

Clare Bat Project '08

4 June 2008

Significant steps are being taken in County Clare to help protect Ireland's most misunderstood mammal.

The **Clare Bat Box Project 2008**, which recently received EUR3k funding from the Heritage Council, aims to erect 20 specially ordered Bat boxes at five locations throughout the county.

It is hoped that the boxes will provide valuable homes for Clare's many bat species and encourage local communities to learn, watch and protect their resident bat populations.

According to Ms. Brigid Barry, Clare Biodiversity Officer, *'Many people are surprised when they hear that bats do not always live in caves. Some bats spend winter months in caves, but most bats spend summers in trees, under bridges or in old buildings, where they give birth and rear young. Bat boxes act as nurseries for these protected species'*

Nine of the ten species of bats in Ireland are found breeding in Clare, underpinning the county's status as one of Europe's most important bat population centres. The *Daubenton's* bats, for example, are endangered in parts of Europe and are 'endangered' in the *Irish Red Data Book* but are still considered relatively common in Clare. Clare also has internationally important populations of *Lesser Horseshoe* and *Leisler's* bats.

The mammals are strictly protected in Ireland under the Wildlife Act (1976) and the EU Habitats Directive.

The Clare Bat Group, meanwhile, has organised a series of public events at the bat box locations in *Flagmount, Ennis, Kilrush, O'Briensbridge* and *Two Mile Gate/Ballycuggeran*.

Ms. Barry explained that one of the main objectives of the upcoming bat walks and talks would be to expose people to the highly complex lives of bats and help to dispel the myths that exist about them.

'Bats actually have very good eyesight but because they hunt at night when it is dark, they use sound (echolocation) to navigate and locate their prey. Echolocation is a highly sophisticated accurate location method. Bat detectors have been developed to make the ultrasound audible to humans and have helped to distinguish different bats in flight. And, despite the rumours, bats do not get stuck in you hair', Ms. Barry stated.

She continued, *'To celebrate the Clare Bat Box Project 2008, the Clare Bat Group has organised a number of events throughout the summer. These include Bat Walks, where young and old get to see and hear bats in their local communities and a children's bat talk, where children learn about the world of bats through pictures, video and sounds.'*

Event details:

- **12th June** 2008 - Bat Walk - **White Sands, Flagmount** (10.15pm)
- **26th June** 2008 - Bat Walk - **Two Mile Gate/Ballycuggeran, Killaloe** (10.15pm)
- **10th July** 2008 - Bat Walk - **Vandeleur Gardens carpark, Kilrush** (10.15pm)
- **17th July** 2008 - Bat Walk - **riverside carpark, O'Briensbridge** (10.15pm)
- **28th August** 2008 - Childrens Bat talk and walk - **Clare Museum, Ennis** (Talk)/ Abbey Street Carpark, Ennis (Walk) (8pm)

For further details please email: clarebatgroup@gmail.com

All bats and their roosts are protected by law in Ireland. Therefore you should not do anything to disturb or harm bats or obstruct their roosts without first seeking advice from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The NPWS can be contacted on Lo-call 1890 202021

The Clare Biodiversity Group manages the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process in Clare. Clare County Council, the Heritage Council, and LEADER support the project. The Clare Biodiversity Action Plan is an action under the County Clare Heritage Plan 2003-2007.

For more information log on to: www.clarebiodiversity.ie

Vesper bats

Bats are nocturnal mammals which, in Ireland, exclusively predate insects. Their range varies with species, from the *Common Pipistrelle* which is widespread throughout the island to *Brandt's bat*, which has to date only been identified from a few counties.

There are 10 species of bats in Ireland, nine of these belong to the family known as *vesper bats* (the 10th species – the *lesser horseshoe bat* - is not found in N. Ireland and so is not covered by this all-island SAP). These nine species are Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), Whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), Leisler's bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*), Nathusius' Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*), Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), Brown Long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and Brandt's bat (*Myotis brandtii*).

Bats provide a valuable pest control service. They emerge from hibernation in late spring and early summer to forage for insects. A single bat can consume thousands of insects every night. Bats are not blind, but use a type of sonar, called echolocation, to locate their prey. In early summer female bats get together in a suitable nursery roost. They each give birth to a single baby that they can identify by its smell and sound. The mother feeds it milk for several weeks at which point the baby is able to fly and learns to echolocate and catch its own prey. By 6-7 weeks after birth the young are independent.

The females usually leave the maternity roost in August and avail of the late summer's insects to build up a store of body fat to help them survive the winter. Females then seek out males who have set up mating territories by mid-August. Mating takes place from August onwards. Then as temperatures drop further during the approach of winter and insect numbers decline, males and females move into hibernation roosts. Hibernation takes place from October/November onwards during which time a hibernating bat uses very little energy and its body temperature drops to 8-9°C. Individuals may wake up occasionally during mild spells to eat and to drink water. By spring bats gradually wake up to begin the yearly cycle again. The average lifespan of the Irish bat species is thought to be 7-8 years although some have been found over 15 years old.

Habitats especially used by bats include woodland edges and wetlands. Destruction and infilling of these habitats has led to local population declines in some areas. Bats use a variety of roost over the year, choosing warm places such as the attics of churches, stables and occasionally houses for summer nursery roosts, but preferring cool, humid locations like caves and cellars for hibernation.

Loss of foraging habitat can arise from a change in land use resulting in a loss of invertebrate habitat, land management measures which reduce the number of invertebrates present and a loss of habitat corridors which link roost sites to foraging sites.

source: www.environ.ie

Bat Conservation Ireland

www.batconservationireland.org

Biology.ie

www.biology.ie

The Habitats Directive

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm

Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan

<http://www.botanicgardens.ie/gspc/nbp.htm>

Wildlife Act, 1976

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/ZZA39Y1976.html>

Irish Wildlife Trust

<http://www.iwt.ie>

National Parks and Wildlife Service

www.npws.ie/

Red Data Books & Red Lists

<http://www.npws.ie/en/PublicationsLiterature/RedLists/>