

## BECHSTEIN'S BAT IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Oliver Frazer

At the time when Morey's *Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight* was published in 1909, Percy Wadham was not able to include Bechstein's Bat, *Myotis bechsteini*, in his list of Chiroptera recorded in the Isle of Wight up to that time, which comprised eight other species. However, in 1935, Percy Wadham recorded that *Two of these rare bats were taken by me in 1909, flying over a marshy meadow between Westmill and Priory Farm, Carisbrooke. One, a female, was obtained in the month of July; the other, a male, early in August.* It was not until the latter part of that year that he was able to get the identifications verified.

Writing in connection with this record J.E. Harting (1909), one of the foremost authorities on bats at that time, stated:

*The instances in which it [Bechstein's Bat] has been met with and recognised in this country are so few in number that they may be easily mentioned. The first British examples, preserved in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, were taken many years ago in the New Forest, where subsequently, in July 1886, Mr. E.W. Blagg captured two others out of a dozen or more which he found in the deserted hole of a woodpecker. When this announcement was made by him in the Zoologist for 1888 (p. 260) an editorial note was appended to his communication to the effect that two examples of Bechstein's bat, taken at Preston, near Brighton, were in the possession of Mr. F. Bond (of Fairfield Avenue, Staines), since deceased; but some years later I had an opportunity of examining them in the company of Mr. J.G. Millais and of comparing them with specimens of Natterer's bat, when it was evident that they were both referable to that species. Mr. Millais himself, however, was fortunate enough to capture a specimen of Bechstein's bat in March, 1901, when visiting a chalk cave on the property of Mr. Heatley Noble at Henley-on-Thames. Of this specimen he gave a description with a figure in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society, June, 1901; and has since published an excellent coloured plate of it in his British Mammals. Until August of the present year no further example of this bat was known to have been met. On Sept. 21 Mr. H.G. Jeffery, the well-known taxidermist, of Newport, Isle of Wight, sent for my inspection a bat which had been captured with another like it in the island, and which was new to him, but which, from published descriptions of this species, he thought might be Bechstein's bat. The rarity of that species, however, and its general resemblance to Natterer's bat, occasioned him some doubt in the matter. On examining the specimen forwarded I found that his surmise was correct. It was undoubtedly Bechstein's bat, and he subsequently informed me that my identification of the species had been confirmed at the Natural History Museum. It only remained to ascertain more about it, when and where captured, and by whom. For this information I was referred to Mr. Percy Wadham, also of Newport, Isle of Wight, who in reply to my inquiry courteously informed me that he had himself captured the two bats in question . . .*



*Plate 1.* Close up of Bechstein's Bat, *Myotis bechsteini*, which emerged from a hole in a pear tree at Lock's Farm, Porchfield, I.W., on 6th June, 1965. *Photograph Barry Angell*

Although a specimen of the Natterer's Bat was recorded from the railway between Newport and Cowes, by the Cement Mills, on October 7th, 1965, by John Stafford (1957), there were no further records of Bechstein's Bat until a dead specimen, thought to be of this species, was found at Northwood by Clive Burland in August, 1981. This was sent to Dr. R.E. Stebbings, at Monks Wood Experimental Station, who confirmed the identification.

Bearing in mind the rarity of this species, the events of 1986 were quite exceptional. On 1st June I was brought a specimen which had been caught by a cat at Newbridge. There was little doubt in my mind that, with ears some 23 mm long, this must be a Bechstein's Bat, so I sent it off to Dr. Stebbings, who again confirmed the identification. On 19th June, an almost identical specimen, also probably injured by a cat, was found freshly killed at Copse Lane, Freshwater. In November I was handed a bat skull, which had been extracted from a Barn Owl pellet, which from certain measurements and arrangements of the teeth seemed to be that of a Bechstein's Bat, but this certainly needed confirmation so I sent it to Dr. Stebbings, who once again kindly confirmed the identification and asked me to obtain more details. On enquiry I found that the pellet from which the skull came was from a resident Barn Owl at Lock's Farm, Porchfield. On discussing this with the farmer, Barry Angell, I described the characteristic features of the Bechstein's Bat and this put him in mind of a bat which emerged from a hole in a pear tree many years ago, in 1965, and of which he took a number of photographs. He promised to look them out and let me have some copies later. These were sent to Dr. Stebbings, who once again was able to confirm '*Bechstein's Bat without any doubt at all*'. One of these photographs is reproduced here (plate 1), the only record of a *live* Bechstein bat that we have, thanks to Barry Angell.

Dr. Stebbings informs me that there are something like 60 records of the Bechstein's Bat, mostly from the southern counties, since records began, so the total of seven records from the Isle of Wight since 1909 is pretty good, and the fact that three of those records were in 1986 is quite remarkable by any standards.

### References

- Harting, J.E. 1909. *The Field*, 20th Nov. 1909.
- Morey, F. (ed.) 1909. *A Guide to the Natural History of the Isle of Wight*. Newport.
- Stafford, J. 1957. Mites found on bat. *Proc. Isle Wight nat. Hist. archaeol. Soc.*, **5**(1) (for 1956): 42.
- Wadham, P. 1935. Notes on the fishes, reptiles, and mammals of the Isle of Wight. *Proc. Isle Wight nat. Hist. archaeol. Soc.*, **2**(5) (for 1934): 395–401.

### Footnote:

Since writing the above paper a further record of the Bechstein's Bat in the Isle of Wight has come to light. On 25th September, 1985, I was called to see an injured bat in the centre of Freshwater (Grid Ref. SZ/337870) by Mrs. Hartley. It had a severely torn wing, but took food readily. Measurements were taken and the bat was photographed. I rang Dr. Hutson for advice on treatment, but the bat had escaped and could not be found. The details of measurements also had been mislaid, but on showing the photographs recently to Dr. Stebbings, he stated that they showed sufficient detail for it to be positively identified as a Bechstein's Bat.