**BATS 2018** Jenny Harris

Very cold weather in the first quarter of 2018 may have affected the ability of bats to survive hibernation, with unusually high numbers of grounded bats recorded from late January to April; although none of these was found in Rutland. Later in the year I observed that very hot, dry weather appeared to have reduced the number of flying insects, with a possible impact on the survival of newly weaned young but this was not borne out by any increase in the number of grounded juvenile bats in the latter half of the year. During 2018 ten members of the society (in addition to myself) provided bat records and helped with roost or other surveys. These were: Carolyn Baxter, Anthony and Linda Biddle, Ivan and Lorna Burger, David Cole, Charles Gallimore, Marian Markham, Ann Tomlinson and Linda Worrall.

There were no records of bats in flight or grounded during January, February, March, November or December. The first record of the year was of bats emerging from a roost in Wing on 15 April; bats seen emerging from this property were identified and counted on subsequent dates in the summer (see National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) counts, Table 1.). Other unidentified bats recorded during the year were in Barrowden (SK948002) on 14 April; on 26 April at the Volunteer Training Centre, RW (SK883083); and a single bat flying very low over a Langham garden (SK843112) on 24, 25 and 26 April.

**Hibernaculum survey**

Following many years of counting several species at the hibernation site in the old railway tunnel under the A47 at Morcott, access difficulties arose in 2018 which prevented the NBMP surveys from going ahead. The portals at both ends of the tunnel were fenced by the Historic Railways Board, so that the January and February counts had to be abandoned. Efforts by Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group to restore access continued throughout the year.

**Other surveys**

During the year five surveys of local churches were carried out on behalf of Natural England when various works were required: Barrowden, Belton-in-Rutland; Clipsham; Empingham and Whitwell. In June seven roosts of five different species were counted for the NBMP (see Table 1.) Ten incidents of grounded bats of three species were dealt with by JH and another member of the Bat Group. Seven bat boxes were surveyed in Burley Wood and 52 in Barnsdale Wood, the latter as part of the RW bat box scheme run by Joelle Woolley. Leicestershire and Rutland Bat Group (LRBG) carried out a survey with harp traps on the south shore of Hambleton Peninsula on 22 September, where six harp traps were deployed with the help of members from three other Midlands bat groups: Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.

In October Linda Worrall noted that the Wakerley Road Bridge over the R. Welland between Barrowden and Wakerley (SP956997) had re-opened after a 10-week closure for repairs. Since bats had been recorded foraging round the bridge in the past and Daubenton’s bats had also been recorded along the R. Welland, surveys were carried out by the Leicestershire County Council Highways Department’s ecologist. As a result of our historic records, special gaps in the stonework were retained and strengthened as bat roosts during this work.

**Species accounts**

The order of classified records follows Dietz, von Helversen and Nill (2009). *Bats of Britain, Europe and Northwest Africa.* A & C Black, London.

Status, unless otherwise stated, refers to Rutland only.

**Daubenton’s bat** *Myotis daubentonii*

**Status:** Widespread in suitable habitat (rivers, ponds, larger water bodies and streams) but not common.

Bats were foraging over the R. Chater at Sinc Bridge, Aldgate in Ketton (SK982045) and below the Station Road bridge, Ketton (SK982043) on 7 July but considered to be present in smaller numbers than in previous years. During harp trapping by LRBG at Hambleton Wood (SK903070 and SK907066) on 22 September two Daubenton’s were caught: one male and one female. There were no other records.

**Whiskered bat** *Myotis mystacinus*

**Status:** Uncommon, but possibly under-recorded; only one roost known. Occasionally found hibernating in Morcott tunnel.

A roost in Main Street, Seaton (SP899984), formerly known to be a maternity roost of up to 60 bats, was counted as bats emerged on 23 June. Only 10 bats emerged, so this may no longer be a maternity roost. Six whiskered bats were caught during the Hambleton survey on 22 September: two males, four females.

**Natterer’s bat** *Myotis nattereri*

**Status:** Uncommon; two maternity roosts known, both in churches, which are counted for the NBMP.

Roost counts for the NBMP took place at Stoke Dry and Whissendine churches (see Table 1.) in June. Ann Tomlinson and other members of RNHS surveyed Stoke Dry church and discovered additional roosting sites within and external access locations. Theft of lead and the resulting erection of security lighting that may have impacted the emerging and foraging behaviour of the Natterer’s bats were a concern at that time. However, following discussion with local people the light was turned off after only a few weeks and did not seem to have deterred the bats from roosting there. At Whissendine church 39 bats were counted emerging from the maternity roost on 25 June. The continued presence of floodlights that illuminate the church interior may be the reason why this colony has never recovered to its former number of between 70 and 80 breeding females in the early 2000s.

**Noctule bat** *Nyctalus noctula*

**Status:** Widespread but not common. Two roosts found in Burley Wood and Barnsdale Wood in 2016.

The first noctule activity recorded in 2018 was of one or more bats foraging at approximately 10.0pm over Lyndon Road, Manton between Stocks Hill and the A6003 (SK879045 to SK877044) on 14 June. At least two bats were seen foraging on 18 June over Egleton Church (SK875075) and a nearby field, with other bats heard on the south side of the church. Foraging activity continued for at least 45 minutes, with many feeding ‘buzzes’ heard. A noctule was heard briefly as it passed over Braunston-in-Rutland church (SK832066) on 22 June and over Main Street, Seaton (SP899984) on 23 June. Two potential tree roosts were found in Compartment 25 (SK891096) north of the main east-west ride in Burley Wood on 29 September. One tree (Ash) had scratch marks round a hole high in the trunk while a second had a distinctive black stain beneath a hole, again in Ash.

**Common Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

**Status:** Widespread and common, although only two colonies are currently confirmed and counted for the NBMP.

Occasional common pipistrelles were seen and heard passing through my own and neighbouring gardens in Woodland View, Oakham. A few bats were heard foraging at Braunston-in-Rutland, Whissendine and Stoke Dry churches during counts of the soprano pipistrelle and Natterer’s colonies in June. Several bats emerged and others were foraging near Empingham church on 7 August (SK950084). Bats were heard foraging over a garden in Seaton on 23 June, in Ketton in Station Road and Aldgate on 6 July and at Oakham church on 21 July. Two roosts were counted for the NBMP; but it was noted that in Morcott bats were not present at all in 2018. Twenty bats emerged on 9 June at the Wing roost, where bats were present from April throughout the active season. Three grounded bats were recorded during the year (see Table 2.)

**Soprano Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

**Status:** Widespread and common, especially around Rutland Water. Several maternity colonies recorded.

Soprano pipistrelles were heard on bat detectors in my Oakham garden, in Manton (SK879045) on 3 May and in Ketton on 6 July. Two roosts were counted for the NBMP (see Table 1) with a maximum count of 568 bats on 10 June at Braunston-in-Rutland church and 859 at Egleton church on 14 June. The count of only 206 bats at Egleton on 8 June was an unusually low figure for this roost, possibly as a result of the collapse of part of the ceiling inside the church close to where the bats roost. At Braunston work under NE licence to keep bats out of the church interior seemed not to have adversely affected the number of bats using the maternity roost in the south aisle roof. A colony of soprano pipistrelles was counted in Ketton on 3 July (SK984040) with approximately 480 bats present, probably including newly flying juveniles. A new roost was discovered in Station Road, Uppingham, at the Arnold Wills factory, after 16 bats including non-flying juveniles were trapped in the office on 9 and 10 July. Eight of these had died; the remaining bats were returned to the roost and a total of 54 bats was counted emerging on 25 July. In addition to those found at Arnold Wills, a further two grounded soprano pipistrelles were recorded (see Table 2), both male.

The bat boxes in Burley Wood were checked on 18 April (13 bats found) and 11 October when four bats were recorded. (See Fieldfare May 2018 for full details). All the bats found were soprano pipistrelle. Records show that over the year all seven boxes had been used. In box BW2, although no bats were fund in October there was an accumulation of 3cm of droppings, suggesting the bats had roosted there for a good part of the summer. Box BW6, previously unused, contained a mating group of a male in breeding condition and two females (one of which had bred in 2018). The scheme of 52 boxes in Barnsdale Wood (from SK911086) run by Joelle Woolley based at RWNR, contained 38 Sopranos when checked on 11 October. Of these nine were male, six female and a further 13 bats were not examined.

During the harp trapping survey carried out in Hambleton Wood on 22 September, a total of 10 soprano pipistrelles was caught; this was the most numerous of the species caught.

**Pipistrelle species** *Pipistrellus* species

Droppings found in the churches at Whitwell (23 March), Empingham (7 August), Barrowden (24 August) and Clipsham (10 September) were assessed as being those of unspecified pipistrelle bats.

**Nathusius’ Pipistrelle** *Pipistrellus nathusii*

**Status:** Considered to be a nationally rare breeding species. Rare in Rutland; no roosts currently known. Records are all from around Rutland Water.

On 22 September six Nathusius’ pipistrelles were caught in harp traps and ringed for the National Nathusius’ Pipistrelle Project (NNPP) at Hambleton Wood, approximate map references SK903070 and SK 907066. All were male and none had been previously ringed. Of these bats, four were caught early in the evening, around 8.0pm, so were probably close to a roost. The other two were caught at around 12.0am. During the Barnsdale Wood bat box survey on 11 October seven Nathusius’ were found, including three in one box, which may have been a mating cluster. The three males recorded were all in breeding condition, one of them weighing 10.1g, an amazing weight for a pipistrelle. Two bats escaped before they could be handled to determine sex and breeding condition. None of these bats had been ringed before, so what has happened to the 17 bats ringed during the NNPP since 2014?

The table below shows details of roosts thought to be maternity roosts that were counted for the National Bat Monitoring Programme, co-ordinated by the Bat Conservation Trust. Other roosts mentioned in the species accounts as having been counted were not sent to the NBMP.

**Table 1. Summary of roosts counted for the NBMP in June 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Species** | **Date** | **Count** | **Comments** |
| Braunston-in-Rutland church, SK832066 | Soprano pipistrelle | 10 June  22 June | 568  519 | 4 counters  3 counters |
| Egleton church  SK875075 | Soprano pipistrelle | 08 June  18 June | 206  859 | 3 counters; part of ceiling fallen inside church |
| Morcott (house roost)  SK926007 | Common pipistrelle | No counts | N/a | No bats present in 2018 |
| Stoke Dry Church  SP855967 | Natterer’s bat | 13 June  26 June | 11  34 | Emerge from numerous exits |
| Whissendine church  SK833143 | Natterer’s bat | 25 June | 39 | 1 counter |
| Wing (house and outbuildings roost), SK889032 | Brown long-eared | 09 June | 4 |  |
| Wing (house roost) | Common pipistrelle | 09 June | 20 |  |

**Brown Long-eared bat** *Plecotus auritus*

**Status:** Thought to be more common and widespread that current records show.

One roost was counted for the NBMP (see table 1). Droppings were first seen in April at the Wing roost but the low number of bats emerging from the roost in June suggested this was not a maternity roost in 2018. Droppings found in Braunston-in-Rutland church porch were assessed to be those of long-eared bats and several bats emerged from the doorway and under the eaves well after sunset. Some of the droppings at Whitwell, Clipsham and Empingham churches were identified as probably those of long-eared bats. From August onwards four brown long-eared bats were found grounded (see Table 2) all of them dehydrated and of low weight.

**Table 2. Summary of bats found grounded in Rutland, 2018**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Species, details** | **Location** | **Outcome** | **Comments** |
| 31.5 | Soprano pipistrelle  Adult male, weight 3.5g | Edith Weston, SK929054 | Released after care | Dehydrated, starved |
| 09.7, 10.7 | Soprano pipistrelle, 16 juveniles in total | Uppingham, SP869994 | 8 died, 8 returned to roost | Trapped inside office  Roost found |
| 20.7 | Soprano pipistrelle juvenile male, weight 3.2g | Manton, SK883044 | Dead on arrival | Trapped in house, starved/dehydrated |
| 21.7 | Common pipistrelle, male juvenile, weight 3.7g | Oakham SK861087 | Released after care | Found inside office, dehydrated |
| 08.8 | Brown long-eared bat, male juvenile, weight 4.8g | Whitwell SK924088 | Died | Brought in by cat, but also thin/dehydrated |
| 15.8 | Common pipistrelle, male adult, weight 4.4g | Oakham SK858085 | Released after care | Grounded in garden, not injured |
| 20.8 | Common pipistrelle, male adult, weight 3.8g | Barrowden SK950002 | Released after care | Grounded in garden, thin, not injured |
| 04.10 | Brown long-eared bat, male juvenile, weight 6.3g | Hambleton Hall, SK902075 | Over-wintered for release in 2019 | Found indoors, low weight for time of year |
| 08.10 | Brown long-eared, adult male, weight 6.6g | Lyddington SP872975 | Euthanised by Oakham vet | Injured, starving |
| 22.10 | Brown long-eared, adult male, weight 5.1g | Manton SK879039 | Over-wintered for release 2019 | Starved, dehydrated |

It is worth noting that the bats being grounded in 2018 were mostly dehydrated even when there were other causes such as injury, almost certainly as a result of the hot, dry weather over the summer. Even the ingress of 16 juvenile soprano pipistrelles at the Arnold Wills factory is likely to have been because their south-facing roost became too hot and the young experienced heat stress and dehydration. It is also notable that no female bats were grounded in Rutland during the year.



Photo

Lloyd Park removing a bat box for inspection in Burley Wood, September 2018.

Photo © Linda Biddle

Report from:

Jenny Harris