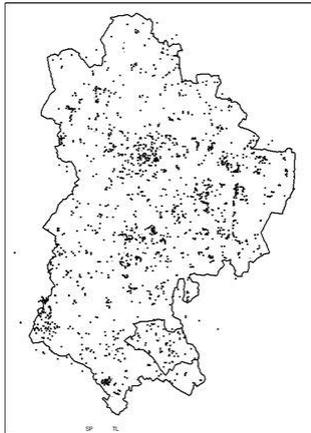


The Luton Bat Project - Putting Luton on the map.



Illustration by Joan Childs

Regular readers will know that Martin O'Connor has been keen to get more happening in Luton. We absolutely agree with him. You have only to look at maps of bat records in the county to see that Luton is underrepresented.



You can make out Bedford and the Greensand Ridge quite easily but Luton is hardly noticeable.

We have some members in Luton but a lot of the things we do occur far away in the north, so there is less opportunity for people in the south of the county to get involved.

We know from Count Bat in Bedford that once we get a foot in the door things can happen, but where to start?

Luckily for us, Luton born and bred Martin has lots of contacts and he has been enthusing steadily about bats and even lured some of his chums into the group. So we sat, like spiders in a web, and waited for an opportunity to present itself. In October Janet Conway from the Parks Department asked Martin if we would be interested in putting up bat boxes in Luton. Martin, Soggy and Simon had found a brown long eared bat roost at Wardown Museum. The Luton Cultural Services Trust were very interested in the roost as a potential display and in October we met with Paul Hyman and Amy

Skellern and a plan was hatched, centred round a community bat box building project using the Kent Bat Box design.

Martin checked out possible sources of money and his eyes alighted on the Heritage Lottery Fund's Awards for All



LOTTERY FUNDED

Martin, Jude and Bob spent long hours on the bid. **Jon Balaam**, who is a fundraiser at the Greensand Trust, looked it over for us, and **Jo Potts**, a chartered accountant member of the group, kindly took on the hideous task of auditing the books. (We will omit the bit about how it took the Nat West six weeks to change the signatories on the Bat Group bank account. It is not a story to inspire faith in banks).

The Cunning Plan

- Run a community bat building project centred in Luton, using the experience we have gained from the work in Bedford.
- Target groups such as schools, scouts and other interest groups young or led (*if you have any suggestions for people who might like to get involved, get in touch*).
- Give them wood, they build Kent boxes and in return offer them bat talks / walks / training.
- Boxes go into parks or other appropriate spaces such as school grounds. (LSCT is offering to advertise this to groups and run some events from the museum)
- These boxes are monitored.
- If we made enough we could offer boxes for sale at stalls (We will be doing more stalls in the Luton area).
- Encourage folk to get involved – through public walks and an offer of training. (*Have confirmed walk at Wardown and Stockwood thus far.*)
- LCST is keen to monitor and video bats in roost and make a display in Wardown Museum and the bid includes funding for this if it proves feasible (*We could also use equipment to film other known bat roosts, e.g. John's pip roost*).
- LCST are offering to deal with youth organisations and deal with press releases.

We already have got a promise of £700- £1000 from Luton Parks Department for commercially bought bat boxes. Luton Parks Department will help us with installation of the boxes.

We can't go too far ahead of ourselves as Awards for All

pay nothing for expenses incurred before the day they confirm the grant, but we have the shopping list ready.

We asked AFA for

- 10 Magenta bat detectors and associated kit so we can run more walks in the Luton area.
- A CCTV set up for Wardown Museum, data loggers and computer.
- An iBats set-up so we can do car surveys in the Luton area (and further afield) for the BCT international iBats project.
- Materials and tools for making and installing bat boxes.
- Admin costs - including leaflets, publicity and travel costs for volunteers.



How can you help?

- manning stalls in the Luton area
- helping out at walks
- talks
- helping with surveys in the Luton area on foot and by car
- building boxes or helping groups make boxes, by cutting kits for us and/or helping other groups put them together. (*Do you know any bored carpenters who want a new project?*)
- putting us in touch with groups (or individuals) that might want to get involved in building boxes.
- joining the co-ordinating group to help with running the project
- are you a whiz with a video camera who would help us film emerging bats?

Please don't think this is only for hardened /experienced bat group members, we need to involve as many people as we can if we are going to pull off this audacious cunning plan. We promise not to throw you in the deep end. Martin is the project leader for this, but feel free to contact Jude, who no longer has to work for a living and has offered to help Martin out, so it may be easier to contact her.



iBats surveys – help needed

The *iBatsUK* survey is part of an international programme (www.ibats.org.uk) to assess bat population levels. In this country, it has subsumed the Bats and Roadside Mammals recording scheme which collects data on population levels of a range of bat and other mammal species. The results feed in to the population trends published by the Tracking Mammals Partnership (see www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/TMP_TMP_update_2008.pdf for the most recent report, and www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4316 for the TMP web site). The surveys are carried out by evening car transects – slowly driving a 25 mile route along minor roads while the passenger records sightings of mammals, both living and dead. A GPS unit records locations and the route, and a time-expansion bat detector linked to a digital recorder detects and stores the calls of bats encountered along the route.

Although the processing of the recordings and identification of bats from their calls requires training (which the Bat Group can provide), carrying out the surveys themselves needs no specialist skills or knowledge other than driving, operating a GPS unit, and identification of a few familiar mammal species such as fox, badger and rabbit.

We included the cost of the equipment need for *iBats* surveys in our application for funding through the National Lottery Fund's Awards for All scheme. As I write, we have provisionally been granted the funding for a *Bats in Luton* project. If all goes well, we shall be starting this project in the spring, and carrying out some *iBats* surveys will be part of it.

If anyone would like to take part in these surveys, particularly in the Luton area, please contact me. The surveys should be fascinating, and they will produce records of bats and other mammals over a large area. Teams of two or three people (driver and navigator/recorder) are needed, and the more volunteers we get, the more recording we can do.

Bob Cornes

Andrew McCarthy Associates has very kindly donated 2 unwanted Bat Box IIIs to the bat group. They can rest assured they will get a lot of use.