

TEES VALLEY

BAT NEWS

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The State of the UK's Bats, a summary of the results of the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) from 1997-2007 has been published. Following earlier, dramatic declines in bat numbers, four species, Lesser Horseshoe, Daubenton's., Natterer's & Common Pipistrelle continue their gradual increase in numbers over the survey period whereas Soprano pipistrelles appear to be decreasing. Brown Long Eared Bat numbers are stable and showing signs of increasing. For other species the surveys either have not been running long enough or the sample size is too small to work out any significant trend. Full details of the report can be viewed at www.bats.org.uk

For some bat species the NBMP runs more than one type of survey and these can give different results. For example while Common Pipistrelles are showing an annual increase of 6.4% from the results of field surveys the colony counts show an apparent decline. The colony counts are considered less accurate because of Pipistrelle's habits of using multiple roosts over the summer. There is a similar discrepancy with Soprano Pipistrelles results although for that species both field and colony surveys indicate a decline, just different levels of decline. To improve the accuracy of the colony counts, the Bat Conservation Trust is trying to recruit additional people to count bats as they emerge from a roost. To take part you don't need to be a bat expert but just need to know of a roost where it is possible to count the bats out on two dates in June and possibly a third date in July. If you are interested in taking part then visit the above website and look under "help us count bats." For those with a bit more experience there are other surveys that you might like to get involved with.

The long-awaited fourth edition of the Handbook of British Mammals has now been published. In addition to the 17 species of bat that are accepted as being resident in Britain it gives some information on species that have turned up as vagrants and, who knows, might even be establishing here. Some of the occurrences were known to be accidental introduction but the following are potentially naturally occurring bats. Kuhl's Pipistrelle is a Mediterranean species that is spreading north and which now breeds in the Channel Islands. It was first recorded in mainland Britain in 1991 but there have now been a total of 6 records. Savi's Pipistrelle is similarly a southern European species that has been recorded twice in Britain in recent years. The Pond Bat, a larger version of Daubenton's Bat has just been recorded once, in 2003, and the Northern Bat, a smaller version of the Serotine, has been recorded twice, including one found hibernating in Surrey in 1987. The most commonly found "vagrant" species is the Parti-coloured Bat, from northern European. There were only 4 records of this species in Britain to 1980 but there have been 16 since then and it is now almost an annually recorded species.

Fortunately for Britain's songbirds one species that hasn't been recorded here is the Greater Noctule. A study in 2001 found the remains of feathers from Robins and Blue Tits in the bats droppings leading to the astonishing conclusion that these bats were eating birds. This theory was challenged by others who thought that the bats were accidentally ingesting feathers or at most opportunistically catching the odd bird in roosts. A new study published in the on-line journal, Plos One, gives evidence that the

bats are actually exploiting the otherwise untouched food resource of nocturnally migrating songbirds. The study looked at isotopes of Carbon and Nitrogen in the bats blood at different times of the year. The relative proportions of the different isotopes reflected the bat's diet and showed a clear difference between Summer when they were typical of what would be expected from an insect based diet and Autumn when they were in line with a bird-based diet. Greater Noctules are designed for a high speed aerial pursuit predation strategy and are also restricted in distribution to the Mediterranean regions where songbird migration is concentrated. Taken together this has led the researchers to suggest that rather than opportunistically take birds the Greater Noctule's life history might depend on them and that it could be the ecological bat equivalent of the Eleonora's Falcon. What is even more remarkable is that if this theory is correct, given Noctule's flight and hunting characteristics, the bats will be catching the birds and eating them on the wing; a scary thought if you are a swallow!

Stop press: A bat survey in Elwick in July 2007 found 3 Natterer's bats and 1 Soprano Pipistrelle foraging around a farmyard. As far as I am aware these are only the fourth Natterer's and second Soprano Pipistrelle records for Cleveland.

Events:

Friday 25th April, 8-10pm - **Tilery Wood; Wynyard Woodland Park** (off the A689)
One of the largest woodland complexes in the Tees Valley but it's never been surveyed for bats. We will also be looking for newts and owls. Further details Tel: 01740 630011

Friday 22nd August, 8-9.30pm. **Greatham Beck, Hartlepool**
Back to the Beck for lots of Common Pipistrelles and an attempt to beat last year's record of seven Noctules. Further details Tel: 01429 853325

Friday 29th August – 9-10.30pm **Tilery Wood; Wynyard Woodland Park** (off the A689)
The event will mainly focus on moths but will include a bat walk. Further details Tel: 01740 630011

Wed 10th Sept – 8.30-10.30pm **West Park, Darlington**
Another new bat walk site but there is a big Common Pipistrelle site nearby and Noctules have been recorded foraging across the road. Further details Tel: 01325 388628

Friday 19th September – 6.15-8.15pm **Billingham Beck Ecology Park**
Usually a good site for lots of Common Pipistrelles with a few Daubenton's bats over the ponds. Further details Tel: 01642 360376

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