allan Cooper for sharing this report and the images.

Gareth Harris, January 2022

Unravelling the mysteries of bats at Salisbury Cathedral

Wiltshire Bat Group began working with the Salisbury Cathedral team in 2019 (which was reported in previous newsletters and [here](#)) but local bat workers had begun investigating the bat *situation* at the cathedral prior to this. The *situation*? For reasons which aren't entirely clear, during late summer and autumn a number of pipistrelles are found grounded and in need of rescue on the floor of the cloisters every morning – sometimes, multiple bats are found, and sometimes these bats are found dead, although most are released unharmed. Thankfully, the cathedral staff are well versed in safely collecting bats, and their re-release!

Clearly the timings coincide with the mating period for pipistrelle bats but that still doesn't explain the numbers of bats found grounded and that they are found every morning. So, in summer 2021 we began investigating in more detail.

This coincided with the arrival of Kate Stubbings, the new verger, in August, who supports this work and is our main liaison on the cathedral.

THE VERGERS' VIEW

For the past seven years I have both worked in and lived around cathedrals. First at Canterbury, which is where I consider my home, and more latterly in Salisbury. The role of a verger is almost as old and unique as the buildings we belong to – it can also sometimes require a similar level of explanation! The ancient office is named after the 'verge' which refers to the ornate rod carried at the front of a liturgical procession. Traditionally, this would be a method of clearing a path for clergy through throngs of people. In modern times, it remains simply as a ceremonial practice. On a more general

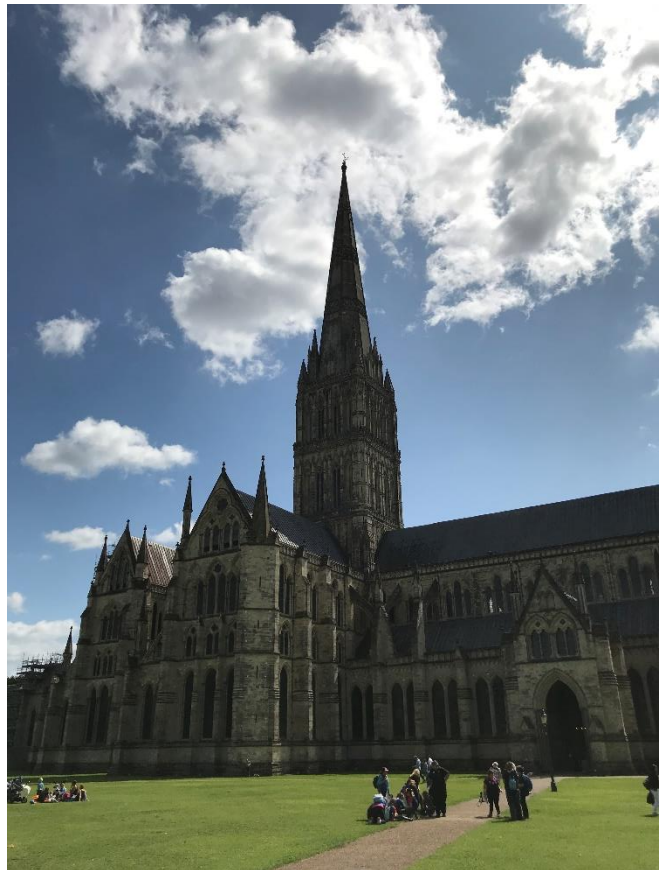
day-to-day basis, a verger carries the responsibility for the care and security of the church of which they are custos.

From my experience, this can range from the standard duties of unlocking early in the morning and preparing for the daily services to, on one occasion, coordinating the attempted capture of a crazy cat guilty of attacking tourists in the eastern crypt [of Canterbury Cathedral].

Although not always in such an aggressive manner, animals do tend to play a major role in cathedral life. From the beloved clergy cats, tortoises, guineafowl, the occasional goat to the donkeys and camels (!!!) at the nativity scene... animals (domestic and wild) enrich the lives of many who enter the precincts of cathedrals. One animal I failed to encounter during my time at Canterbury (very uncharacteristically for such an old church) was bats!

I arrived at Salisbury Cathedral in August of last year and found to my surprise (and joy) that during the late summer months, our cloisters host a variety of species that come together to forage

Salisbury Cathedral looking stunning at sunset © G. Harris



Salisbury Cathedral by day © G. Harris

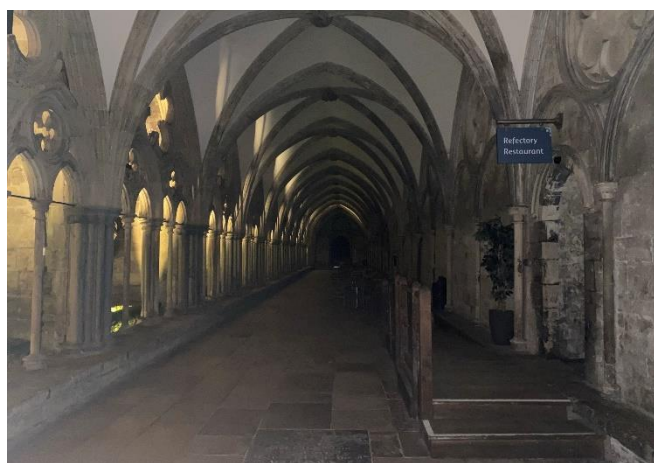
cloisters 2 hours before sunset, over the heads of visitors!

These observations prompted Gareth Harris to come and visit us on a couple of evenings to observe and help make efforts to understand their nocturnal behaviour.

As a result of these evenings, a little high frequency recording, and some strategically placed detectors, we noticed several curiosities...

Firstly, the variety of different species all sharing the same space. We were able to record: Common Pipistrelles, Soprano Pipistrelles, Noctules, Serotines, Brown Long-eared, Whiskered and Natterer's bats.

We observed roosting in the corner "bosses" – a decorative feature in medieval architecture, which typically conceals the keystone or a joiner piece of vaulting. In Salisbury, the corner bosses are distinctly larger than the rest and the grout hollowed enough to provide an ideal roost. Bats can sometimes be seen roosting in these during the day, and sat perched in them during the evening, likely calling to other bats in flight nearby.



The cloisters within the cathedral © G. Harris

and mate here. The evidence of this activity has presented itself in the same way for as many years as our longest serving staff can recall; unlocking the building on a summer's morning to find, often, numerous grounded bats in need of some R&R.

Although not an unusual sight for this time of year, what ignited a fascination with the cloister bats was their boldness and visibility during the day, with small numbers often seen flying around the

Bats could also be seen foraging under the cover of the Cloister's roof, attempting to catch a meal there instead of outside in the centre garth.

Perhaps the landscape of the cathedral cloister, one which offers both enough food and safe cover from the resident peregrines, offers the ideal destination for courtship.

It is exciting to be a part of the cathedral's decision to dedicate more focus to the bats that roost here. The new year presents opportunities for cathedral centred projects – namely the addition of new bat boxes to the roof voids - and those which bolster engagement with the wider community. We hope to reintroduce a number of guided walks and talks over the coming season as well as some signs for permanent display which can help to educate our visitors on the wildlife they do not get to see during opening hours.

Many unanswered questions still remain – which in turn creates plenty of opportunity for further research and observation. How the cathedral bats behave during the winter, for example, is an ongoing mystery which we are keen to unveil as the weather progresses in its severity.

Kate Stubbings, Verger, Salisbury Cathedral

During late summer & autumn, we spent two evenings observing the bats in the Cloister to try to understand quite what was going on. The bats were clearly expecting us too – 2 hours before sunset, they were already flying around the cloisters foraging!



Inside the courtyard of the cathedral at sunset © G. Harris

Firstly, we confirmed they are mostly Soprano pipistrelle bats – they are roosting in three of the four corner “bosses” in small groups. Common pipistrelle appear to using the fourth corner “boss” too. Their behaviour is consistent with courtship and with these being mating roosts – pursuit was observed, and coming & going from the bosses, and some approaches noted, and lots of social calls heard. Additional bats are foraging up and down the Cloisters too, with feeding buzzes heard to confirm this. At this stage, the bats are mostly staying under the cover of the Cloisters and avoiding going outside to forage around the large cedar. But occasional passes of Noctule and Serotine are noted as well as long-eared bats and Myotis species. (We demonstrated that all of these species roost inside the Cathedral in 2019.

Static detectors were left in situ for a week or so, inside the cloisters and outside, to record additional activity. These recorded astonishing levels of bat activity.....

During the first visit (2nd September) nearly all bat activity was Soprano pipistrelle and some Common pipistrelle. During the second visit (13th September), other bat species were present too – and in fact, they appeared to be swarming. Small numbers of Myotis bats were swarming at one corner of the cloisters – it was hard to discern if they were interested in a particular feature, but certainly the activity and behaviour was consistent with what we've seen at the entrances to underground sites where large numbers of bats may gather to swarm during the autumn months. Again, we recorded large volumes of data on static detectors in the following week, and analyses of these data is ongoing! Certainly, one or more species of Myotis were present, including Natterer's but potentially other species too. These timings are consistent with the timings of species activity at underground sites too, when Natterer's activity may peak in mid-September.

Kate, Lisa & I returned to the Cloisters in mid-December – none of the bosses were apparently occupied with bats..... but whilst we were there, we deployed a bat detector to the cedar in the centre of the Cloisters to monitor midwinter bat

activity (partly with a view to assessing for [“frost swarming”](#) of [Common pipistrelles](#)).....intriguingly, there was a spike on one night of Common pipistrelle activity.....which really warrants further surveys!

CONCLUSIONS SO FAR

It's nice to confirm that Soprano and Common pipistrelle bats appear to gather to court and mate at the Cloisters each autumn.

And it appears that the Cloisters is also used by other species too for courtship and mating, for example, Natterer's bats.

NEXT STEPS

We still don't understand why so many pipistrelle bats become grounded and require rescue here. More investigation is needed!

Next autumn we'll conduct further surveys to understand the swarming behaviour of Myotis species in the Cloisters.

In the coming winter Kate and I will also be investigating whether there is any evidence of “frost swarming” of Common pipistrelle bats on frosty nights – just waiting for some cold nights!

With thanks to Kate Stubbings and her colleagues at Salisbury Cathedral for supporting this work, including Marie Thomas and Gary Price, and Georgie Starkie & Lisa Wade from the bat group for assisting with surveys.

Gareth Harris, Wiltshire Bat Group 2022

The Friends of Quarry Woods need your views!

The Friends of Quarry Woods are looking at ways to preserve Quarry Woods (part of the Box Mines SSSI) for the community and for wildlife, including its significant populations of protected bat species. A lot has happened since our previous article in the [Spring 2021 newsletter](#) - we'd like to provide a short update, but we are also keen to hear your views on a proposal for the woodland going forward.

In Spring of last year, two small parcels of the woodland

were auctioned off to new owners. Since then, the Friends have been engaging with the original landowners to secure the remainder of the woods to ensure its benefits for wildlife and people are conserved and enhanced.

Our first preference was to find a conservation organisation who would be willing to take the woods under their wing. We engaged with six or so charities, including most recently some positive conversations with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. However, after a lot of deliberation, their decision was sadly not to proceed with acquiring the woods - even if the community were to fundraise and donate the land.

That left us with the decision of whether we would fundraise to take on the woods ourselves as a community purchase. After exploring the various challenges and complexities that come with taking on community land, our core team of 20 or so villagers regretfully decided this would not be feasible for us.

However, positive conversations have led to an interesting proposal, whereby the current landowners may retain ownership of the woods (at least for a period of time), with support from the local community in two ways: 1) helping to manage/conservate the land, and 2) fundraising to support ongoing management.

At this stage, this is a loose proposal with more thought needed on various aspects. But our first step is to gauge the level of support for the idea among - specifically, people's willingness to volunteer to help with management/conservation work and support with donations.

Please share with us your views! Do you like the idea?

Would you be willing to either volunteer time to help with woodland management and/or donate to help cover the costs?

Do you have time and energy to join our Core Group to move this along?

We are not asking for any commitment or donations at this stage, but it would be good to know whether the village and the wider Quarry Woods community would support the proposal in concept.

You can get in touch with us via the [The Friends of Quarry Woods Facebook page](#) or send us an email at friendsofquarrywoods@gmail.com. Many thanks!

Isobel Taylor, January 2022

And finally....

Thanks again for your support. As you can see from this newsletter, the group is very active to protecting bats and to expand our understanding of the species and their distributions across Wiltshire. Let's make 2022 another great year for bat records in Wiltshire!

We are on all the social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and on the Wiltshire Mammal Portal where we post minutes, newsletters and notices.

[Wiltshire Bat Group | Wiltshire Mammal Portal \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Our sincere thanks

As always there are a host of people to thank, especially our members who continue to donate, renew and fund raise, thank you! every penny this year has gone towards good causes, equipment and bat conservation in Wiltshire.

None of our surveys or events can happen without a lot of cooperation. Businesses, Statutory Bodies, multiple land owners, individual donors, farmers, consultancies, interest groups, project leaders, invited speakers and members of the Wiltshire Bat Group, all played a major part in supporting our conservation efforts in 2021.

In no particular order we gratefully acknowledge the help, funding and support of:

Forestry England

Natural England

Avon Bat Group

Black Sheep Countryside Management

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Cotswold lakes Trust & Lower Mill Estate

Swift Ecology / Ecotype Genetics

Bat Conservation Trust

Pewsey Downs, Nadder Valley and Chalke Valley

farmers groups

The Ramsbury Estate Cranborne Chase AONB

Wessex Water

Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Tisbury & District Natural History Society

The landowners supporting the SWGHBP including two landowners providing grants and donations.

Sustainable Warminster community group

The numerous landowners supporting our work through access for surveys and monitoring

Daniel Hargreaves and Paul Colley for the use of their photographs

Contact Details

We can be contacted at any time via email:

wiltsbg@gmail.com

For any membership enquiries:

wiltsbgmembership@gmail.com

Wiltshire Bat Care on:

wiltshirebatcare@gmail.com

Send your bat records to:

wiltsbatrecords@gmail.com

If you want to read more about Wiltshire mammals and in particular the status of our bat populations please see:

[mammals-in-wiltshire_2nd-edition_available_to_download_free_here](#)

Thank you, and until next year.

Your Committee

Position vacant – Chair

Jenny Bennett - Secretary

Gareth Harris – County Recorder

Caitlin McCann – Wiltshire Bat Care coordinator

Will Ponting – Membership and Treasurer

Kelly Sheldrick – Events Officer

Ollie Ellis – NBMP Champion

