

## Nature Notes

### Bat Survey

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the bat survey, especially Allen at Petstop who distributed survey forms. The enthusiasm and dedication some people had was very encouraging. There were reports of bats throughout the village and I have had several interesting 'phone calls about personal experiences with bats.

Bats were seen throughout Bugbrooke. Many people thought at first that there weren't any bats by them, but once they looked shortly after sunset, they found that there were. Often they were seen for only a short time before disappearing, and it seems that when bats first emerge from their roost, they go to a regular hunting ground for breakfast before going further afield.

As most of the species of bats seen in Bugbrooke feed on very small flying insects such as midges, the brook and the canal are very attractive, and it might explain why people living close but not alongside the water see few or no bats. Daubenton's bat is often seen on the canal flying close to the water scooping up insects from the surface, and Pipistrelles feed and display by the canal bridges.

Brown Long-eared bats are the only species in Bugbrooke that prefer night flying moths for food, and there have been several reports of discarded moth's wings being found under a night roost. When large prey is caught, it is taken somewhere where they can eat the succulent body, leaving the wings behind. Often, they leave dropping there too.

Noctule bats were seen flying high and straight at the cricket ground by the brook. The sightings were confirmed with a bat detector which registered their characteristic low frequency of 25 MHz.

Where bats have regularly roosted in a house, they often return to a different part of the house in the morning. One house owner explains this as a result of the wind direction changing, but she says too that there have been fewer bats this year than previously, and this seems a common perception. It is unlikely that it results from the harsh winter as cold conditions are more favourable for hibernation. In warmer winters bats waste energy by looking for food when there isn't any. Other factors such as the use of insecticide and the loss of habitat may explain the change. With increasing house building in the village, loss of feeding grounds will be detrimental to bats as well as other wildlife. Phil Richardson, the bat recorder for the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, is very concerned about this and warns that there is no room for complacency. Although Bugbrooke may seem "a very batty place", a bat seen in West End may be the same one seen in Chipsey Avenue, so numbers may not be as great as it appears.

Another 'phone call was about a grounded bat that died shortly afterwards. The Bat Conservation Trust says that a grounded bat in daylight hours is normally "in trouble", but they advise that you should put it in a cardboard box with air holes and a small cloth for it to hide beneath with a bottle cap of water. Then call the helpline for a local bat rehabilitator to come and assess the situation. The number is available on their website, or from me.

A map of Bugbrooke bat distribution may be seen at Petstop or online at [www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes/batsurvey](http://www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes/batsurvey).

Recent sightings: An Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar was found in a hanging basket containing a fuschia at the beginning of August by Christopher Merry in Chipsey Avenue. It was about 3 inches long and as thick as his little finger, with prominent eye-spots. They are not particularly unusual, but it is rare to see them so late in the year.

The Swifts left early this year, and were all gone by the beginning of August. The Swallows and House Martins were already congregating on the electricity wires ready for migration by the 19<sup>th</sup> August. Stan Clarke thinks there were far more this year than have been seen for years.