

Swanton Novers Woodland Bat Project Summer Newsletter

Summer 2016

Discovering the connection between natural heritage and cultural influences in Swanton Novers woodland

Earlier in the year, we started a new bat monitoring project in Swanton Novers National Nature Reserve (NNR) an 83 ha ancient woodland not far from Fakenham, Norfolk with a long history of active woodland management dating back to the Domesday Book. Supported and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, this exciting new venture is a collaboration between Natural England and the Bat Conservation Trust and will run until December 2017.

With help from the local community we aim to learn:

- how bats are affected by common woodland management techniques
- how bats use the interior of woodlands which have been actively managed
- how bat activity differs between the understory and the canopy
- and raise awareness about a natural heritage through walks, talks and events

To do this we will be carrying out four fixed route surveys (transects) each month, from April to September covering the whole of Great Wood. Ten static detectors will also be deployed in Great Wood every three weeks in five different locations from April to September. These detectors are fixed to mature trees located close to long term monitoring points and are left to record over two nights for each deployment. In total there are thirty three monitoring points scattered throughout Great Wood, situated in different woodland types (active coppice, high forest and abandoned/ stored coppice).

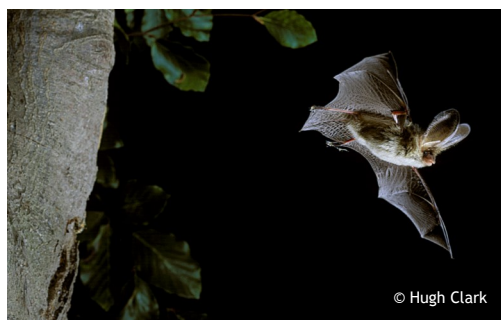
What we learn from the project will help secure the long-term survival and protection of the NNR. It will also lead to significant benefits for woodland bats nationally, as the information will be used to provide guidelines for future woodland bat surveying projects at other sites.



Volunteers putting static detectors up



Active coppiced woods



Brown long-eared bat

What has been happening since the project started?

By the time you read this newsletter we would have just completed our fourth deployment of the static detectors and our volunteers will have carried out bat transect surveys throughout Swanton Novers Great Wood during May and June. Next lot of bat transect surveys will take place on the 19th of July.

We have also recruited seven volunteers from the local community and eight volunteers from further afield. Volunteers who have helped us with the transect surveys in May and June have learnt how to use a Peersonic detector and observe bat activity along the predetermined transect routes. I would like to take the opportunity to say a **HUGE** thank you to all our volunteers for all their help.

Important Dates:

07/08/16 — 11am–3pm Community Day at Swanton Novers NNR (More information can be found on the back of the newsletter)

20/8/16 — 19.50 Bat Walk at Swanton Novers NNR (To book contact Sonia at SReveley@bats.org.uk)

01/09/2016 — 19.30 Bat Walk at Holkham Estate (A Holkham event. To book go to <http://www.holkham.co.uk/event/bat-discovery-walk>)

07/09/2016 — 19.00 Bat Walk at Salhouse Broad (A Natural England event. To book go to <http://www.salhousebroad.org.uk/events.html>)

September 2016 — Call Analysis Training Workshop — learn how to identify bat calls using sonograms (Date to be confirmed—contact Sonia if you're interested in taking part)



Our findings so far...

April transect surveys were unfortunately cancelled due to cold evening temperatures and chilly winds.

For May, the transect surveys coincided with the emergence of the cockchafer beetles (also known as may bugs), which provided a feast for the serotines and noctules emerging from the woods and a feeding frenzy was observed by the lucky surveyors. Within the center of Great Wood we picked up a few barbastelles and of course plenty of pipistrelles, while down in the bottom part of the woods where a few active coppice compartments are located, only pipistrelles were detected.

June transect surveys are showing barbastelle activity in the top section of Great Wood, and the usual pipistrelle activity elsewhere.

We also did a trapping survey on the 6th of May. This allowed us to catch bats and identify them in the hand in parts of the woods where we have recorded activity from barbastelle bats (a rare woodland specialist and one of our key woodland species) and myotis bats (a family of bats whose calls are similar and need to be seen close up to identify to species). Information from the trapping survey will support the data collected from the transect surveys and static detectors. From the trapping survey in May we caught and identified one female barbastelle bat, two female brown long-eared bats, one male common pipistrelle and one male soprano pipistrelle. Catching female bats (who have higher demands than males during the summer season) indicates that the woodland is good quality habitat.



Brown long-eared bat



Bat surveying



Barbastelle

Bat Spotlight— The Noctule

The noctule is the UK's second largest bat. It has large round broad brown ears, with mushroom shaped tragus. Its fur is chocolate brown, short and flat lying, almost suede like in texture. Underbelly is lighter in colour and it has long narrow wings. Bare skin is black-brown. Weighs 18-40g, which is equivalent to a bag of maltesers.

Noctules are found throughout the UK but are absent from Ireland. They tend to fly and feed over open pasture land, over tree canopies, parklands, marshlands and waterways. They will also forage in suburban areas and round street lamps catching moths that are attracted to the light. However they are not commonly found in urban areas.

The deepest and clearest calls of the noctule are best heard on the peak frequency of 20kHz (frequency range 20 - 45kHz). Calls sound similar to a 'chip-chop, chip-chop', with the occasional clicks when feeding. Because of its lower frequency range, children and adults with good hearing can hear noctule calls.

Noctule bats emerge 10-15 minutes after sunset, sometimes before. They are one of the first bats to emerge, with a fast and straight flight pattern, reaching speeds of 50kph. They are not very agile but will dive steeply while foraging, catching insects on the wing (aerial hawking). Their diet consists of moths and beetles (mainly chafer and dung beetles).



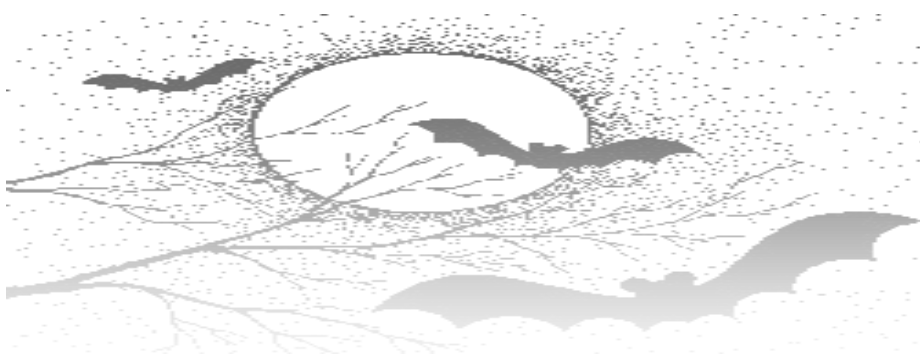
© John Altringham

Noctule bats are tree dwellers and are rarely found in buildings. They tend to roost in old rot holes and woodpecker holes, usually 4 - 12 m high or higher. They do move the maternity roost frequently, up to 12 km in distance. In the winter, noctule bats will roost in trees and rock fissures, but have also been found in bat boxes, buildings, bridges, and caves.

Maternity roosts can be up to 60 females and the residents can be very active at high temperatures and therefore can be heard from long distances away, up to 200 -300m. Late summer is when noctule bats will start to mate. Males will locate a suitable mating roost in an appropriate tree hole. They will then attract around 4 -5 females (sometime up to 20 females, if very successful) by singing, defending their roosts from other active males at the same time. Females who visit the mating roost of a suitable male, will stay for 1-2 days.



© Hugh Clark



A bit about Swanton Novers National Nature Reserve



High Forest

Swanton Novers Woods is a National Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is made up of four woodland parcels - Great Wood, Little Wood, Barney Wood and Guybon's Wood and is managed by Natural England.

The geomorphology, soil conditions, woodland types and hydrology varies throughout the reserve which means the site is species rich supporting a variety of animal life (fauna) and plants (flora).

Due to its rich diversity of flora and fauna, its long history of active management dating back to the Domesday book and its ancient past, the reserve is classified as some of the most important woodlands in the country. And research into the history of the woods shows that they were probably part of the great 'Wildwood' which once covered around 75% of the British landscape. Another indicator of its past is the presence of ancient woodland indicator species such as midland hawthorn, herb paris, lily of the valley, yellow archangel and small leaved lime.

In terms of its management, there is documented evidence that Great Wood has been managed by the local people of Swanton Novers as far back as the 1400's with coppicing carried out on a nine year rotation, leaving very few trees over 1' in diameter. Some of the products, branches and twigs known as faggots were used as fuel, firing up brick and pottery kilns located on the southern outskirts of the village.



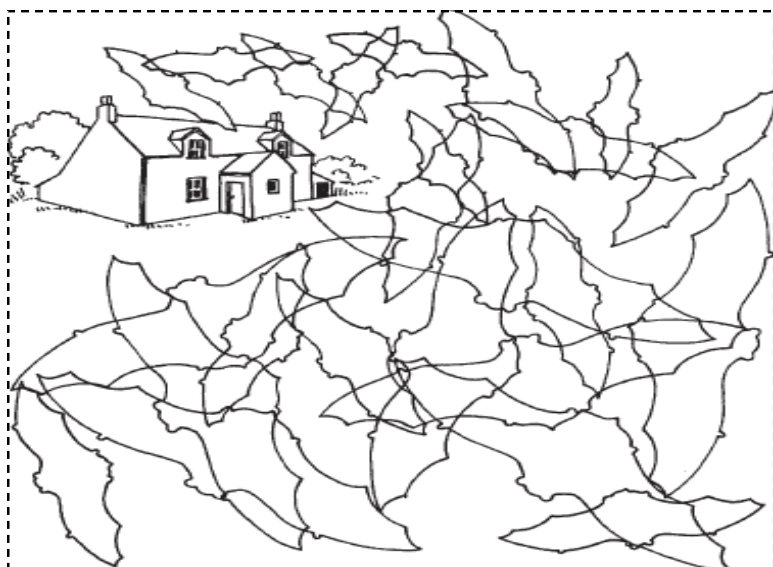
Lilly of the Valley

However after the first world war, coppicing within the reserve was gradually phased out over the years. The result is a range of woodland types of different ages, from active coppice to abandoned coppice and high forest.

The reserve currently supports eight species of bats, including populations of barbastelles and brown long-eared bats. Other bat species are common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, Natterer's bat, Daubenton's bat, noctule and serotine. Through this bat monitoring project, we hope to learn more about how bats use the woods, ensuring future management plans are sympathetic to bats and therefore securing their long-term survival and protection.

Batty activities

How many bats? Can you count how many bats are flying around the cottage? *Hint: Try colouring each bat one at a time.*



Thumb bat



ALL YOU NEED IS

- An ink pad
- A felt tip pen
- And a thumb

METHOD

- Make a thumbprint
- Add two long ears
- Add fore edge to each wing and a thumb
- Add four fingers from the wrist (look at a photo of a bat to see how they arranged or use this illustration)
- Add five toes
- Join the membrane from the toes to the fingertips



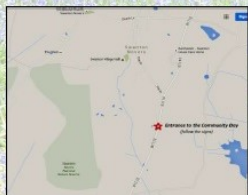
Events

To keep updated have a look at the events page on the Bat Conservation Trust website at www.bats.org.uk/swanton.

Community Day at Swanton Novers NNR

Sunday 7th of August, 11.00am – 3.00pm

Come along to a Community Day at Swanton Novers National Nature Reserve and learn about the woods and its wildlife. There will be walks, mini beast hunting, moth trapping sessions, displays and activities.



Walk Times

11.30 Butterfly and Woodland walk
14.00 Butterfly and Woodland walk
20.20 Bat walk and moth trapping

Free

Meet in Swanton Novers NNR

(Follow the signs - star on the map = entrance to the Community Day site or call Sonia for directions)

For the bat walk and moth trapping, please book by contacting Sonia Reveley at SReveley@bats.org.uk or ring 07788226528

- Please wear warm clothes and wear wellies, as we may walk on uneven and wet terrain.
- Children should always be accompanied by an adult at all times.
- Bring a torch if you are coming to the bat walk



Woodland activities with the Local Youth Group

Looking for a project which you can contribute to?

We are always looking for people to help us with a range of activities from bat surveys to walks and events.

Not only is it a chance to learn a new skill, or open up a hidden world, it is also a great opportunity to enjoy a natural heritage. There is nothing better in my opinion than seeing the seasonal changes within the woods. The sunset shimmering through the bare limbs of the twisted oaks, the ground covered with bluebells and wood anemone, the flush of new leaves swiftly followed by a lush green carpet of bracken and of course the rush of excitement and exhilaration when you realise you have seen/heard a rare woodland specialist like the barbastelle.

So, if you are interested and would like to join our team on a journey of discovery then I (the Volunteer Coordinator) would love to hear from you and can be contacted by email at SReveley@bats.org.uk.

In addition, I am able to provide talks over the winter either this year or next year, so do get in contact if you're interested.

Bat Walk at Swanton Novers National Nature Reserve

Saturday 20th August 2016, 7.50pm

Come on a guided bat walk in Swanton Novers National Nature Reserve and learn about bats. We will be using detectors which will enable us to listen out for bats and open up a hidden world.

Free

Meet at Swanton Novers Village Hall

(Swanton Novers Village Hall, St Giles Road, Swanton Novers, Norfolk, NR24 2RJ)

Limited places. Booking essential

To book email Sonia Reveley at SReveley@bats.org.uk or ring 07788226528

- Please wear warm clothes and wear wellies, as we may walk on uneven and wet terrain.
- Children should always be accompanied by an adult at all times.
- Bring a torch



More information including blogs can be found at www.bats.org.uk/swanton.

Bat Conservation Trust



NATURAL
ENGLAND



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The National Lottery
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