



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

The Sussex Bat Hospital Presented by Jenny Clark MBE.

Fri 12th May 2017

The profile of animals has been given a boost at our monthly talks over the past couple of years, with Trevor Weekes talking about the Wealden Rural Ambulance Service in 2015, and last year June Felstead come along to talk about search and rescue dogs with Mollie, her Blue Marle Collie.

However, not many of us have ever had the opportunity to see live bats at close quarters and that's what Jenny did so wonderfully in her talk. She began by relating the tale some 40 years ago of how a plumber she knew brought in a bat that had been found on the ground. Neither of them knew what to do to help it; there was no internet or other reference material from which to glean useful information. Therefore, she reasoned that given that it was a mammal and she had an equine background training horses, her father being a GP and her mother a staff nurse at Guys then she would treat it as a very small horse. That approach did the trick, the bat survived, and that helped create the template for the future. An interest in the care of these curious and misunderstood creatures developed and thus the hospital was founded at her home.

Of the 17 breeding species to be found in the UK (out of 2000 worldwide), Jenny had brought along 4 different bats, each tucked away inside their own favourite oven mit, inside a cylindrical wicker basket about 8" across. I was surprised to learn how small they all were, not that I was expecting anything approaching the size of an Asian fruit bat. As Jenny walked around the room to show everyone each bat in turn, she spoke of their particular background, how they came to the hospital and whether they could ever be released again. The key to release was the all-important flying test; failing that would mean they couldn't fend for themselves properly and so they would have to stay. Indeed, with a life span of up to 40 years, Jenny has had one bat for 25 years.

The first bat shown was a serotine, named Sophie, who's been at the hospital for 18 years. Described by Jenny as "lazy and dim" they have broad wings and a leisurely flapping flight. They live in the south east of England, mainly in the Sussex.

The second bat was a noctule, the largest species in the country but still smaller than the palm of your hand, referred to as "four fingers wide". "Honey" has been in the hospital for seven years, having been sent down by taxi from Knightsbridge by the people who found her. This species is intelligent and flies quickly, coming out early in the evening to beat the owls.

The pipistrelle is one of the smallest and most common bats, only "two fingers wide". There are two types of pipistrelle: the common and soprano. They appear fast and jerky in flight as they catch small insects, anything up to 3000 in one night.

Finally, we were shown a brown long eared bat, which have very soft coats to reduce any sound that they make. Their hearing is exceptional, enabling them to hunt by stealth in the dead of night.

Half of Jenny's time is spent caring for bats and the other half in educating the public about bats and how numbers have dwindled 70-90% since she began caring for them, mostly from changes in the environment. This covers loss of habitat, changes in the chemical composition of the environment and physical hazards such as wind turbines and vehicles. Sticky fly paper is a problem too and Jenny urges us not to use it as it takes a good three weeks of treatment before a bat can be released once

more. The most prevalent weaknesses in a bat are their humerus bone, where their fingers enter their wrists and if there' a hole in their tail membrane then they can't fly. If one is found injured never unfold the wing sideways as it will think you're trying to break it, always unfold it downwards carefully. When stressed, they will lose hair under their chin, then on their chest and then on their back.

For further information and for guidance if an injured bat is found please visit <http://www.sussexbatgroup.org.uk/batrescue>, where you'll find the helpline phone numbers.

Leycester Whewell, EHADPS secretary, 17 May 2017