

**BATS (CHIROPTERA) - 2003**

**Colin R. Pope**

A commendable total of thirteen confirmed species were recorded in 2003, as a result of continued targeted monitoring projects and the ongoing high level of interaction with the public through the bat hospital, run by Graham and Donna Street. 2003 saw the first confirmed record of Brandt's Bat, a resident species, bringing the total of recorded species since 1981, when the Bat Group was first established, to sixteen. The Bat Hospital dealt with 114 bats during the year. This is a higher figure than in 2003 (92 bats) but similar to that of 2002. As is to be expected, the overwhelming number of bats dealt with were Pipistrelles (55 male and 34 female pipistrelles).

Mist netting in Briddlesford Great Wood by Ian Davidson-Watts on 25 June yielded a male 55kHz Pipistrelle (*P. pygmaeus*), a female 45 kHz Pipistrelle (*P. pipistellus*) and a female Brown Long-eared Bat in harp traps, all trapped around 2 a.m. The following evening, trapping in nearby Dunnage Copse was more profitable with three Bechstein's Bats, 2 Brandt's Bats, a Whiskered Bat and a Pipistrelle, all caught after midnight. The bats were attracted to nets by a device called a 'squeaker' which emits high frequency bat distress calls. Mist netting was also carried out in Wroxall Copse and both rare woodland bats, Bechstein's and Barbastelle, were caught. The information gained from these trapping sessions was invaluable and confirms the great importance of Island woods for rare bat species.

Erika Dalberg investigated morning swarming of Brown and Grey Long-eared Bats at roost sites on the Island and in Hampshire, recording and analysing their social calls. Interestingly, she found that more accurate and higher counts were achieved during dawn counts (when bats are returning to the roost and light conditions are better) than during evening emergence counts.

**Systematic List**

Greater Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*)

One recorded from the usual Undercliff hibernaculum on 12 January, but not present on 21 December (C&JP).

Daubenton's Bat (*M. daubentonii*)

A male was collected from a shop front at Upper Pyle Street, Newport in June and was subsequently released (GS).

For the first time ever, none were detected at the Eight Bells pond at Carisbrooke when visited by the bat group on 26 August, and subsequently. This has proved a highly reliable site in the past. It is believed that water quality in the mill pond has deteriorated and this may have reduced the insect food supply making it less attractive to feeding bats.

Whiskered Bat (*Myotis mystacinus*)

A maximum of 46 were counted from a long-established house roost in Pallance Road, Northwood on 16 June (SC). One was caught in a mist net in Dunnage Copse, on the Briddlesford estate, on the night of 26 June (IDW).

Seven confirmed Whiskered Bats were treated at the Bat Hospital during the year: single males from Alverstone Garden Village, Binstead and Yaverland; and single females from Stag Lane outside Newport, Watergate Road in Newport, and Freshwater. Also, an undetermined Whiskered/ Brandt's male was brought in from Totland. (GS)

Brandt's Bat (*M. brandti*)

Two females were caught in mist nets in Dunnage Copse, on the Briddlesford estate, on the night of 26 June (IDW, **Fig. 1**). One of these was lactating, indicating that the roost must be nearby. These are the first confirmed Island records of this species, which is very similar to the Whiskered Bat.

Natterer's Bat (*M. nattereri*)

One individual in the Shide tunnel hibernaculum on 31 January (CP) and on 22 December (C&JP, CF, NB). The Bat Hospital received a female from Whitwell and a male and a female from two different locations in Freshwater (GS) during the summer.

Bechstein's Bat (*M. bechsteinii*)

The nursery roost cavity in an ash tree in Briddlesford Copse, discovered in 2002 (see *Proc. Isle Wight nat. Hist. archaeol. Soc.* **19** (pub 2003): 51-53), was monitored by the bat group in 2003. This proved difficult due to the late emergence of the bats and to the obscuring foliage. However, it appeared that the roost was used intermittently throughout the season (May to September), with a maximum of 25 counted, considerably fewer than in 2002 (J&DG).

Three, all males but different individuals, were caught in mist nets in Dunnage Copse, on the Briddlesford estate, on the night of 26 June (IDW). One of these was radio-tagged. It spent the rest of the night and the following day in an oak tree in the wood but the following night had moved to a different oak tree at the eastern edge of Dunnage Copse.

Mist netting in Wroxall Copse, an isolated woodland along the northern edge of the Ventnor downs, yielded an individual male Bechstein's in the small hours on 27 June (IDW) and 20 September (IDW, JR, **Fig. 2**), attracted by a 'squeaker' (IDW). This was a surprise because it is believed that this species requires woodland complexes with strong hedgerow linkages. This evidence, together with the regular incidences of grounded bats, implies that this species is probably rather widespread on the Island.

A grounded female was collected from Sibden Hill, Shanklin in late July (D&GS), which, although surviving has not recovered sufficiently to be released. In mid August, a young grounded female was found at Victoria Avenue, Shanklin, just 0.25 km to the southwest of Sibden Hill (D&GS). Another individual, a male, was collected from Norton Green, Yarmouth, on 10 September. It survived but was too badly injured to be released (GS). A fourth individual, a female, was collected from inside a flat above a shop in School Green Road, Freshwater (GS), an unexpected location for a tree dwelling bat.

Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*)

The Bechstein's nursery roost cavity in an ash tree in Briddlesford Copse which was monitored by the bat group in 2003, was shared by Noctule bats. Noctules moved in during early June, reaching a peak of 17 on 17 July (C&JP).

Serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*)

Up to five Serotines were seen in the traditional Grey Long-eared roost site at Niton for the first time ever but they were only present for a few days in the roof during July (ED).

Serotines were also unreliable in the traditional roost site at Havenstreet station, being present for a time in June and then absent until late August for no apparent reason (C&JP).

A distinctively ginger-coloured individual was grounded at Wheeler's Bay, Ventnor, in September, not near an obvious roost site (GS). It was returned to a bat box erected in the vicinity. A further four individuals were dealt with by the bat hospital.

Six roosts were monitored this year. The highest count was, as usual, from Meadow Cottage, Adgestone (JR), 35 on 10<sup>th</sup> June. Tragically, it is believed that the traditional breeding roost site at The Grange, Alverstone, has been lost as a result of building works. This is a site had been monitored regularly since 1987 but observations in 2003 suggest that the bats were not in occupation at this time.

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

Pipistrelles are rarely found hibernating. However, this year there was a remarkable find of seven Pipistrelles in wall crevices of an old, redundant thatched barn at Ford Farm, Whitwell on 19 February (GS, KD), together with a Long-eared Bat. They were all using crevices more than 2 metres above ground level. This is the highest count of hibernating bats from any site on the Island and was unexpected. It indicates the importance that some old, derelict farm buildings may have for hibernating bats. This particular barn also has a breeding pair of Barn Owls although they would be using the building at a different time of year to the bats.

Thirty-two house roosts were monitored this year. High counts were recorded from roosts at Cranmore (199 on 9<sup>th</sup> June); Marks Corner (152 on 16<sup>th</sup> June) and Binstead (142 on 24<sup>th</sup> June).

**(Kuhl's Pipistrelle (*P. kuhli*)**

Recorded for the first time in 2002 from a garden at Westhill Road, Ryde (see *Proc. Isle Wight nat. Hist. archaeol. Soc.* **19** (pub 2003): 51-53). In 2003, one or two bats were detected feeding regularly in the garden where the Kuhl's Pipistrelle was found last year. They exhibited a similar distinctive flight pattern to the individual released here last year but when the calls were analysed on frequency division, they did not demonstrate a distinctive pattern. (C&JP). )

**Brown Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*)**

Two caught in mist nets in Wroxall Copse on 20 September (IDW, JR). See also under Pipistrelle above.

Four roosts were monitored this year. The maximum count, again from a house at Brook Hill, was 16 on 14<sup>th</sup> June (MJ).

The bat hospital dealt with three individuals from Calbourne, Brading and Godshill.

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

The long-established roost site at Niton was investigated in some detail this year by a student (ED). Erika discovered that, although bats are difficult to observe leaving the roost site in the late evenings, they are much more reliable at dawn when they return to the roost in early light and swarm before entering the roost. Numbers at dawn swarming, around a dozen although impossible to count accurately, are higher than those seen emerging after dusk or those counted in the roof space (ED, JP).

A dead female was found at Youngwoods Farm, Porchfield, in early May (SY). This is a 'new' sites but other individuals found in the Porchfield area may have originated from this roost site.

A young male was collected from the Old Rectory, Chale in August (GS). A grounded male collected from a cottage at Carpenter's, St Helen's, on 16 February, was the same individual treated by the bat hospital from the same site in 2002 when it was treated for an amputated foot (G&DS).

**Barbastelle (*Barbastella barbastellus*)**

A male was caught in a mist net in Wroxall Copse on the night of 20 September, around midnight (IDW, JR, **Fig. 3**).

**Acknowledgements**

Neil Brown, Sheila Cooper, Erika Dalberg, Ian Davidson-Watts, Karl Dyson, Carol Flux, Jill& Dave Green, Margaret Jackson, Colin & Jillie Pope, John Ralph, Jo Ramsay, Graham & Donna Streets, Simon Young.

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**Fig 1**

A female Brandt's Bat, mist netted at Briddlesford. The first confirmed Island record.

*Photograph by  
Ian Davidson-Watts*



**Fig 2**

A male Bechstein's Bat caught in a mist net at Wroxall Copse, Ventnor.

*Photograph by  
Ian Davidson-Watts*



**Fig 3**

A male Barbastelle Bat mist netted in Wroxall Copse, Ventnor.

*Photograph by  
Ian Davidson-Watts*