

## TEES VALLEY

### BAT NEWS

#### No 11. July 2008

My standard comment with bats is that they keep on surprising me but I don't think I've heard anything quite as surprising as a sighting by Ian Forrest at Billingham Beck Country Park. In the middle of the day Ian watched a bat flying up and downstream over a 10yds stretch in a more or less vertical ellipse between 2 and 12 feet above the stream, returning over the same area again and again. It repeated the same pattern at least half a dozen times before heading up into the tree canopy and out of view but could have been doing it for far longer as he came across it as he crossed a footbridge. As if this wasn't remarkable enough, the bat was carrying a large object, almost as large as itself. Completing the triumvirate of weirdness, a kingfisher flying upstream had to dive under the water to avoid the bat as it continued its circling. The kingfisher then came back downstream and again had to dive out of the way and then finally flew back upstream this time giving the bat a wider berth. Ian wasn't sure whether the bat was mobbing the kingfisher or their near mid-air collisions were just co-incident. He managed to get a blurry photo of the bat complete with "luggage". From his description of the bat as appearing larger than the kingfisher and the colour of the bat on the photo, it seems as if the bat can only have been a Noctule. This is the first record of Noctule for Billingham Beck and as if just to complete the litany of abnormal bat behaviour, Noctules are the swifts of the bat world flying high and fast and aren't noted for tight circles and flying among foliage. The bulge by the way is possibly a baby bat as mother bats will sometimes transport their young between roosts however this is almost as big as the adult bat and at this time of year young bats are usually flying for themselves. Perhaps there just isn't a rational explanation for this one!



Although not coming anywhere near the above account I had my best bat watching experience ever in May this year when I had a wander over to Drinkfield Marsh in Darlington to see if the Noctules were back this year. Straight away there was a Noctule flying fairly low over the school playing field; I'd forgotten how big they are! I then saw another and another, until I realised that I was looking at a cluster of them in the distance. At one point I managed to count 15 individual Noctules in view but given the topography, the high hedges and the speed they move I reckon that there could easily have been 20 or more of them. This is almost twice the previous highest count and about 4-5 times the usual count. It is also the first time I can say that I have seen something with the appearance of a flock (or whatever the collective noun for flying bats is) rather than a few individual bats. The numbers of Common Pipistrelles flying along the hedges there were also at an all time high, probably into double figures and I only covered 2/3 of the site. By co-incidence Phil Roxby the Countryside Officer for Darlington Council had been leading a guided walk at Drinkfield that evening during which he'd been telling the participants about the Noctules but they hadn't seen any. The guided walk had ended just after 9pm and I'd turned up at 9.20pm.

A count of a bat roost near the Burn Valley Gardens in Hartlepool has revealed a maternity roost of 132 Common Pipistrelle bats. This was before the young were flying so the eventual number before the colony disperses could be significantly higher and perhaps close to 200. This makes it the largest known colony in Hartlepool beating the previous record of 94 adult Pipistrelles from a roost in Elwick. It isn't quite the largest colony in Cleveland as there are a couple of records of roosts of c150 adult Common Pipistrelles from the Yarm area. These are all large colonies by Common Pipistrelle standards but are they the largest? Please let me know if you know of a bigger roost (or indeed any roost)

There have been another two records of Soprano Pipistrelles, the third and fourth records for Cleveland. The third record and technically the first roost was a single bat found roosting in the Hart to Haswell tunnel, bringing the number of bat species recorded roosting there to five. This is close to Middlethorpe Farm where the first Soprano Pipistrelle bat was recorded flying; indeed it might even be the same bat. Soprano Pipistrelle was also recorded around the Burn Valley Gardens in Hartlepool. So far all four Cleveland records are from Hartlepool but as more bat surveys start to use sonogram analysis to identify bats it is likely that further records of Soprano Pipistrelles will come to light. Soprano Pipistrelles typically roost in larger numbers than Common Pipistrelles so, who knows, the largest Cleveland roost may one day prove to be Soprano Pipistrelle.

Impossible though I thought it would be there has recently been an even more bizarre bat story that of Ian Forrest's. A young lady has found a bat roosting in her bra. More specifically she found it in the bra which she had been wearing for some 5 hours! She initially thought the movement was her mobile phone vibrating but eventually she reached in and pulled out a bat. Now technically I'm not sure that she should have done that as the bra could be classed as a bat roost and should only be disturbed by a licenced bat worker. I must check that my licence is up to date!

## Events

Sat 16<sup>th</sup> August, c 8.30pm **Spion Kop Cemetery, Hartlepool**

This event will mainly concentrate on moth trapping but will include listening for bats with the detectors. Further details Tel: 01429 853325

Sat 16<sup>th</sup> August, 8.30pm, **Barnard Castle, meet outside Post Office on Horse Market**

Usually a great spot for bats with at least three species. Durham County Council walk so there will be a small charge.

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 29<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> Sept – 8.30-10.30pm **West Park, Darlington**

Another new bat walk site but there is a big Common Pipistrelle roost nearby and Noctules have been recorded foraging across the road. Further details Tel: 01325 388628

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> 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 pond. Further details Tel: 01642 360376

## Contacts:

**Durham Bat Group:** Noel Jackson; Tel: 01207 560684; e-mail [noelbats@onetel.com](mailto:noelbats@onetel.com)

**North Yorkshire Bat Group:** John Drewett; Tel: 01325 718133; e-mail [johndrewett@btinternet.com](mailto:johndrewett@btinternet.com)

**National Bat Helpline:** Tel: 0845 1300 228 or [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)

**Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership:** Sue Antrobus; Tel: 01287 636382; e-mail:

[santrobus@teeswildlife.org](mailto:santrobus@teeswildlife.org); [www.teeswildlife.org/bio.htm](http://www.teeswildlife.org/bio.htm)

**Newsletter:** Ian Bond; Tel: 01429 523431 or e-mail [ian.bond@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:ian.bond@hartlepool.gov.uk)