

SOCIETY AWARDS GRANT TO LAUNCH NEW BRECKS BAT PROJECT

The Breckland Society Committee agreed recently to make a grant of £750 towards the creation of a new Brecks Bat Project, to be run by the Society in conjunction with the Norfolk Bat Survey. The grant will be used to purchase bat recording and monitoring equipment which will help provide vital information on the distribution and numbers of bats across the Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks.

Bats are one of the most widespread but under-recorded groups of mammals in Britain. Of the 17 species identified in the UK to date, several are extremely scarce and numbers generally are thought to be falling. Although this decline is probably attributable to factors such as the use of pesticides (meaning less prey for bats), loss of feeding habitat, breeding and roosting sites, the precise reasons behind the fall are not clear—underlining the urgent need for more data.

Last year saw a countywide Norfolk Bat Survey led by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) from its headquarters at Thetford. The survey relied on community participation, with a network of bat monitoring centres set up across the county, from where members of the public could borrow bat recording equipment. This comprised a small recording box, an extendable pole and a microphone, which participants were asked to set up at three different points over three consecutive nights within a

Senior Research Ecologist and Project Manager for Norwich Bat Group. Dr Newson would download the data, run it through the software and produce a summary for each site of the total number of “bat passes”, ie each time a bat swooped past the microphone, as well as the number of passes that could definitely be attributed to a particular species.

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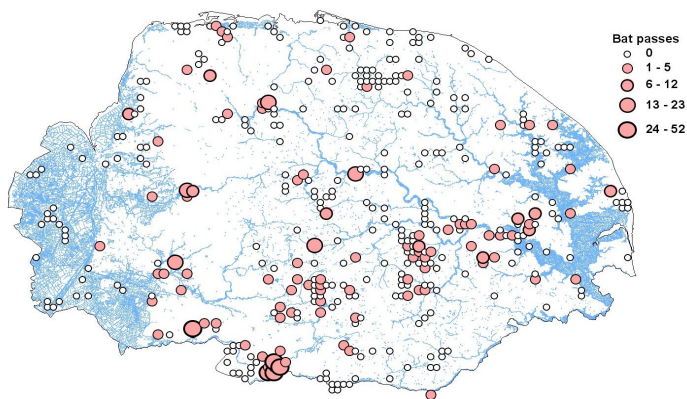


Diagram showing numbers of passes of Serotine Bat across Norfolk

1-km square, anytime between mid-April and September. Over 350 people took part in the survey, setting up the recording equipment at a range of locations from urban gardens and woods to farmland and open heaths.

The equipment is configured to register and record the echolocation calls made by bats as they fly about at night. Individual bat species make different types of call, and recent advances in bat detector technology and digital signal processing mean that it is now possible to collect the acoustic recordings and then use a special computer programme to identify and attribute the calls to the different species.

Participants would send in the recording box memory card from their three nights of recording to Dr Stuart Newson, BTO

WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

Friday 28 February, 7.00pm

The Archaeology of Breckland

Presented by David Robertson (Norfolk Archaeology Dept)
Mundford Village Hall

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.
(Mundford is situated at the junction of the A134 north of Thetford and the A1065. The Village Hall is first right (St Leonard's Street) off the A134. The Hall is on the right

Friday 14 March, 7.00pm

A private view of *Thetford's Lost Tudor Sculptures*, an exhibition at the Ancient House Museum, Thetford

Members £5, non-members £8, to include refreshments.

Thursday 15 May

AGM and *Nightingales* at Lackford, with Suffolk Wildlife Trust at Lackford Lakes Reserve, near West Stow

Nightingale walk 6.30pm, members £12, non-members £15, to include refreshments.

AGM 7.30pm, free of charge

Saturday 19 July

Dragonfly Field Study Day, led by Dr Pam Taylor
East Wretham Village Hall and Thompson Common,
10.00am to 3.30pm

Members £15, non-members £20

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The results were amazing. Over 350,000 individual bat recordings were made during the course of the survey in 2013, involving a total of 13 different bat species. The lack of knowledge about Norfolk bats was underlined when analysis of the data revealed the presence of what is thought to be a new bat for the county! About the size of the end of a person's thumb, the Alcahoie Bat is known from only a handful of other counties in the UK and was only described to science as a new species in 2001. DNA analysis will be needed to confirm its presence, but if so, the species would probably have remained undetected here for years to come had it not been for the survey!

Meanwhile the Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle (so-called because it calls at a higher pitch) were by far the most

Photo by Amy Lewis

Common Pipistrelle



commonly recorded bat species during the project, and together made up at least 91 per cent of all bat recordings. Larger bat species were scarcer but still well distributed, with the Brecks appearing particularly important for Serotine Bat and Noctule Bat, Britain's largest species. Oxburgh Hall, one of the monitoring centres for the survey, proved to be a bat hotspot, with eight species recorded.

The Brecks is likely to be one of the best areas for bats in East Anglia, with few urban centres, some of the lowest light pollution rates in lowland England and extensive swathes of good habitat—all factors that help bats. One issue however in last year's survey was uneven coverage: there are huge parts of the Brecks where no recording has been done and where we simply do not know which bats are present. This is why the Society has decided to create the Brecks Bat Project.

The Society's grant will enable the purchase of a complete set of bat monitoring equipment which will be available to Society members and the general public for use at sites in the Brecks, starting on 1 May this year. The entire Norfolk and Suffolk Brecks will be divided into 1-km squares and participants will be able to select which square to record in and then book the equipment for the dates they need. Training will be given and the data will be downloaded and analysed during the survey by Dr Newson.

The results of the project will be published in a report similar in style and format to those produced at the conclusion of the Society's two previous projects, on vernacular architecture and rabbit warrens. Dr Newson says: "We are really grateful for the support of the Breckland Society. The grant will make it possible to get a more accurate idea of bat status and diversity across the Brecks and we hope that many members will take part and help rewrite what's known about bats in the Brecks." Full details about this exciting project and how to join in will be published in the April newsletter and on the Society's website.

For general information on the Norfolk Bat Survey, visit www.batsurvey.org

NEWS FROM THE NORFOLK WILDLIFE TRUST IN THE BRECKS

The last few months have seen plenty of activity on local NWT reserves, designed to improve the condition of sensitive habitats and help ensure that the rare wildlife that depends on them continues to thrive.

At Thompson Water we have had a study carried out to determine the best method of removing and controlling water soldier, an invasive plant that can choke out less robust plant species. There has been plenty of field research going on recently into pingos—among the most important habitats in the Brecks—and their aquatic plants, with surveys showing encouraging results. We now have 12 longhorn cattle to graze at Thompson, to help prevent the pingos themselves from becoming choked with grass and other vegetation.

Meanwhile we have built new deer scrub enclosures at Thetford Heath to improve the screening for nesting birds from the long-distance footpath that passes along the western edge of the reserve. We have also removed the last section of birch trees at East Wretham Heath, to make a corridor connecting the sections of grass heath and so provide more habitat for scarce heathland plants and birds.

The Norfolk Bryophytes Group have conducted several field trips to Weeting and Thetford Heath recently and compiled an up-to-date species list on mosses, liverworts and hornworts, which were previously very under-recorded at both sites.

Darrell Stevens, NWT Breckland Reserves Manager

Photo by Alan Dalton



A male two-barred crossbill, a handsome visitor from the north

Bird news...

The place to be right now is Lynford Arboretum, with regular sightings of up to 15 hawfinches as well as small groups of crossbills, and even of the closely-related two-barred crossbill, a very scarce autumn and winter vagrant from Scandinavia. Resident birds such as thrushes and blackbirds have already started singing and defending territory, and in the coming weeks the first firecrests—a real Lynford speciality—should also be in song.

INTRIGUING TRIGS

Trigs are concrete pillars known as triangulation stations, trigonometrical stations, trigonometrical points, triangulation pillars, trig beacons, trig stations or trigpoints. It is trigs that enable our Ordnance Survey maps to be accurate to 3mm over the entire length of Great Britain. Sue Pennell has been doing some research...

Between 1935 and 1939, and again after the war until 1962, some 6,500 triangulation pillars were built so that a comprehensive survey could be carried out across the width and breadth of the United Kingdom. Pillars were generally built on high ground, giving surveyors a clear view of adjacent trigpoints. The resulting triangulations formulated the National Grid reference system we use today.

Triangulation stations are obelisks, or pillars, built from either stone or concrete, rising some four feet above the ground. Obelisks are surmounted with a three-armed brass plate, engraved Ordnance Survey Triangulation Station, and with fittings for a theodolite. A second plate on the side of the trig bears the legend 'OSBM' (Ordnance Survey Bench Mark) and the reference number of that particular trig point. Below, in the ground, are concealed reference marks whose National Grid References are precisely known.

Triangulation pillars were constructed at several places in Breckland, including Frog Hill on the Battle Area, Gallows Hill at Thetford, Maids Cross Hill near Lakenheath, and Shingham Heath near Swaffham. Although these trigs are indeed on high ground, there is one trig in Norfolk, close to Brandon Creek, that is only one metre above sea level—the lowest in the UK.



Top of trig pillar at Drymere, showing mounting for a theodolite and lines of sight to other trig stations

The trig obelisks to be found at Pickenham and Feltwell are the result of 'Project Emily' when, during the Cold War of the '50s and '60s, American-built PGM-17 Thor intermediate-range ballistic missiles were deployed in the Brecks.

The mapmakers took bearings from church spires such as Swaffham and Ashill, from the Elveden Memorial, and from the cupola at Culford School, or used surface blocks, as at Great Livermere, to complete their triangulation of the area.

Although the Global Positioning System has superseded triangulation stations, trigpoints still



Plate on side, showing OSBM and ref no. for trigpoint at Shingham Heath

prove of interest to walkers, as websites dedicated to logging and photographing them bear evidence. However, these features should surely not be allowed to decay and be forgotten by all but a few, but should be protected as part of our historical, scientific and cultural heritage.

For further information:

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk and www.trigpointinguk.com.

FROM LOG TO LODGE: FOREST TIMBER SAVES MEDIEVAL WARREN LODGE

A partnership between the voluntary group Friends of Thetford Forest and the Forestry Commission has conserved a 600-year-old warrener's lodge in Mildenhall Woods. This is one of only two such standing buildings (the other being Thetford Warren Lodge) to survive as reminders of the warrening industry of the Brecks, where rabbits were farmed commercially for their meat and their fur (and which was the focus of a very successful Society project in 2008-10).

Mildenhall Warren Lodge had been placed on the 'Heritage at Risk' Register because its flintwork had been so damaged by harsh winter weather in recent years. In order to save the building, Friends of Thetford Forest secured funding of £81,600 from English Heritage, the Forestry Commission and Forest Heath District Council for a protective new roof, modelled on a photograph of the 1930s.

Friends of Thetford Forest appointed Tim Buxbaum as architect and RJ Hogg and Son successfully tendered for the building conservation work. Planning permission was granted by Forest Heath District Council and Scheduled Ancient Monument consent given in time for work to begin in April 2013.

Of particular significance is the use of timber from the Public Forest Estate in East Anglia. The Douglas Fir for the roof was donated by the Forestry Commission, which also organised its milling at a sawmill in Hevingham, outside Norwich. The project therefore links to the 'Grown in Britain' initiative to encourage sustainable use of British wood products. Meanwhile, Friends of Thetford Forest commissioned photographer Nick Ford to record each stage of the process, ensuring that it is well documented and can help in future projects of this type.

On Wednesday 4 December 2013, 40 invited guests gathered to view the new roof for the first time and celebrate its completion. Tim Yarnell, the Forestry Commission's Heritage



Mildenhall Warren Lodge, with its new roof

Adviser, unveiled a plaque commemorating the project and acknowledging the role of Friends of Thetford Forest in saving such an important symbol of the warrening heritage of Breckland.

See www.fotf.org.uk for more information about the project and the work of FOTF in general.

Winter Wander

**“Goodness, what a large group!
Are you a bus-load?”
“No, we’re the Breckland
Society on a Winter Wander”**

On Sunday 12 January the weather was just perfect, with bright sunshine and not a hint of breeze, as members and friends, accompanied by five dogs, massed at St Helen’s car park beside the Little Ouse, deep in Thetford Forest, for a winter walk.



Photo by Sue Pennell 27 Winter Wanderers and five dogs at Santon Downham

Anne Mason, who is so knowledgeable and enthusiastic about all aspects of the forest, told us about the sites we visited. Anne also explained how the forest is managed for wildlife and historic sites, as the group of 27 walked along the medieval Stanton Street and along forest rides.

We looked at and learnt about the deserted village buried under the car park, the ruins and holy well at St Helen’s, the Bronze-age burial mound at Blood Hill and the Viking grave that was discovered in a quarry in 1868. We also visited the parish

church of All Saints at Santon—one of the smallest in the country. It is this church that was almost buried during a sand-blow in the seventeenth century.

We concluded our Winter Wander at Santon Downham, where we visited the beautiful church of St Mary’s, with its elegant Norman doorways.

More details of these historic sites can be found on www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk under ‘parish survey’, and then ‘Lynford’.

CHRISTMAS PARTY at Cockley Cley Hall



The Society held its Christmas Party on 13 December, at Cockley Cley Hall (above), by kind invitation of Sir Sam Roberts.

Stephen Pope, of the Norfolk Museum Service, gave a talk on *The Village Craftsman*, with slides of old photographs showing blacksmiths, wheelwrights and coopers at work.

Swaffham Arts

Sunday 23 February, 3pm, Swaffham Assembly Rooms

Classical music concert

by David Angel and Michal Kaznowski of the Maggini Quartet

Enquiries 01366 328648

Beachamwell Walking Weekend

5–6 April 2014

Beachamwell is the venue for a weekend of walks, and other events, in April. There will be two days of guided walks in the area, as well as an exhibition of the history of local paths and the wildlife to be seen from them.

The weekend will also see the launch of a leaflet map of Beachamwell footpaths, and will feature an illustrated talk on Saturday 5 April at 7.30pm by **Mark Cocker**, naturalist and author of *Birds and People* and *Crow Country*.

Beachamwell is one of four Norfolk villages chosen by CPRE Norfolk to take part in *Connecting Threads*, a Heritage Lottery-funded project exploring the history of local footpaths and encouraging people to use them.

For more information please visit www.exploringourfootpaths.co.uk or tel Philip Spencer on 01366 328536

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: lizdittner@tiscali.co.uk or tel 01366 727813