

Climate Emergency: Bovey & Heathfield



At the same time as addressing the local and global climate emergency we are concerned that there is a linked environmental emergency and our wildlife is often under threat. This article is looking at this issue in relation to bats and has been written by Bovey Bat Group.

Bovey Bat Group developed in 2017 from the Bovey Tracey Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) Local Group as part of the Greater Horseshoe Bat Project. This project has now ended although the resources on the website remain available (see <https://devonbatproject.org/>). We are a small band of DWT volunteers who all have a general interest in nature, conservation and preservation yet had not been aware that we have Greater Horseshoe Bat maternity roosts and a significant range of other bats right here in Bovey Tracey.

Our initial aim was to better understand the nature and number of bat species in the Bovey area. Our ongoing aim is to raise awareness of these bats (and how we can help them survive) amongst our community. There are 16 species of bat in Devon (out of 18 species in the UK) and many of these can be found locally.

Most of us only see bats rarely, if we see them at all, and consequently do not tend to consider them. Yet these incredible animals are both worthy of our notice and our respect. Bats are the only mammal capable of controlled flight. They locate their prey through the amazing process of echolocation (a type of radar) and watching them do so over the River Bovey is a sight to behold. Walk along the river at the very end of any summer's evening and you will see them performing their speedy aeronautical displays – these are likely to be soprano pipistrelles, one of our most common species.

To get started, Bovey Bat Group bid for grants (Bat Works, Bovey Tracey Almshouse Trust and Bovey Tracey Town Trust) and purchased a range of bat detecting equipment – two tablets (one iPad and one Android) with Echo meter touch, two detectors as well as three Magenta 5 hand held detectors.

As we were all new to bat detecting, we initially attended bat walks run by others and practised using our equipment in order to develop our knowledge and skills. Various members also attended training on: how to deliver bat talks; outdoor emergency aid; and bat data analysis. Some of us participated in the Devon Bat Survey to gain insights into local bat presence.

We ran public bat walks & talks ('bat safaris') at Parke in 2018 and again 2019 from May to September. These were fully attended and participants gave us positive feedback. The time and effort that goes into organising and running these is well rewarded when we see the looks and voices of excitement each time bats appear. We do not charge for our events but, in keeping with other DWT events, suggest a modest donation. Our safaris start with an explanatory talk with photos and other items of interest then, as dusk settles, we set off on

our trail. We use the detectors to support our group to notice, identify and listen to bats and we now know the right spots to stop and watch bats feeding.

We have also held stalls at summer fairs and shows – giving out wildflower seeds and information as well as enjoying lots of chats about bats with locals.

We were unable to run any events in 2020 due to COVID-19 and it is still not clear whether or not we shall be able to do so in 2021. As soon as we know we will advertise locally (e.g. via the Tourist Information Centre, local DWT group newsletter, DWT website etc)

We have been engaging with Bovey Tracey Town Council Environment Committee and the Verges Group and are hoping to support the promotion of gardening to encourage wildlife – many flowers for pollinators in turn feed our bats. We plan to link with the newly formed Friends of Millmarsh Park group. We hope to obtain funding for an information board which will explain a little about bats in Bovey Tracey and what we can all do to help them.

In recognition of the work being carried out by Bovey Bat Group, Bovey Tracey has been awarded 'Bat Friendly Community' status by the Greater Horseshoe Bat Project team. The Town Council has kindly agreed that our plaque can be displayed in the Riverside Community Centre.

Cath Valentine, Co-ordinator, Bovey Bat Group. email: boveybatgroup@gmail.com

