

Bealeswood Common, September 2021

The Bats of Bealeswood and Beyond

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)

Previous monthly records and notes are posted at www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

This month there is little to report except the declining numbers of butterflies and flowering plants being recorded as the weather cools into autumn. However, there is plenty happening in the evening skies and Steve Lockett led 10 people from Dockenfield and surrounding villages for a walk and talk about bats. Here is his report which starts at the bench on the Common and then follows the bridleway (Immum's Way) through to Frensham Mill:

"In Surrey we are lucky to have at least 15 of the 18 UK species and as we learnt a bit about their habits and behaviour one began to flit around our heads – time to switch on the bat detector. This device translates the bat's hunting and navigation calls (their echolocation) into noises we can hear, and these, and their frequency give us a clue as to which species we are seeing.

The first bat we saw and heard on the detector was a Noctule -the largest British bat. They are often the first to emerge and can be seen flying high in the open in a straight line in the last of the daylight. It's wingbeats are slower than other bats so you may be able to distinguish individual flaps.

Soon a pitter patter sound on the detector told us a Pipistrelle was near- this is the species most likely to be seen in our gardens and countryside. A zig-zagging figure of 8 flight pattern is the giveaway here, and if you have a detector you may be able to differentiate between the 3 UK species- this one being a Soprano Pipistrelle.



This bat was photographed in a nearby barn and is believed to be a Pipistrelle. Note the head is at the top indicating that bats don't always roost upside down, as is commonly believed. (photo Philippa Hall)

Our walk took us to Frensham Mill where we looked over the mill pond in search of the water bat or Daubenton's bat that specialises in skimming the surface of water bodies for insects. A continuous "Geiger counter" like series of clicks from the detector confirmed one was hunting.

One other common species you may see (but was not seen on this walk) and is present on the Common is the brown Long Eared bat. With good eyesight you may be able to make out the long ears as this bat hovers around trees picking off individual insects from leaves.

There are many opportunities to help our bats. You can join many surveys organised by The Bat Conservation Trust.

www.bats.org.uk.

If you are a gardener you could grow night flowering plants like honeysuckle, which will attract insects the bats may feed on. Ivy and veteran trees provide potential roosting sites so please bear this in mind if you are doing clearing work. Bats are protected by law in the UK and it is a criminal offence to deliberately disturb or injure a bat or bat colony. However, much can be learnt on an evening walk aided with a bat detector."



This photograph of a Kestrel (taken by Alan Cox) has had us puzzled. His attention was drawn "by a commotion in the ash tree" and he focussed his camera on the Kestrel. We still don't have the definitive answer of what the black "hood" is covering the bird's head. Might it be a Kestrel that predated on a bat and it's a bat wing covering part of the head and parts of a bat are in its beak? Or, is it a shadow on the head the bird? The shadows on the Ash tree are dark and the shadow of the Kestrel can be possibly be seen on the trunk of the tree below the bird. Any suggestions or comments please to Alan at: alanfjcox@gmail.com