

BATS (CHIROPTERA) - 2002

Colin R. Pope

A total of 14 confirmed species were recorded in 2002. This is the highest number ever in one year. It reflects our increasing understanding of the Island's bat fauna resulting from targetted monitoring projects and a high level of interaction with the public through the Bat Hospital, run by Graham and Donna Street. Two nationally important finds, reported below, were the discovery of a nursery roost of Bechstein's Bats and the third British record of Kuhl's Pipistrelle. The Bat Hospital dealt with 92 bats during the year. This is a lower figure than in 2001 (116 bats) and is probably a reasonable reflection of generally better weather conditions resulting in fewer grounded bats.

Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*)

Not found in any of the traditional haunts at Carisbrooke Castle on 22 June (C&JP). It was a great surprise to find an individual in the Shide tunnel hibernaculum on 1 February (CP, JG, CF), as this species had not been recorded from here. Evidence from bat droppings suggested that it may make regular use of this site during the autumn and winter.

Daubenton's Bat (*M. daubentonii*)

Only one bat was dealt with by the Bat Hospital this year, representing just 1% of their bats (GS). Other records by bat detector.

Whiskered Bat (*Myotis mystacinus*)

One house roost of Whiskered Bats was monitored (SC). A Whiskered Bat was caught in a mist net set across a ride in Briddlesford Copse on 8 August (IDW & JR). Four individuals were treated at the bat hospital during the year: singles from Bonchurch and Newport and two from Westridge at Ryde (GS). There were no confirmed Brandt's Bat records.

Natterer's Bat (*M. nattereri*)

One individual in the Shide tunnel hibernaculum on 1 February (CP, CF, JG). None received by the bat hospital.

Bechstein's Bat (*M. bechsteinii*)

A week-long survey of Briddlesford Copses between 24 and 29 June by IDW and JR proved to be extremely successful. They set up six mist nets across rides in the woods and trapped two female Bechstein's Bats on the first evening; one of these was lactating. The bats were radio tagged and tracked back at dawn to a cavity some 10 metres above the ground in an ash tree along the north-west edge of one wood. The following evening (25 June), 57 bats emerged from this cavity around dusk. Four of these were netted and they were all female Bechstein's. They all flew into the wood rather than across open ground and subsequently, tagged individuals were detected feeding in shaded rides in various parts of the complex of woods, up to 1.5km from the roost site. On 26 June, 56 bats were counted out from the roost site, on 28 June, 36 were counted and on 11 July, all had vacated the roost. This was an important discovery. Only a handful of Bechstein's nursery roosts have been identified in this country. Of additional interest was that this roost site was shared with Noctule Bats (see below).

Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*)

The Bechstein's nursery roost cavity in Briddlesford Copse (see above) was shared by Noctules. Emergence counts were twelve on 24 June; seven on 26 June; six on 28 June; eleven on 11 July; and

none on 15 August (C&JP). A Noctule flew into the open cab of a lorry at North Fairlee on 2 October whilst the driver was returning to the Fishbourne ferry! Another individual, from Bembridge, was treated by the bat hospital earlier in the year (GS).

Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*)

Eight house roosts were monitored this year. The highest count was 40, from Meadow Cottage, Adgestone (JR) and the mean maximum count from all roosts was 17. Three were treated by the bat hospital, individuals from Ryde, Alverstone and Newtown (GS).

Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus* / *P. pygmaeus*)

Thirty-seven house roosts were monitored this year. The highest count was 247 on 20 June from a roost at Cranmore. This count, from the largest known bat roost on the Island, was slightly lower than in 2001. Counts exceeding 100 pipistrelles were made from an additional four roosts, but the mean maximum count from all recorded roosts was 58. The bat hospital dealt with 68 pipistrelles of both species during the year.

Nathusius' Pipistrelle (*P. nathusii*)

A female, grounded at The White Mouse at Chale on 13 October, was subsequently released (GS). Although there is some evidence of breeding in this country, this is generally regarded as a rare migrant species. The location and time of year suggest that this individual falls into the latter category.

Kuhl's Pipistrelle (*P. kuhli*)

A female pipistrelle grounded in a garden at Westhill Road, Ryde on 6 August (GS) did not look like a common Pipistrelle Bat. It was larger, with a distinctive dark brown colour on the back. On further examination, GS identified it as a Kuhl's Pipistrelle, a very rare migrant bat and C&JP also came to the same conclusion. The record was subsequently accepted by Tony Hutson and will be included in the forthcoming Handbook of European Bats, Handbuch der Säugetiere Europas (in press). It is a rather elusive species but was confirmed by detailed measurements, recording of its echo location call and a careful examination of the dentition (see *Figure 1*). The bat was eventually released and was detected feeding regularly in the garden on subsequent evenings. There have only been two previous records of it arriving unaided in this country, at St Blazey in Cornwall in 1994 and on St Leonard's seafront, East Sussex in 1995.

There is some evidence that on the Continent, this species is expanding its range. It was first recorded in Normandy in 1983 and in Jersey in 1991. It is an easily overlooked species and it may be that it is now extending its range into southern England.

Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*)

Four house roosts were monitored this year. The maximum count, from a house at Brook Hill, was 21. Most counts were between 5 and 10, but this is a particularly difficult species to count as most individuals emerge unobtrusively after dark. A particularly large roost at Thorness Farm had at least fifty individuals in a cluster in the roof on 11 September (CF, CP). The owner said that the numbers were down to only about one quarter of that seen several years ago before the property was re-roofed! Five individuals were caught by mist nets in rides in Briddlesford Copses on 27 June (IDW & JR). An adult male grounded at the Needles Battery on 28 August may have been migrating (CP). The bat hospital dealt with seven individuals from Whippingham, Mottistone, Haylands near Ryde, Thorness Bay, Arreton, Brading and Wootton.

Grey Long-eared Bat (*P. austriacus*)

Only one individual seen at the traditional summer roost site at Niton on 22 June (C&JP). One grounded

and in poor condition at New Road, Brightstone on 17 October (GS). Also, individuals from Brading, Westridge near Ryde, Havenstreet and Albany Prison were dealt with by the bat hospital. These records suggest that this species is less rare than was formerly believed on the Island, although currently few roost sites are known.

Barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*)

A male was caught in a mist net placed across a ride in Briddlesford Copse on 27 June (IDW & JR). It was radio-tagged and tracked moving through the woods on the following two evenings, but no roost site was located. This is the second successive year that this rare bat has been caught in Briddlesford Copse. Elsewhere in the country, a better understanding of their habitats and improved methods of location have led to the conclusion that Barbastelles are less rare than once thought.

Acknowledgements

Sheila Cooper, Ian Davidson-Watts, Carol Flux, Jill Green, Colin & Jillie Pope, John Ralph, Jo Ramsay, Graham & Donna Streets.

Author: C.R.Pope, 14 High Park Rd., Ryde, I.W. PO33 1BP

Fig. 1 Kuhl's Pipistrelle. This photograph shows the dentition on the left upper jaw. The distinctive feature is a single clear incisor tooth (just visible in front of the obvious canine tooth) with a single point.



