



*Barbastelle (and spider), Box Hill Fort, photo Derek Smith*

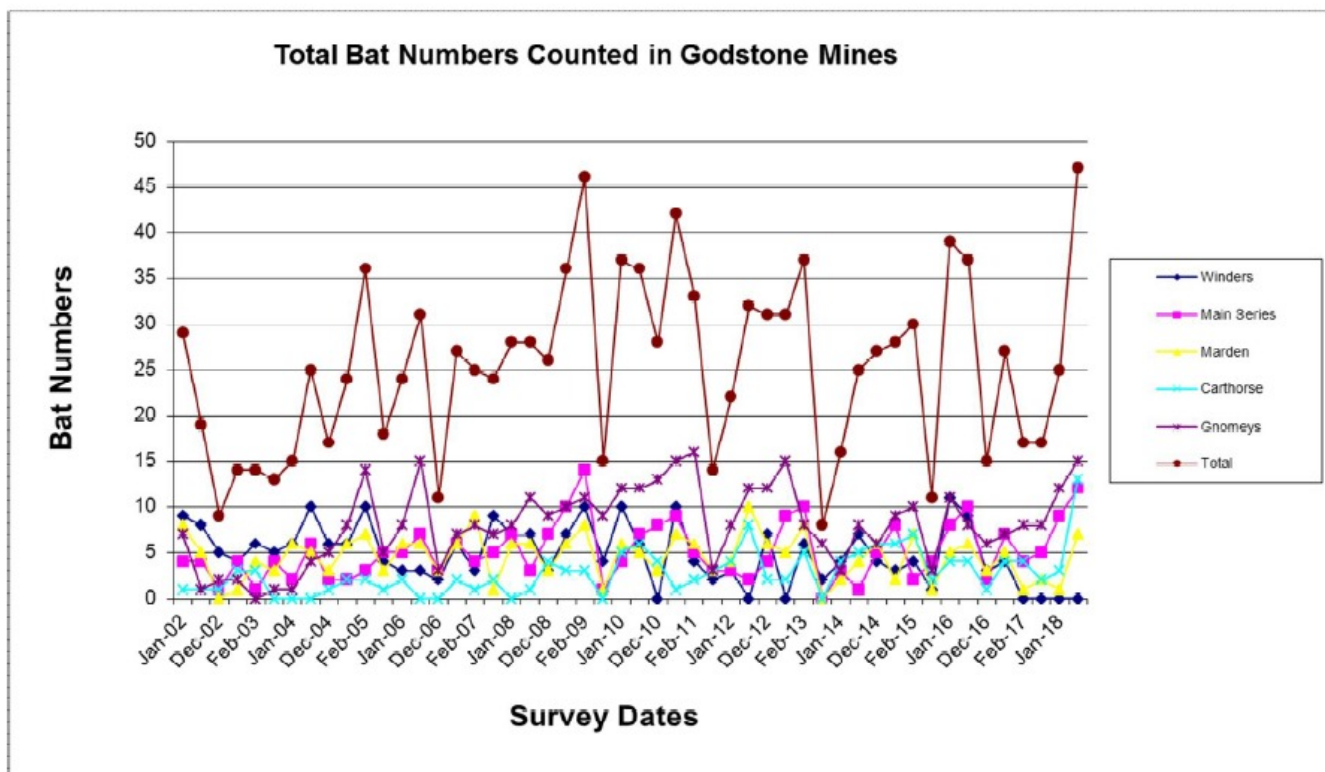
## Surrey Underground Hibernacula

In the table below, the sites named Main Series, Carthorse, Marden and Nomies are collectively referred to as Godstone Mines. Like Westhumble they are abandoned mines. (Winders is one of the Godstone Mines and has appeared in tables in previous years but as no checks were carried out there this winter, due to access problems, I have not included it this year.) Albury refers to a tunnel, Betchworth and Brockham to lime kilns and Busbridge and Clandon to ornamental grottos. “Whiskered group” is a term describing the highly similar whiskered bat, Brandt’s bat and Alcathe bat, distinguishable only by close examination in the hand which would cause unacceptable disturbance to hibernating bats. (“WAB” and “small *Myotis*” are alternative terms for these three species.) Hatchford ice house was checked but as no bats were found in any of the three monthly visits I have not included it in the table.

		Natterer's bat	Daubenton's bat	Whiskered group	Brown long eared bat	Bechstein's bat	Barbastelle
Albury	Jan	4	1		1		
	Feb		2	1	1		
Betchworth	Dec	5	1	2		1	
	Jan	3	1	2		1	
Brockham	Feb	5	1	1		1	
	Dec	3		6	1		
	Jan	4	3	2			
	Feb	9	4	2			
Box Hill Fort	Dec				3		2
	Jan	1			1		2
	Feb	2			1		1
Busbridge	Jan	8	3				
Clandon	Jan	No bats	found				
	Feb	1					
Main Series	Dec		3	2			
	Jan		8	1			
	Feb	1	9	2			
Carthorse	Dec			2			
	Jan	1	1	1			
	Feb	7	5		1		
Marden	Dec	1	1				
	Jan		1				
	Feb	1	6				
Nomies	Dec	1	3	3	1		
	Jan	4	4	3	1		
	Feb	2	8	5			
Westhumble	Dec	6	2	3	2	1	
	Jan	11	10	2		1	

*Thanks to Claire Andrews for the Busbridge data and to Ross Baker for the rest in the table above.*

Despite access difficulties preventing the monitoring of Winders, the total for Godstone Mines in February was 47 bats which is the highest total yet found. See the graph below for the results for Godstone Mines over the years (with zero for the last four entries for Winders due to lack of access).



Below is a selection of photos taken on the Busbridge visit. As you may guess it was raining. The centre photo includes two Natterer’s bats, the one at lower left has its pale underside uppermost while the other is deep in the crevice on the right. The herald moth, bejewelled with drops of condensation, was hanging on a fine tree root emerging from the sandstone ceiling of the grotto.



*Optional equipment, Natterer’s bats and herald moth, photos Derek Smith*



*Photo, Bernard Baverstock, Feb 2015*

The Tice’s Meadow hibernaculum, known by Tice’s Meadow regulars as “The Bat Cave”, was adapted from an old concrete structure about three years ago (as reported in the Spring 2015 issue of this newsletter). In January this year Bernard Baverstock and Steve Bailey found two brown long eared bats in a 1FF bat box inside. The boxes were funded by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust. This was the first time bats have been seen here. Hopefully it will be used regularly in the future. For further information about the site, especially relating to birding see: <http://www.ticesmeadow.org/>

## Noctules at Thursley Common

Noctules hibernate in a collection of bat boxes at Thursley Common, mainly the large, well insulated 1FW boxes. They are checked just once each winter under a special project licence from Natural England, with minimal handling – handling of bats in hibernation is not permitted under standard Natural England class survey licences. Before the 2016/17 winter the total number of noctules in the boxes never quite reached 100 and people taking part always speculated that “this time” the 100 barrier might be broken. Diligent readers may remember that in February 2017 the total reached 123. This year’s total was 118, which would once have been a cause for mild celebration but the bar has now been raised.



*Daniel Whitby with a noctule on a 1FW box front (and sporting his Bat Conservation and Research Unit top) and a noctule’s thumb near a gathering of bat bugs, Cimex sp., on the box front, photos Derek Smith*

## Neighbouring Counties

**Greater mouse eared bat** Of all the bats hibernating in Britain the greater mouse eared bat, which hibernates in a tunnel in West Sussex, is the undoubted celebrity. When first discovered there in December 2002, its uniqueness, in a British context, warranted in the hand examination which allowed it to be identified as a male and his unworn teeth showed him to be young. He has hibernated in the tunnel every winter since then, the ring he bears proving that it is the same bat each year. He is the only greater mouse eared bat known to have been present in the country from 2002 to 2018. He is, as it were, the latest chapter in the intriguing “Greater Mouse Eared Bat in Britain” story.

The beginning of the story was described in detail in the Bat Conservation Trust’s “Bat News,” issue 26, July 1992, in an article by RE Stebbings, “Mouse eared bat – extinct in Britain?” The first properly documented record, of a dead one, was made by Michael Blackmore (with others) in February 1956 in Dorset. Within a year four live animals were found and ringed. A Dorset colony was known for 35 years, the maximum known population size being 12 (five females and seven males) in December 1960 although it was thought likely that there had been more at one time. The last individuals seen in the county were a male in December 1973 and another in February 1979. In October 1969 Michael Blackmore learned of a group seen in Sussex. He and Bob Stebbings visited the county and ringed 26 bats (19 females and seven males) of which 10 were judged to have been born that year. Three hibernacula were used and because two were not secure and there was a perceived threat from specimen collectors “... many weekends were spent in an effort to protect the site and to keep out visitors.” (Bats had no legal protection then.) In January 1974 bats were found in the usual hibernacula but the next winter the females did not return.

Up until that time summer roosts had not been sought but in August 1977 a felled tree about 5 km from the hibernacula revealed two ringed bats, dying as a result of the felling. This prompted a search for roosts in the surrounding 200 sq km area. Of 66 buildings searched, 20 held roosts of 26 bat colonies comprising six species but no sign was found of mouse eared bats. From 1980 just two males were known from Sussex and

from 1985 only one. January 1992 was the second anniversary of the last male's absence from his usual hibernaculum and it was then that the species was declared extinct in Britain, the first mammal to become extinct in Britain since the wolf.

The next chapter was a short one. In January 2001 a cold, wet greater mouse eared bat was found hanging on a fence in Bognor Regis. This was a female whose worn teeth showed her to be old, and she was taken into care but died in a matter of days. That was that until the present chapter began in December 2002 as stated above. Is he really the only one? Where does he go in the summer? The story continues .....



*Greater mouse eared bat, W Sussex, Feb 2018*      *Greater horseshoe bat, W Sussex, Dec 2017*  
*Photos, Martyn Phillis*

(My thanks to Tony Hutson, former editor of Bat News, for reminding me of the Stebbings article. DS)

**Greater horseshoe bat** A greater horseshoe bat is always an exciting find in the South East. One was found hibernating in West Sussex in December and in January one was found in Hampshire, as reported by Colleen Hope of Hampshire Bat Group, on UK Bat Workers Facebook group. It was found in the Greywell Tunnel, a very important hibernaculum for Natterer's bats in particular with 560 counted this winter, one of the highest counts for the site. January's greater horseshoe bat is the first found here since records began in 1985 and only the seventh record for the north of the county.

Greywell Tunnel is a 1,125m canal tunnel, blocked at the western end, on the Basingstoke Canal. The canal had fallen into disuse but in 1966 the Basinstoke Canal Society was formed with the aim of restoring it for recreational use. In the early 1970s Hampshire and Surrey County Councils bought the derelict canal and after 20 years of voluntary and professional work 32 miles of the waterway, from the junction with the Wey Navigation to the Greywell Tunnel, were fully restored, complete with new lock gates etc. There was considerable pressure from some quarters to allow restoration of the tunnel as well, with much bad feeling towards those who thought that the importance of the tunnel for bats should come before that for boats. (See <http://www.basingstoke-canal.org.uk/bcn/bcnews167.htm> ) Dr RE Stebbings was commissioned to do a survey. The scientific report "Bats in Greywell Tunnel, Basingstoke Canal: An assessment of the bats in Greywell Tunnel and the potential effects on them of the Surrey and Hampshire Canal Society's restoration proposals, June 1992" appears to be unavailable now but a few copies of the English Nature booklet, "The Greywell Tunnel: An internationally important haven for bats," can still be bought from Amazon etc. Bob Stebbings' work won the day for the bats!

Derek Smith