



Bat crime

National wildlife crime priority Delivery group newsletter.

Newsletter number 2

November 2015

This is the second bat crime newsletter produced by the UK bat wildlife crime priority delivery group (pdg). We intend to bring you news as demand dictates with this edition being produced in light of a number of recent convictions. Other information is included that we hope you will find to be of interest. No confidential information will be included in this newsletter; it can therefore be freely circulated.

Who are the bat crime-priority delivery group?

The pdg meets twice a year, invariably, at Natural England's offices in Cambridge, is chaired by the Police with BCT providing secretariat services. Membership at present comprises of the Police, representatives of Natural England (NE), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Northern Ireland's Department of Environment (NIDOE). The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) and the Chartered Institute of Environment and Ecological Management (CIEEM) are also members. Our work is shaped by our objective;

To reduce bat crime by working with key stakeholders to raise awareness of responsibilities and criminal offences against bats, promoting a preventative approach and improving the submission of

intelligence and standards of investigation relating to bats across the UK.

If you would like more information regarding the work of the pdg or are interested in contributing to the work of the group please contact Pete Charleston at BCT. (pcharleston@bats.org.uk)

Extent of bat crime.

Bat crime 2014 is out! In 2014, 159 allegations of bat crime were referred to the Police. A 30% increase on 2013 and a significant increase over any previous year.

During the year forty-one police forces are known to have undertaken investigations into Police crime. Ten referrals were made to both the Metropolitan Police and Police Scotland, eight were made to Devon and Cornwall Police, and seven to Essex Police, seven other forces each had 6 referrals.

Analysis of case disposals reveals that criminal offending was identified in 16% of referrals. Batcrime 2014 can be found at;

http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/bat_crime_investigations.html

Recent convictions.

West Mercia Police

On Wednesday 29th July 2015 Mr Stephen Donald Taylor B26/05/60 of Berrow Green Road, Martley, Worcestershire, appeared before Redditch Magistrates Court where he pleaded guilty to unlawfully destroying the resting place of European Protected Species (a bat roost). The facts of the case were that in 2014 Mr Taylor purchased a property with a view to improving it and then using it as his place of residence. To support his planning application a bat survey was undertaken by a consultant ecologist, which identified roosts by solitary common and soprano pipistrelles. The report referred to the need to obtain a licence from Natural England before undertaking work that would impact on the roosts.

Despite the advice contained in the report Mr Taylor during the autumn of 2014 stripped the roof of the house, and work that destroyed the roosts. In his defence it was said that Mr Taylor was confused about the licensing process and had unsuccessfully sought advice from a number of sources as to whether he could lawfully strip the roof. The court was also told that since being reported for the offence Mr Taylor had provided mitigation far beyond what might have required as a condition of any licence. There was general acceptance that the destroyed roosts had not been used either as a maternity nor a hibernation roost and that the offence had in fact had minimal ecological impact.

The magistrates in sentencing Mr Taylor said that they accepted that Mr Taylor may have been confused about the licensing requirements but nevertheless the onus was on him to do things properly. Mr Taylor was fined £2300 with other further costs totalling £270. In imposing sentence the magistrates made the point that the fine was initially set at £3500 but had been reduced in order to take account of Mr Taylors guilty plea entered at the first opportunity.

Metropolitan Police

On Thursday 17th September 2015 City and Westminster Developments of Aston Mews, 103 Kilburn Lane, London W10 4AN appeared at Hendon magistrates Court where they pleaded guilty to an offence of destroying bat roosts at Great North Way, Barnet.

The developers in this case, in order to develop land wished to demolish a number of buildings. Bat surveys were undertaken with roosts being identified in three of the four buildings involved. Despite being made aware of the roosts on August 19th 2014 demolition of one of the buildings took place destroying a common pipistrelle roost. A fine of £4500 was imposed along with a £450 victim surcharge and £85 costs.

Staffordshire Police

On Friday 18th September 2015 Mr Timothy Bull of Mosley Mews, Rolleston on Dove appeared at Burton upon Trent Magistrates Court where he pleaded guilt to an offence of destroying common pipistrelle and brown long eared bat roosts at Beech Lane, Stretton, Burton upon Trent.

In 2014 Mr Bull applied for planning permission to develop a property, a bat survey was undertaken and revealed the presence of roosts used by 3 common pipistrelle and one brown long eared bat. Initially Mr Bull engaged with his ecological consultant with a licence application being submitted to Natural England. However Mr Bull destroyed the roosts before any licence was issued. He was fined £1500 with a victim surcharge of £120 and costs of £85.

The priority delivery group welcomes these convictions, noting that the fines that were imposed have substantially raised the average level of sanction for such offences. We believe that this has much to do with the use of conservation impact statements, specialist CPS wildlife crime prosecutors and investigators being trained wildlife crime officers. This has been the first recorded conviction for bat offences in each of the three police forces. The bat priority delivery group would like to thank all those involved in the investigation and prosecution of these cases.

Other cases of interest.

In April 2014 a developer and his company were convicted of destroying a bat roost in a building in Matlock. In a ground-breaking move the case was referred to the Crown Court in order that an order under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 could be considered. Before the Crown Court could consider the case the defendants lodged an appeal against conviction. That appeal has still to be heard and is now listed to be heard by Nottingham Crown Court during March 2016. Should the original conviction be upheld then consideration would be given at a later date to a proceeds of crime order.

Elsewhere.

Use of social media.

In June of this year Andy Long (plan owner and Essex Police wildlife crime officer) used Twitter to raise awareness of bat crime. Organisations represented on the group re-tweeted the messages with fantastic results. During the week Andy tweeted 34 messages, which were re-tweeted 296 times. The messages

reached a potential audience of millions of users. Using Twitter Analytics it can now be shown that these messages were actually seen 72,200 times over this 7 day period. This is the amount of times the message was generated on a mobile device, tablet or computer in front of the user.

Natural England EPS newsletter

In August 2015 Natural England published their latest EPS newsletter. This edition contains information relating to low impact class licences and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wildlife-licences-european-protected-species-newsletters>

Response for Nature

This report is a follow up to the State of nature Report published in 2013 highlighting significant declines in UK wildlife. BCT along with 25 other nature conservation organisations had involvement in production of the report, which calls for government to play their part in a plan for nature recovery. The report can be accessed at:

http://www.bats.org.uk/news.php/289/launch_of_the_aoresponse_for_naturea_report

BCT Helpline – change of number.

Due to a legislative change the National Bat Helpline phone number is changing from 0845 1300 228 to 0345 1300 228. The main part of the number is exactly the same; just the prefix has changed. Callers should now dial 0345 1300 228 instead of 0845 1300 228. So, it's just the '8' in '0845', which has changed. Both numbers will be working simultaneously for many months and the service will remain the same.

Bat Habitats Regulation Bill

This Bill was initially introduced into the House of Commons in January 2015 and subsequently to the House of Lords where it was first read on 11th June. A general debate on the proposals is yet to be scheduled. The summary of the Bill reads

A Bill to make provision to enhance the protection available for bat habitats in the non-built environment and to limit the protection for bat habitats in the built environment where the presence of bats has a significant adverse impact upon the users of buildings.

More information on the Bill can be found at

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/bathabitatsregulation.h>

An introduction to Pipistrelle bats.

Analysis of crime reports has revealed the different species of bats affected by operations that have attracted Police interest. We will, in each newsletter, feature one such species.

Pipistrelles are not only the commonest and most widespread of all British bat species but are also the species most commonly identified in Police investigations. There are two very similar species, common pipistrelle and

soprano pipistrelle. Pipistrelles are the bats that you are most likely to see. They appear fast and jerky in flight as they dodge about pursuing small insects, which the bats catch and eat, on the wing. A single pipistrelle can consume up to 3,000 insects in one night!

Vital statistics

Head & body length: 35mm - 45mm

Forearm length: 30mm - 35mm

Wingspan: 200mm-235mm

Weight: 3g - 8g

Colour: Medium to dark brown. Face and around the eyes usually dark.

General

The two commonest pipistrelle species found in the UK, the common and soprano pipistrelle, were only identified as separate species in the 1990s. The two species look very similar and often the easiest way to tell them apart is from the frequency of their echolocation calls.

Habitats

Common pipistrelles feed in a wide range of habitats comprising woodland, hedgerows, grassland, and farmland, suburban and also urban areas. They generally emerge from their roost around 20 minutes after sunset and fly 2-10m above ground level searching for their insect prey, which they catch and eat on the wing by 'aerial hawking'. Summer roosts of both common and soprano pipistrelles are usually found in crevices around the outside of often newer buildings, such as behind hanging tiles, soffit and barge or eaves boarding, between roofing felt and roof tiles or in cavity walls. This species also roosts in tree holes and crevices, and also in bat boxes. Summer roosts support smaller colonies than soprano pipistrelles, with numbers averaging around 75 bats. Common pipistrelle maternity colonies are more likely to move between roost sites than those of soprano pipistrelles. In winter common pipistrelles are found singly or in small numbers in crevices of buildings and trees, and also in bat boxes. They are often found in relatively exposed locations and rarely underground.

Diet

Feeds mainly on a wide range of small flies as well as the aquatic midges and mosquitos.

Reproduction & life cycle

During the summer, females form maternity colonies where they give birth to a single young in June or early July. For three or four weeks the young are fed solely on their mother's milk. After about four weeks the young are able to fly and at six weeks they are able to forage for themselves. Male bats usually roost singly or in small groups through the summer months. During the main mating period from July to early September, males defend individual territories as mating roosts, attracting females by making repeated 'song flights' around their roost and singing social calls.

Echolocation

Sounds produced by common pipistrelles are above the range of human hearing with the exception of social calls that may be heard by children and some adults with good hearing. With a bat detector (heterodyne) the echolocation calls can be picked up between about 45 and 70kHz.

The calls sound like a series of clicks towards the top of this range, turning into 'wetter' slaps with the deepest sounding slap being heard at about 45kHz, the peak intensity of the call.

Distribution & conservation

The common pipistrelle is widely distributed across the UK and its distribution appears to extend further north than that of soprano pipistrelle. Along with the common pipistrelle it is one of Britain's commonest bat species. Populations of pipistrelles have declined dramatically in the last few decades. This is at least partly as a result of modern agricultural practices, although common pipistrelle populations have started showing signs of recovery in recent years. Their reliance on buildings for roosting makes them vulnerable to building renovations, exclusion and toxic remedial timber treatment chemicals.

Information taken from the BCT website

http://www.bats.org.uk/publications_detail.php/212/species_information_sheet_pipistrelles

Bats and Pieces from the Web!

- Many bats hate long commutes: here's how to help them – this article, by Elisa Fuentes-Montemayor, has recently been published in the Conversation and is available at: <https://theconversation.com/many-bats-hate-long-commutes-heres-how-to-help-them-47434>
- Bats, Road and Railways – we are expecting this report, written by Prof. John Altringham and funded by Defra to be published on the Defra website on Monday (19th October). We will share the full link in the next Bat Group Bulletin and via a news update on the BCT website. However, to find the report when it is published next week, go to the Defra website at: <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Location=None&Module=FilterSearchNewLook&Completed=0> and enter the project number (WC1060) in the search box.
- Bats are worth \$3.7 billion to US agriculture. http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/oct/14/bats-worth-37bn-to-us-agriculture-research-california-texas?CMP=share_btn_tw
- New bat survey methods to reduce impact of planning and development. http://www.leeds.ac.uk/news/article/3778/research_points_way_to_more_wildlife-friendly_roads_and_railways
- Nathusius pipistrelle migrates from Latvia to Sussex in 50 days. http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/13888413.Tiny_bat_flew_from_Latvia_to_Sussex_in_farthest_recorded_migration/
- Mauritius to cull 18000 native bats <http://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/mauritius-to-cull-18000-native-bats-nearly-40-percent-of-bat-population/>

For more information about how to access journal papers see the BCT website at: http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/accessing_journal_papers.html

Pete Charleston, Investigations Officer, Bat Conservation Trust produced this newsletter on behalf of the bat pdg. Any views expressed are those of the author and may not be the views of any of the members of the pdg or the organisations they represent.

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