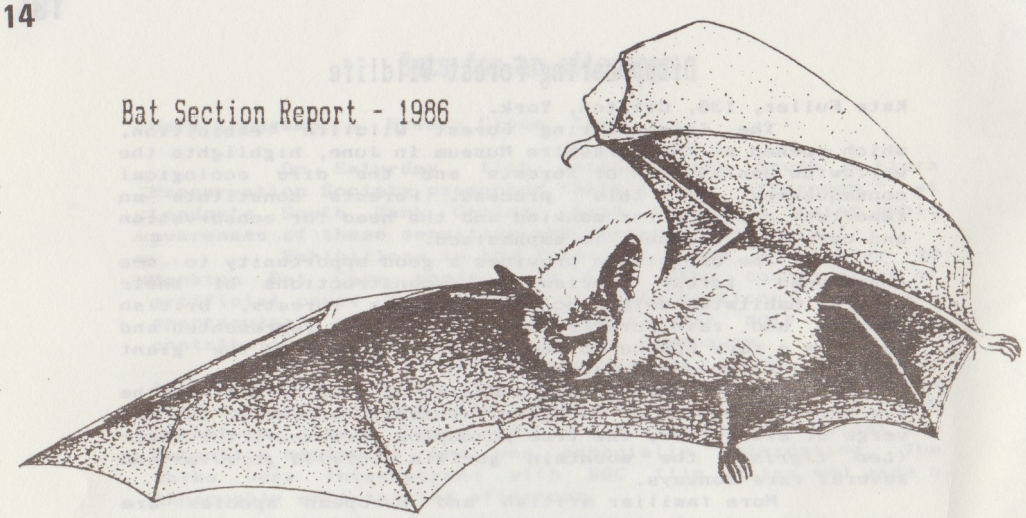
Bat Section Report - 1986



The Bat Section started the year off very well by holding a meeting of all those people interested in doing bat work (approximately 19). Eight bat boxes were then sited on trees in Askham Bog near York. It was our intention to inspect these boxes regularly during the summer. Regretfully, because of other commitments, this did not happen and indeed the boxes now need inspecting and cleaning out ready for next year. The placing of these bat boxes, however, created publicity in the local press and on the Yorkshire Television 'Calendar' programme. In addition we also gained a few bat box sponsors.

In early summer Dr Bob Stebbings came to York especially to give a talk, accompanied by slides, on all the British bats. He also outlined what some of our tasks could be during the forthcoming months. He stressed that counting bats was particularly important.

Our work over the year has again been mostly for the Nature Conservancy Council. It seems we have been busier than ever this summer with NCC bat problems. The majority of visits have been successful, some exciting, some disappointing, but all interesting. Roof surveys prior to timber treatment have been predominant. In this respect I have been asked by Mr Derek Ungley, the NCC Assistant Regional Officer in York, to express his grateful thanks to all those Bat Section members who have worked so hard on his behalf, and to say how terribly important this voluntary help is towards to conservation of bats in Yorkshire.

Because of the cold spring and warm autumn the birth of the bats was again delayed by a few weeks and consequently they were active later, sightings being reported well into November.

At first most of the roosts we found were pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). Later in the summer we began to find different species, notably a nice colony of brown long-eared bats (*Plecotus auritus*) near Easingwold and another roost which, from the droppings, was originally thought to be only pipistrelles but Bob Stebbings later discovered it contained a colony of about 100 Brandt's bats (*Myotis brandti*).

Two more pipistrelles were found half a mile below the surface at one of the Selby coal mines, presumably sucked down the air shaft.

One rather unusual call from the NCC was to survey the roof of a house in York, not for wood boring insects but for a fly infestation. The flies, as opposed to being the usual cluster flies, were found to be yellow swarming flies (*Thaumatomyia notata*) whose larvae feed on grass root aphids. These flies are known to go into roofs for the winter.

It would take far too long to enumerate all the calls and visits we have made (possibly in the region of 180). Suffice it to say, it has been another exceptionally busy year for us.

We have continued supplying bat boxes to various people and Nigel Robinson has been instrumental in selling a good number of these. Our largest order to date, through the NCC, has been for 100 roosting boxes and 6 hibernating boxes from the North York Moors National Park.

During this, National Bat Year, there has been much publicity in the local and national press concerning the welfare of bats. Radio York broadcast a bat interview with one of our members.

Other members of the Bat Section worked very hard in extremely hot weather on a stall at the Tadcaster Carnival and we have been invited by several Watch Groups to give talks to children and to take along live captive bats. One such talk in Hull prompted a very young boy to present us with a little bat poem he had written accompanied by a drawing! Talks have also been given on bats to various other organizations, including Young Farmers and a Conservation Group. In March 1987 a talk will be given to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in York.

We still continue to receive reports of injured bats and these bats are subsequently collected and cared for by our Vet member, Lesley Helliwell, who currently has around 20 pipistrelles, 2 noctules (*Nyctalus noctula*) and one Brandt's bat in captivity. Other bats brought in have, after examination, been found fit enough to be released again into the wild. On a number of occasions we have been contacted by the RSPCA in Leeds and York about bats brought to them from our area.

Three of us had an odd experience one evening. We were returning from a bat roost visit when, a few miles from York, a bat suddenly crashed into the car windscreen. We fully expected it to have been killed, but anyway decided to look for the body. Sure enough there it was on the roadside but - still alive! We took it with us with the intention of examining it closer for injuries, but by the time we arrived back in York it had grown so lively that we decided to return it immediately to the place where it was found, and there it flew off happily none the worse for its collision.

The unique project of ringing pipistrelles within 8 miles of York Minster, which has been carried out for some years now by Michael Thompson and Sheila Walsh, continued in 1986. Sheila Walsh came up from Peterborough for several weekends specifically to help with this. Much valuable data has been aquired from the project for the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Monkswood.