



## *Berks and South Bucks Bat Group*

### **Report of the visit to the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, Beenham on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov 2011**

#### *Background*

We made contact with the Wolf Trust following a visit there by a relative of James Shipman, who had discovered that they had some existing bat boxes and wanted to know more about their bats.

The Wolf Trust was founded by Roger Palmer in 1995 to:

- enhance public awareness and knowledge of wild wolves and their place in the ecosystem
- provide opportunities for ethological research and other research that may improve the lives of wolves both in captivity and in the wild
- raise money to help fund wolf related conservation projects around the world
- provide wolf related education programmes for young people and adults

The Trust is a not-for-profit organisation run by its five Directors with two full time and three part time members of staff, as well as over 70 volunteers, and some notable Patrons.

Tsa Palmer informed us that the existing boxes must have been installed prior to her husband's death in 2004, as she had not been involved in this. She wants to increase the wildlife potential of the whole site, to encourage conservation of all kinds and to educate the public about it. She would be interested in combined wolf/bat walks in the summer.

#### *Overview*

In addition to the land occupied by the wolves and their walking spaces, Tsa owns and lives in the adjoining Butlers Farm and has recently purchased a further 23 acres of farmland, bringing the total estate to 50 acres. Much of this is farm land, either pasture or crops, with hedge lines, many of which consist mainly of mature trees. There is a stream along the bottom of the wolf walking field and a small pond in the corner. The farm house was built in the 1600s. There is a newly built barn at the top of the new field. Close by is an area which Tsa has given over to the village for allotments. The hillside in this field has been planted with native British trees, approx 2ha.

#### *Aims of the bat box installation*

- To increase public awareness of bats
- To find out what bats are present on the site
- To try different styles of box to see how many/which species occupy them

## Our visit

The existing boxes, which Tsa knew about, were two standard boxes on a youngish oak tree, just inside the second gate, maybe 4m up. There was a nice, small interpretative



panel just below suggesting that visitors look up to see bats. John checked both boxes and brought down a brown long eared bat *Plecotus aureus*. She was mature with no sign of lactation (but that may be normal at this time of year), forearm 41.5mm and both thumb and tragus measured approx 4mm. There was some damage along the bottom edge of her left wing and the tip of her left tragus was missing.



Oddly she was in the box to the WNW of the tree and which was filled with cobwebs and spiders! The other box was completely empty but was also quite damp both inside and out (both were damp on the outside!). We consider that she may normally roost in the house but was caught out by the torrential rains and took the nearest shelter.

We then walked down the track between the wolf enclosures and the farm house, towards the staff portakabin. There are a number of additional trees down there which could have small bat boxes installed (wooden or 1fn??). We then followed the wolf cubs which were being walked into their field and around the edge. Buzzards have nested in a tree in the bottom (NE) corner in the last year. There is an oak tree approx in the middle of the bottom edge of this field, along the side of the stream, known as Wolf Creek, beside a bench. This would be a good site for a hibernation box (1FW) as it is obvious to the public and could be

accessed from two ladders at the same time. This would also be a good site for an interpretative board. As the public walk close by and possibly sit on the bench, it might be sensible to use a



webbing tree tie/belt to increase the security of the box.

We then walked back up the hill along the far side of this field. There are two predatory bird boxes along this hedge; a triangular owl box about half way up and an open rectangular box near the top of the hill. Bat boxes could be placed on the second tree down from each of these.

We cut through the hedge line between the top end of that field and the next field and found ourselves on a footpath. This hedge line is largely very mature cherry trees which, whilst they may contain several very good roost holes are not very good for bat boxes as branches often fall off and/or the trees fall down.

The footpath led back into the over flow car park at the point where the tracks to the farm and the public areas split. There are several young straight trees here, one of those near the entrance to the car park would be a good position for a standard 3 wooden boxes set up.

We then walked down to look at the farm house, which almost certainly houses a BLE roost in the summer. The timber framing and brick work are in need of fairly significant attention, which means there are many possible access points for other species of bats. It would be well worth a visit at a more appropriate time of year to look for emergence, as well as an internal roost visit. The wooden exterior to the detached garage/play room has recently been treated.

We proceeded up the next field to towards the new barn, alongside the trees planted last winter. These could do with some attention as this has not been the best year for new trees. As the barn is so new, it is unlikely to provide much roosting opportunity at the moment, but the sides are entirely constructed of wooden planking and they should therefore mature into quite a useable structure. In the meantime, it would make a good “host” for a large scale bat box project. Boxes could be fitted to every wall to see if different aspects are preferred. Different styles of box could be used, to see which (if any) styles are preferred and these could be rotated around the barn every few years. If the boxes were fitted with a metal plate on the back, which could be hooked over a hook or nail in the wall of the barn, this would facilitate the rotation. It would be a good opportunity to get the whole village and the local school involved in building the boxes.

Beyond the newly planted wood and the allotments, there is a small sewage works surrounded by mature planted oaks etc. It might be worth contacting Thames Water to have a look inside this site.

In all locations, bird boxes should be installed with the bat boxes to try to avoid the birds taking over the bat boxes.

### *Proposed actions*

- Over the winter, obtain and install 1fw and 2x2fn Schwegler boxes together with either, a bird box and a Kent box, or combined bird/bat box and cottage styled wooden bat box, for each of the three trees identified in the main walking field. Also 3 standard wooden boxes for the tree in the over flow car park.
- Create interpretative material to accompany these boxes.

- In early spring, hold a bat & bird box making session for the village and school and then a box installation day to attach them to the barn.
- In late spring and maybe late summer, hold bat walks in the village.
- In late spring/early summer, conduct an emergence survey around Tsa's house. At some point, arrange an internal roost survey.
- Throughout the summer, arrange 1-3 joint wolf and bat walks, depending on demand.
- Next winter, prepare a presentation/leaflet describing the bats which have been identified on the various parts of the site and the future plans.

### *Cost implications*

#### Short term

Cost of boxes:

- 1 x 1fw @ £170
- 2 x 2fn @ £35
- 3 x standard boxes @ £5
- 3 x cottage boxes @ £5
- 3 x combined boxes (bird & bat) @£5

Possibly

- 2 x 1ff @£60
- 2 x bird box @ £5

Publicity:

- Interpretative board by hibernation box
- Advertising for the box building day

#### Longer term

Materials for box building

Publicity for village walks/talks (assuming advertising for Wolf/bat walks will be done by the UK Wolf Conservation Trust)

Presentation/leaflets about bats found, plans for the future etc

### *Conclusion*

Overall, a wonderful opportunity to enhance both our and the local people's knowledge of bats in a project which could last many years.

Many thanks to Tsa and her staff for making us welcome and to the wolves for the lovely vocal display they treated me and Tina to!