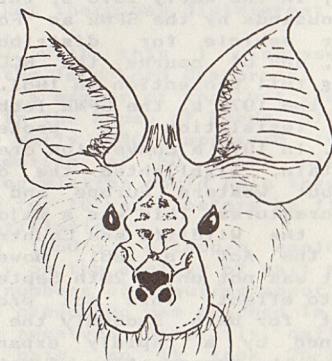


education of the public.

Declines in insect abundance and loss of habitat and roosts remain as severe as ever, but at least there are now many people concerned enough to work hard to help ensure some bats remain for the next generation to enjoy.

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7
 Timber Treatments and Bat Conservation

There have been several recent developments in the field of timber treatments related to bat conservation.

Last December, Dr. Susan Swift, of Aberdeen University, gave a very interesting lecture to Y.M.G. on this topic and her research methods. Together with Paul Racey she has pioneered research on into the harmful effects of wood pesticides on pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). The results of their work are now published in Biological Conservation (35 1986 p.205-214). They confirm the worst fears of bat conservationists. The most lethal chemicals proved to be the most widely used - Lindane insecticide and pentachlorophenol fungicide. Racey and Swift show two routes of poisoning; after bodily contact with treated timbers bats ingest the chemicals through grooming; and, in bats prevented from making bodily contact with the chemicals, vapour is absorbed through the skin and respiratory epithelium. All bats in this study died within three weeks. Even timbers treated up to 14 months prior to bats roosting on them were just as fatal. Racey and Swift also established that synthetic pyrethroids (alternative insecticides) caused no obvious harm to bats even after 13 weeks in close contact with treated timbers. This conclusive scientific evidence should convince all involved with timber treatment to switch to pyrethroid chemicals, which are perhaps more effective as they persist in the wood much longer. More work needs to be done to develop a safer fungicide.

York Civic Trust has taken the lead in this field of bat conservation by banning Lindane treatments on any of its buildings. Following this, a Humberside wood treatment firm has also stopped using it. Now steps are being taken to persuade the English Heritage organisation to ban its use. Hopefully more local authorities will follow this lead especially as the word spreads backed by scientific research.

Ed.

