

Bat care in Biggleswade One man and an injured Bat

Aiden Matthews shares his experience of caring for a badly injured bat

Photos by Aidan Matthews

Back in September 2011 I was out at the Lakeside completing a Nathusius Pip survey for BCT, when I received a text message from Simon Pigeon, the Bedfordshire Bat Care co-ordinator, asking me if I could do a bat ambulance call for him as it was in my home town of Biggleswade. A quick stop at home to pick up a pair of handling gloves and I drove straight around to the house. The home owners informed me that their cat had brought the bat in and they had managed to retrieve it. It was still alive and they had put it into a shoebox, with some holes punched in the top and a grape in one corner, bless.

I took the bat out of the shoebox, and gave it a quick examination for species, sex, age and any injuries. It was a juvenile male pipistrelle, and had a major wound on its front and several puncture holes in the wing. There was no chance of an immediate release with the severity of the wound, and I didn't have high hopes of him surviving overnight, let alone a few days for the wound to heal. I thanked the homeowners for their call and left with the bat, shoebox and grape.

Once I got him home I attempted to clean some of the clotted blood from his fur and provide him with some water and rested him in a quiet area of the house. The wound started at his ribs and



extended down to the hip, and he appeared to have lost a large amount of blood, judging by the number of cotton buds and swabs I went through. I was very nervous about opening up the wound and causing further loss of blood, so left quite a clot of blood where it was matted into his fur. The holes in the wing membrane were fairly small, approximately 2-3mm, and there didn't appear to be any damage to the bones in the forearms or digits. I managed to get him to lick some water from a piece of kitchen roll and left him in peace overnight.

When I opened the box in the morning I was greeted with a

decided that I'd better take him with me into work to keep an eye on him throughout the day. I called in to the local pet shop and picked up some mealworms, found a pair of tweezers and fed him the squeezed insides of the worms. He attracted a lot of attention at work as few people there have ever seen a bat up close in the daylight, but I tried just leaving him alone when I wasn't feeding him.

This went on for a few days and my hopes started to rise that he may get over his injuries. He'd started trying to crawl about and on one occasion jumped from my shoulder and flapped his way to the floor. It must have been so sore for him, as the fur across his front was still matted into the scab, and every movement of his wing would have pulled the skin on his chest. After a few weeks he was really stretching his wings out and I managed to let him



grumpy 'squeak' and I could see that he'd left me a few deposits of dark urine and some droppings. I gave him some more water and

have a few sessions flying around in the meeting room at my work office. All the bat carers I spoke to about him were amazed that

he'd fought off any infection from the cat bites and that he was doing so well. 'You'd better release him soon, else you'll be stuck with him for the winter.' said Martin and Bob. The next two weeks were a mix of cold, wet and windy nights, not suitable for attempting to release him, especially as he still had some of the scab attached.

I brought him along to the 'Bats of Yucatan' talk in November to hopefully get some advice on how to continue to care for him. Here I meet Jan Ragg, from the Essex Bat Group, and Colin Edwards from several bat groups. They gave me various hints and tips about the care of injured bats. Jan explained to me about her set up for the overwintering of bats. A 'Flexarium' is lined with cork tiles to which a couple of cork place mats are attached to create a crawl space and a heat mat is attached to the outside of the cage, to provide a gentle heat source. A couple of shallow bowls are then placed inside, loaded with water and live mealworms, from which he can eat, drink and swim in as he pleases.

A few weeks after the talk, the bat's scab finally fell completely off, and left a long vivid scar and not a lot of fur across his front. His appetite had started to slow down and he was relatively inactive and drowsy, despite being housed in the warmth of my kitchen. Jan made contact with me and kindly offered to loan me one of her overwintering 'Flexariums', so that I could continue to care for the bat, we had discussed him going on a holiday to her, but she already had several patients in and felt that there may be more yet to come this winter. She furnished me with a portable fabric puppy kennel, lined with cork, draped with dusters and a heat mat, and we set

up the cage in my conservatory. He has been in this cage since the beginning of December and spends most of his time behind the hanging tiles. I can lift the tiles off to check that he's still ok and on one occasion he was awake and very mobile. I brought him into the house for the night and placed him in a small vivarium with water and more than twenty mealworms in a bowl. The next day I checked him again and found all of the mealworms gone and a large amount of droppings strewn around the box. I checked his weight and found that he'd actually increased by half a gram since the start of his winter rest. This gain was in the few hours the previous night that he'd learnt how to find and catch the live mealworms, as he'd been a fairly constant weight throughout his recuperation from his wounds.

Today has been fairly warm for January, and he was active when I went to refill his mealworm and water bowls - he even tried to fly out of the cage! It still makes me jump, as he is so quick and tiny. He's been with me now for nearly four months and he's still raring to go and as grumpy as that first morning I checked him. My daughter often told me that the bat shouted at her as she passed through the kitchen and that she liked feeding him the mealworms - 'But I'm not chopping their heads off Daddy!'. It's been such a brilliant experience for me and my family to be able to nurse this wild animal back to health; I just hope that he will gain his flight strength in the spring and that I can successfully release him back into the wild, well Biggleswade at least.

Fossil bat fly discovered

Researchers from Oregon State

University in

amber from the Dominican Republic that was formed 20-30 million years ago. The bat fly was entombed and perfectly preserved for all that time in what was then oozing tree sap and later became a semi-precious stone. Bat flies only leave their hosts briefly for mating, which makes this find even more remarkable



This is the only fossil ever found of a bat fly; it was also carrying malaria, further evidence of the long time that malaria has been prevalent in the New World. The genus of bat fly discovered in this research is now extinct.



"Bats are mammals that go back about 50 million years, the only true flying mammal, and the earliest species had claws and climbed trees. We now know that bat flies have been parasitizing them for at least half that time, and they are found exclusively in their fur. They are somewhat flat-sided like a flea, allowing them to move more easily through bat fur.

Thanks to Goeffrey Gomes for finding this [http:// www.physorg.com/news/2012-02-vampires-million-years.html](http://www.physorg.com/news/2012-02-vampires-million-years.html)