

The Mysterious Case of the bat in the night.

Tuesday 17th saw our now annual trip to the Adams' roost in Haynes. John rang us a few days before, worried that the bats did it seem to be there in large numbers, but we said we'd go ahead anyway. 15 of us arrived and were supplied with the usual cake and a cuppa. It was hard to know where to start but a word must be said for Betty's wonderful offering.

As always it was a good chance to chat to members, and as always the bats were as devious as could be in escaping the net. Eventually Bob caught one which he then took round to show people. As always Bob went to confirm the sex of the bat despite years of records showing this was a girl's only venue.

Just as well really, as there it was – a sizeable penis. He also noticed that its testes were enlarged. This bloke was in full breeding conditions. When we looked at the photos we had taken we noticed something else. His buccal glands were enlarged. Make bats use these glands in their mouth to scent mark in order to entice the ladies. (What kind of world is it when bat slobber is an aphrodisiac?) And the books say they mate in October/November so what was going on here?

We asked round and Daniel Hargreaves said he had found males in breeding condition at this time of year. The most entertaining answer came from Dr James Aegerter who is supervising the student doing the serotine project. And I reproduce his answer here:

“Males are both possible - and even likely - to have been previously present, just in small proportion. I don't think I've ever seen evidence that common pips ever have exclusively female roosts the way say Serotines do - I've always understood that males will be present in variable and small amounts. For all other species that conversation can become complex as you begin to differentiate between bothersome and smelly mature males and sweet and charming immature males (that we'd class as adults because they were not born this year). Thus males could be present, but would not be mature males.

Of all the species, this 'adult like' immaturity is probably shortest in pips and so the likelihood of immatures confusing the picture is less. In the case of pips I'm sure I expect even maternity roosts to have a proportion of mature males (possibly the more polite ones?)

“So evidence that spring mating is attempted by

desperate males - even if the females are neither interested or requiring fertilization. This is a fascinating one to me - and I've seen this (albeit not quite so late in the year) - in other species - in terms of population dynamics it suggests that all of those mature females who 'want' to get pregnant (and are able to do so) have the opportunity, and that just because females might have made some bum calls in the autumn about where to be to get good looking males, or may have had such a hard winter that they somehow lost their collected sperm (no evidence for this what so ever) - they'll always have another chance to attain pregnancy in spring.”



The Lecherous Pip



Photos Jude Hirstwood

More pictures on the newsgroup

Enormous thanks to John and Adams for making us so welcome and so fat.