



Bat Care

One lovely sunny morning, I set up my sat nav (and double checked the map as I have little faith in sat navs), whilst I waited for young Elaine to arrive.

It was almost a shame to have to spend such a nice day driving to Milton Country Park and spend the day inside, but on the other hand Elaine and I were looking forward to the day's subject of bat care.

The park was very easy to get to and find. The venue was a lovely visitors' centre. Unfortunately the room wasn't enclosed and was near the entrance to the seated area overlooking the lake, so was a little noisy, although a pleasant place to spend a sunny Saturday.

As we arrived we had a warm welcome into the venue and the percolator was on to wake us up some more, ready for the attention needed. The course was arranged by the Cambridgeshire Bat Group and BCT. The Cambridgeshire group were nice enough to invite members of the Bedfordshire Bat Group to attend without charge and have some much needed training in bat care to boost the numbers of carers in both counties. Once again it was a pleasure for both groups to work together and meet each other as it provides such strong relations with neighbouring counties and a great support network.

Our trainer for the day was the fantastic Maggie Brown, whose experience in bat care is outstanding. The course itself was new and we were a pilot group for the material, but Maggie needn't have worried as what she put together was great. Her material was just the right pitch for an introductory course to new bat carers and this was backed up with very informative hand outs for us to refer to. Maggie also had examples of equipment to give us a really clear idea of what was needed and what was involved in bat care, I particularly liked her demonstrations with a stuffed squeaky bat toy. There was also a couple of live bats brought along and shown.

We had a chance during lunch for the two groups to mingle with each other and chat with Maggie . . . and to scoff cake that Jude had made, which as normal was grand (I do believe the Beds Bat Group is starting to get a reputation as cake munchers, which makes us an endearing group to visit and work with, all good lol!).

I really liked and appreciated Maggie's 'no nonsense' take on what she does and listening to her experiences is invaluable to people coming into bat care like myself and young bat workers like Elaine who may be considering

this path. The most important point made by Maggie and backed up by Abie several times throughout the day, for anyone, was when we left that day we could get involved in bat care to a level we are comfortable with or not at all if we decided that it isn't what we wanted to do after the course and if we did want to get involved it could be as simple as being an 'ambulance' driver because any help is great.

Also that any help and support needed is out there, whether it be through your own group, neighbouring groups, BCT or Maggie herself, which is a great comfort for these points being stressed so strongly to encourage people to get involved in bat care and to build confidence into new carers starting out.

For myself, I would like a bit of hands on experience before I am confident to take on a really sick bat that needs a lot of attention and hand feeding, which has been arranged through my group, but I am now confident looking after a less serious case and I know that in any case, now or in the future, help and support is available for me and experience comes with time, which is also an important point to bear in mind when looking after any living creature.

The day also had a positive effect on Elaine, who is approaching 16 and is very keen to get involved in bat care, even if its just helping me out so it doesn't affect her school work and she's already looking into getting her injections . . . I can see myself getting another front door key cut lol.

The course put together by Maggie was well worth doing if you are thinking of going into bat care and Maggie and her husband have also written a manual that is worth reading and referring to due to there many years of experience.

Many thanks to Maggie for her wiliness to travel down to Cambridgeshire with all her material, BCT for there involvement and big thanks to Chris, Abie and Antony from Cambridgeshire Bat Group for inviting the mob across the border to join in.

Editor's Note

This was a pilot course being run by BCT and we are enormously grateful for the Cambridge Bat Group for letting us attend. The full cost of attending would have been far beyond our funding and we were looking at Simon providing training in house as an alternative option. This would have involved a lot of preparation.

Outcomes

Eight of us attended, of whom seven offered offered help with bat care in one way or another. Mark Best has offered to collect bats. Jude, Bob (who wasn't at the



course) Lizzie Pauling, Martin O'Connor and Sogs will collect bats and if necessary hang onto them over night/short term. (Lizzie's friends have already given her a special bat box to collect the bats in). Kelly is prepared to take on longer term care if Simon and Claara get overwhelmed and Elaine Rigby is offering to help Kel (We will have to get her inoculations sorted out). In addition to this, Colin Edwards who lives in Baldock has also offered to help – he has experience of bat care with Jan Ragg and the Herts & Middx. Bat Group. We have ring fenced a sum of money to cover purchase of additional equipment as the need arises, and cover claims for petrol.