nursery site for the Dorset greater horseshoes, in an old barn. Examination showed lots of dead bodies - some fresh but most had been dead for several years. The owners said that in May 1953 the roof had been treated with Lindane to kill woodworm and death watch beetles. Immediately afterwards the bats died and the estate workers removed several large barrow loads of corpses which we estimated to total about 10,000 bats.

At the same time I found examples of vandalism where bats were deliberately killed, and there was the rapidly developing sport of caving which meant hibernating bats were frequently being disturbed. These unconnected catastrophies and threats to bats, combined with known changes to habitat, resulting in loss of hollow trees and substancial reductions in flying insects (50% decline from 1947 to 1953 - Rothamstead) convinced me that Britain's bat populations were highly threatened. Armed with these observations, I tried to convince the Regional Officer of the Nature Conservancy Council of the need to protect the important greater horseshoe sites in Dorset, and also the NCC's senior management of the urgent need to undertake research on bats to examine whether the suggested threats were having a significant effect on bat populations. Despite frequent letters and discussions over many years, no one was convinced, mainly because of the lack of research results! Also I suspect that there was disinterest because of bats' bad public image.

Parallel with this I discussed the need for bat protection with the late Lord Cranbrook, President of the Mammal Society, a member of the bat group and champion of the countryside in the House of Lords. Although he was aware that bats in the early 1960's appeared less abundant than his boyhood memories of 50 years previous, he was not convinced that legislation could help them. I pursued this theme with him for 10 years before he finally conceded the need for some legislation.

In the 1950's, although employed by the NCC, working primarily on the ecology of salt marshes, I received ever increasing numbers of enquires about bats - mostly from householders. A crescendo was reached in 1969 when over 900 phone calls were received. Generally, callers were totally ignorant about bats, so it took 20-30 minutes each to convince most to keep their bats. What was needed was a broad public education programme and knowing that 1970 was to be European Conservation Year (ECY) I approached the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR - now Royal Society for Nature Conservation) suggesting there should be a concurrent National Bat Year. The retort came 'who will produce, run and sustain a programme?' and since we in the bat group were only a handful of amateur naturalists, the idea was dropped. However, because of a few broadcasts and articles, and a very substantial 'fall out' from the ECY in educating the public about ecological and countryside matters, there was a dramatic drop in bat

enquiries. Suddenly most people knew that bats were mammals and even that they were threatened.

A report was published in 1972 (Racey and Stebbings) on a Mammal Society's bat roost survey which showed the loss of many sites. Lord Cranbrook, although almost convinced of the need to protect all bats, introduced a bill to the Upper House which aimed only to protect the greater horseshoe and mouse-eared bats since we had good information that these two species were endangered. He suggested we would have great difficulty persuading their Lordships of the need to protect any bats, especially as they did not have a cuddly image like the dormouse.

From August 1st 1975, two species of bat were protected in the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act. The debates in Parliament showed the need to convince people that bats should be considered as something other than vermin. Several people boasted about the bats they had killed during house parties, where guests armed with tennis rackets swatted bats as they flew out of their roosts.

Despite protection given to the two species and much subsequent publicity, little extra interest in bats was shown by naturalists. A leaflet about bat conservation I wrote in 1965 (Stebbings 1967) was widely distributed in the late 1960's. Later, in the early 1970's, this was expanded and reproduced in thousands by the SPNR as 'Focus on Bats'. This was the major vehicle for distributing the bat conservation message, and of course the NCC adopted the publication following full protection in 1981.

Throughout the 1970's, the SPNR lobbied Parliament for comprehensive legislation to protect Britain's threatened wildlife. In 1979 a convention drawn up in Berne and signed by Britain, highlighted the declining bat populations throughout western Europe and in it required protection of these creatures. This was a major stimulus to the publication of the Wildlife and Countryside Bill and eventual passing of the Act in 1981. However, although enacted in 1981, it was not until 29th September 1982 that the bat part came into effect. This act proved the next major turning point for bats. Suddenly the handful of bat enthusiasts were joined by a rapidly expanding army of people concerned about the conservation of bats.

Although the bat group of the Mammal Society acted as a forum for people interested in bats and arranged regular symposia, it did not organise any group activities. The first local bat groups were in Hertfordshire with Michael Clark, the Yorkshire Mammal Group bat project led by Michael Thompson and, in the late 1970's, Northants. with Phil Richardson. All the other groups stem from the stimulus provided by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The original groups were mostly involved with survey and research and this motivation certainly carried on the first of the 'new wave' groups such as Durham led by Johnny Birks. But the driving force for most groups is the need for