

Cotswold Water Park Bat Initiative

Newsletter: Summer 2006



Introduction

This is the first newsletter of the Cotswold Water Park Bat Initiative (CWP BI). For the past two seasons (since the project launch in Spring 2005), data has been pouring in from surveys, box checks, mist netting and roost visits. With your help and interest, we have achieved a staggering amount of fieldwork in only two seasons and generated a fantastic amount of data.

A huge thank you to all for your tremendous efforts so far, whether you undertook some of these surveys, or allowed us into your home/garden to locate roosts, or supported us in countless other ways. One of the many strengths of the project has been the level of involvement from all sections of the community; not just ecologists, bat workers, rangers and reserve managers, but home-owners, farmers, landowners, mineral companies and pub landlords!

The following newsletter is intended as a summary of work to date and of initial results.

Transect Surveys

A series of Transect Surveys were developed by the project team, to target a series of locations across the CWP for survey with bat detectors. The idea was to get as many people out surveying as possible, assessing a wide variety of sites, across the whole area. Such "blitz" surveys would help to direct and target future efforts by highlighting areas of interest. Prior to these surveys, very few surveys had been undertaken in the area.

24 sites were surveyed, 14 in 2005, 10 in 2006. These surveys were undertaken across the entire CWP (approximately 40 square miles in area!), across farmland, along rivers, between lakes, along corridors such as canals and disused railway lines, beside large reed beds; these surveys have covered a variety of habitats.

Data are still being analysed, but these surveys have certainly shown that bat activity in the CWP is extremely high, particularly around the wetlands.

A range of species were recorded, taking the total CWP species list to 12 (out of a total of 17 for the UK!).....highlights include the Nathusius's Pipistrelle near South Cerney, Glos (recorded on time expansion, Steve Laurence, 2005). This is the first time this species was recorded in the CWP!

These surveys were undertaken by over 20 volunteers (often in teams of two) from Gloucestershire Bat Group and Wiltshire Bat Group, highlighting the dedication of volunteers from these groups. Thank you to you all!

Bridge Surveys

During Spring 2006, a second tranche of surveys were launched; these surveys were targeted at bridges, mill houses and other riparian structures.....in particular, looking for Daubentons Bats. Several years ago, similar surveys were undertaken by the local bat groups, so this

was an opportunity to repeat this work and further develop it, by including other structures.

During 2006, 24 bridges and other riparian structures were assessed for bats, with four roosts confirmed. The vast majority of bridges in the area were found to be too well repaired or concreted to enable habitation by bats. Of the four Daubentons Bat roosts that were confirmed, one was also found to be used by Natterer's Bats during the autumn and early winter. A small number of individuals of both species were ringed here through the autumn.



Brown Long Eared Bat

(Photo: G Harris)

Bat Box Schemes

Prior to the launch of the CWP BI, only a handful of bat boxes were to be found in the CWP, mostly wooden boxes erected by the Cotswold Water Park Ranger Team at Keynes Country Park and Cokes Pit LNR (Lake 34). In addition, a handful of Schwegler (woodcrete) boxes were erected by Lower Mill Estate.

Through an injection of money from Gloucestershire Naturalist's Society (GNS), two new box schemes were established. The first was established in autumn/winter 2005 on the disused railway line, near Cerney Wick, an area managed for conservation by the CWP Ranger Team. Checks during summer and autumn 2006, revealed these boxes were already being used by Common and Soprano Pipistrelle Bats. Occupancy within the first year was more than 60%!! (Occupation in the first year is often zero!) Does this indicate a lack of roost sites in this area? Possibly, yes; further work is needed to clarify this.

The second box scheme resulting from GNS funding will be at Whelford Pools, a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Reserve (Lake 111/111b), near Fairford. Boxes have been purchased and will be erected in January/February 2007.



The male Bechsteins Bat (Photo: Nick Cartwright)

Wiltshire Bat Group supplied, on loan, 35 Schwegler bat boxes, which were erected in early Spring 2006 at Clattinger Farm and Swillbrook Lakes, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust reserves. By the end of the Summer/early Autumn 2006, these boxes were showing evidence of use by various Pipistrelle Bats, including mating activity. Incredibly, a male **Bechsteins Bat** took up residence in one of these boxes by July and remained there until the Autumn. This nationally scarce species had not been recorded in the CWP prior to this. So where did it come from?

As a result of this male Bechsteins Bat, a new bat box scheme is to be established, funded by and in partnership with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (and their Landscapes for Wildlife Project), at a small woodland in the Braydon Forest, a few miles to the south of the CWP. As many of you will be aware, there are a number of excellent woodlands in this area, and it seems possible that "our" male Bechsteins may have come from here. Hopefully, this species will be recorded regularly in future through these bat box projects!

Lower Mill Estate continued to build upon their existing bat box scheme in partnership with the CWP BI, relocating the original boxes (after careful checks showed that had not been used) and putting up an additional dozen boxes. A new grant from Lower Mill Estate in autumn 2006 is funding an additional 20 Schwegler boxes to establish a box scheme on Pike Corner SSSI, on the banks of the Swill Brook. This scheme will extend

the corridor of bat boxes leading from Clattinger Farm, through Swillbrook Lakes and to the Railway Line). Another 10 boxes will also be used to support the existing scheme at Cokes Pit LNR. Furthermore, the same grant is also funding a small number of bat boxes to be used in Somerford Keynes village.....more on this later.

The bat box checks at Lower Mill Estate were combined with a superb talk and guided walk by Will Ponting; 15 of the residents from the Estate joined us to help check the bat boxes, with many seeing bats for the first time! Engaging and educating the public will continue to be a key strength of this project.

In all, the project is now monitoring 100 Schwegler bat boxes, in seven different box schemes, across the CWP. With thanks to the funding organisations and to everyone for their help establishing and monitoring these projects..

Roost Visits

Whilst a small number of roosts were discovered during the transect surveys, a large number were found with help from members of the local community. Special mention here must be made of Dr Les Jones, from Somerford Keynes, who introduced the project to a large number of households in Somerford Keynes, identifying over 10 Soprano Pipistrelle Bat roosts, and leading to the discovery of Natterer's and Daubentons maternity roosts. The Daubentons maternity roost was found within an apple tree in a garden; is this the only maternity roost for this species currently recorded in Gloucestershire? If you know of any others, please let us know (and the local records centre)!!

Many of the households in Somerford Keynes have developed a considerable interest in bats and are about to take receipt of some bat boxes (paid for by Lower Mill Estate). Furthermore, increasing interest by the staff of the village pub, The Bakers Arms, resulted in a small donation of funds to the Cotswold Water Park Society Education Team which was used to purchase bat box kits; these were assembled by children and put up in their gardens at home. Many thanks to Simon Eggerton at the Bakers Arms!

A further two large (200+) Soprano Pipistrelle roosts were found in the Somerford Keynes area, plus two smaller roosts. A Natterer's maternity roost was also located near Cricklade, thanks to a tip-off from a local resident. It is becoming clear that many local people are a useful resource when it comes to recording local bat populations!!

In coming years, it is hoped to study other local villages in as much depth as we have studied Somerford Keynes. South Cerney, for example, has a handful of records of Pipistrelle roosts, which may require re-visiting.

Mist Netting & Ringing

Mist netting of bats has been undertaken at five locations. This activity was undertaken to confirm bat identification at these sites, to enable ringing of target species (Daubenton's and Natterer's Bats) and to provide training opportunities in bat handling and identification. Species mist netted include Daubentons, Natterer's, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle Bats and Brown Long Eared Bat.

The provision of training for bat workers at all levels has proven to be a popular and key part of the CWP BI, a

reflection of the high quality of bat workers involved in this project able to supply the training. We are indebted to Steve Laurence of Wiltshire Bat Group for extending his licence to include the entire Cotswold Water Park; it is as a result of this, that we are able to undertake mist netting and ringing activities. Again this demonstrates the wide support for this project across two counties and beyond.

The Future and Strategic Planning

Two years of bat work in the CWP has shown results beyond our initial hopes; who could have possibly imagined we would have made such progress?! Where do we go from here?

On a wider level, nature conservation in the CWP is stepping up a gear. In Spring 2007, the revised and improved Cotswold Water Park Biodiversity Action Plan (CWP BAP) will be launched, this time including a "*Bat Group Species Action Plan*" to promote and target future bat conservation efforts in the area. Tremendous thanks to Jenny Ford for her efforts drafting the "*Bat Group Species Action Plan*".

At the same time, work on the South West Nature Map continues (see the South West Biodiversity Partnership website for details); as many of you may be aware, the Nature Map will direct nature conservation efforts at a landscape level, for example, landscape level habitat creation, promotion of habitat connectivity and landscape-level species conservation. For somewhere like the Cotswold Water Park, the Nature Map offers particular promise, for example, supporting a coordinated view of habitat creation through the restoration of mineral workings.

In the New Year, the Nature Map for the Cotswold Water Park will be completed and circulated. One of the aims of this will be to promote landscape-level bat conservation. Using data collected during the 2005 and 2006 transect surveys, it is hoped that we can flag up particular areas and corridors to link hotspots of bat activity, feeding areas and known roosting areas. This information will be incorporated into long term objectives for habitat creation and restoration in the area, enabling us to support and encourage our bat populations.

On a more immediate scale, data generated to date is being used to push developers and planners to undertake more mitigation works for bats in the area; after all, we now know, that the CWP is phenomenally important for bats. It is hoped that future developments in the CWP will include measures of bat conservation. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust are leading the way, through the construction of hibernacula on buildings at reserves in the area.

Other stuff!

Several local landowners have requested help from the CWP BI, for example, in assessment of boundary feature willow pollards for bats prior to re-pollarding. Assessments were undertaken for a landowner at Castle



Natterer's Bat, near Cricklade (Aug06)
(Photo: G Harris)

Eaton as well as for English Nature (now Natural England) at North Meadow NNR, near Cricklade, where over 50 old willows were assessed.

With thanks to:

The Cotswold Water Park Society Ranger Team, all of the members of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Bat Groups who have given up so much of their time undertaking surveys in the CWP and the many owners of houses and land where we have undertaken roost visits/surveys/mist netting. Thanks to Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Wildlife Trusts for their support and access to reserves for surveys and bat box projects.

Over 60 volunteers are now listed on the database, many from the local bat groups. Furthermore, over 20 households and 25 landowners are involved in the project at some level.

With thanks to the funders:

- Gloucestershire Naturalist's Society: £953 covering costs of mist nets and bat boxes for two bat box schemes (Railway Line & Whelford Pools).
- Anonymous Funder: £300 plus a Bat Box Duet Detector.
- Lower Mill Estate: £3,174.20 for additional boxes and equipment needed,
- Wiltshire Bat Group: 35 Schwegler bat boxes for Clattinger Farm and Swillbrook Lakes Wiltshire Wildlife Trust Reserves.
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Landscapes for Wildlife Project: £510 for the new bat box scheme in the Braydon Forest.

Fundraising is ongoing to continue to support this project. After the initial, very large, expense of nearly 100 Schwegler bat boxes and other equipment, it is anticipated that future fundraising efforts will take a different direction.

Trying to outline the past two years of bat work in only a few pages will never do justice to everyone's efforts. Once again, a huge thank you to you all. A special thanks to Jenny Ford for her efforts in helping to establish this project.

This is just the beginning.....(GH, December 2006)

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