



Bat Group Mingle 17th November 2021

This bat group mingle was held in the evening of the 17th November 2021, and was the first one to be hosted by a bat group: **South Lancashire Bat Group**. The hosting bat group decided on the topics and chaired the discussions in room, they did not provide a talk and all bat groups were encouraged to share experiences and expertise. Abby Packham and Claudia Gebhardt from BCT were on hand to deal with zoom and take notes.

There were 24 attendees from bat groups across England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands. It was a free event with some choosing to make donations to BCT with their booking. There were 4 rooms covering the topics: training, project and volunteer engagement, batlas planning and delivery and an anything else room.

Training

- First training concern raised was that in one group the training needs had previously been driven by consultant ecologists, but over the last two years they have more new members who aren't ecologists and are wondering how to best address the training needs and engage with them.
- One group had a vast amount of recorded data so taught members how to analyse recordings and ID bat species, whilst keeping up with new technologies.
- One group said they had a training programme of 10 to 12 workshops and members are asked for their training wishes, then usually 4 to 6 of those workshops are run per year. However considered workshops are better in person, sometimes necessary, and that full day workshops are time and resource consuming.
- Experience shared of a yearly in person thank you meeting, to all those who have given volunteer time and gives an opportunity to seek feedback, which in this instance lead to the creation of a bat care pick-up whatsapp group.
- Discussion on which workshops seem most popular, which were 'injured bats' held early in the year, bat ID and detector workshops at the start of the season. But also wider scope topics such as bat law, bats in trees and VBRV. Highlighting the overlap with homeowners with bats/arborists/those not directly involved with bat work but would be interested to learn more. In turn using knowledge exchange, so for example bat group members could learn more about trees.
 - Regarding information for homeowners an attendee shared this link in the chat: <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/what-do-i-need-to-know-about-having-bats>
 - Regarding tree habitat these were shared: <https://pelagicpublishing.com/products/bat-roosts-in-trees-bat-tree-habitat-key> and <https://shop.bsigroup.com/products/surveying-for-bats-in-trees-and-woodland-guide>
- Mention sharing workshops between groups can be tricky as presentation may not have made detailed talk notes.

Project and volunteer engagement

- Highlighted the difficulty of getting enough volunteers from the group's membership. Particularly for acoustic analysis after the "exciting hands on" phase of a project.
- People shared examples of past projects, mentioning issues and successes.
- Suggestions to open up events and project to a wider audience than members, as then those actively wanting to get involved come forward and hopefully turn into active members. Acknowledgement that some members only wish to support the group and hear news. Instead of trying to grow the active members from the membership pool, to reach outside the group to find active community members who may not have thought about bats before.
- New bat group members said when they joined certain groups they found there was lots going on and frequent emails and become involved quickly in many things whilst their enthusiasm was at it's peak, and so will now continue. Whereas from others they hadn't received any communication and feel it unlikely they would now take part. Suggested that grabbing new members attention as quickly as possible would be beneficial to converting more new members to active members, via faster responses to emails and more group emails.
- Another new bat group member advised they felt a barrier to getting involved was concern over their own experience level, worried they would get in the way of a project. Suggested efforts to highlight there is something for everyone, or if training would be available at meetings.
- Discussion on outreach, particularly to younger audiences, both school age and late teens to early twenties. This lead to consideration of insurance and safeguarding with respect to younger individuals (*there is advice on this on the [Insurance for Bat Groups](#) webpage that may be applicable*). Desire to get them involved to tap into their enthusiasm and dedication to a passion, and ensure the continuation of the bat group over time. Queries about how to do this, such as how to convert a school talk into bat group members. Fed back to previous comments from new bat group members about what they felt were barriers to involvement.
- Bat walks were discussed as a great outreach activity, and a way to engage new members as it is very accessible compared to a project. Support given to mingle participants about running their own bat walks.
- An attendee highlighted some recent research; that mindfulness/mental health classes had been shown to be ineffective at improving staff wellbeing, and that only initiatives to promote staff volunteering and charity work time helped the mental wellbeing of staff. Suggested this is a largely untapped resource for bat groups. Whilst not everyone would want to volunteer for field projects, there could be those wishing to volunteer time for roles such as treasurer, events management, website design etc. Successful group admin supports successful group projects.
 - Initial article shared: <https://phys.org/news/2021-08-stress-classes-wellbeing-workers-mental.html>
 - Another attendee supported this with these links: <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2021/research/nature-can-improve-mood-and-reduce-anxiety/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/13/two-hour-dose-nature-weekly-boosts-health-study-finds>.

Batlas planning and delivery

- Discussion focused around how to get records back from participants and how best to handle the data.

Anything else

- Conversation mostly turned to bat care
- Enthusiasm to get back out to in person events particularly based on the resumption of the NBMP hibernation surveys ([risk assessment allowing](#)).

The meeting ended with everyone back in the main room, shared hope for returning to in-person bat group events soon. Also highlighted from different rooms was the fact that the existence of bat groups is completely unknown to some, as mentioned by some new group members who are thrilled to now be getting involved and networking connections were also shared.

The bat group mingle event has a dedicated webpage under the 'resources for bat groups' area of the BCT website, containing details of the next event when available, and previous meetings.