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BAT SURVEY OFCHILLINGWOOD AND COOMBE PLANTATION, ISLE OF WIGHT

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report outlines the findings of bat surveys undertaken on parts of the estate of Mr Michael Poland (Ilse of Wight). This report follows that of Davidson-Watts (2003) which had previously investigated bat use of Wroxall Copse on the Isle of Wight.

1.2 Objectives

1 Undertake a baseline survey of bats in Chillingwood and Coombe plantation

2. METHODS

2.1 Bat survey

A small team bat surveyors, with assistance of volunteers from the Isle of Wight Bat Group visited Chillingwood Copse on the 27 July 2004 and Coombe plantation on the 29 July 2005.

2.2 Ultrasound detectors and Batsound analysis

On both surveys time expansion bat detectors were used to record calls from feeding and commuting bats species within the woodlands. The recorded bat calls were downloaded onto a Sony Professional cassette recorder. These bat detectors were used to compliment and guide the catching methods employed during this survey,

The recorded calls were subsequently analysed on Batsound Pro 3.1 (Pettersson Elektronik AB, Sweden) to determine the species or genus of the bat calls recorded and assess bat activity levels in that location.

2.3 Catching bats

Three 6-12 meter mist nets and a 2 x 4m² harp traps were placed across selected woodland rides in both woodlands. From 22:30 previously recorded ultrasonic bat distress calls (Russ 2002), were replayed at hourly intervals for approximately 20 minutes through a laptop computer and high-speed sampling card system, with the aim of drawing any nearby bats to the mist nets. The Sussex Autobat system (using synthesised bat calls) was also employed to lure bats to the nets.

Caught bats were identified, sexed, aged (juvenile/adult) and breeding condition (where appropriate) was noted. Forearm measurements were also made.

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3. RESULTS

27 July 2004 – Chillingwood

There was little bat activity recorded by bat detectors throughout the evening. One Pipistrelle bat (45 kHz) was detected at 21:45 and there were infrequent pipistrelle calls throughout the night.

However the ultrasonic lures between them were able to attract the following bats:

22:00	*Myotis bechsteinii*	Female	Adult- Lactating
22:15	*Myotis bechsteinii*	?	Escaped before examination
22:25	*Myotis bechsteinii*	Male	Adult
23:05	*Myotis bechsteinii*	Female	juvenile
01:05	*Plecotus auritus*	Female	Adult - Lactating

29 July 2005 – Coombe Plantation

The nets were set on a small cluttered ride to the south of a small pond in the center of Coombe plantation. Around the pond and adjacent ride Pipistrelle activity was continuous throughout the entire survey period. Both 55 kHz pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) and 45 kHz pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) were identified. At 21:35 and at 21:50 two barbastelle bats (*Barbastella barbastellus*) were detected feeding along the main woodland ride in Coombe Plantation. Both bats remained in the woodland for approximately 5-10mins. At 22:35 a serotine bat (*Eptesicus serotinus*) was also detected commuting through the woodland ride near the pond.

The nets along the more cluttered ride to the south with assistance from both ultrasonic lures were able to capture the following bats:

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22:28	*Plecotus auritus*	Male	Adult
22:28	*Myotis brandti*	Female	Adult- Lactating
22:35	*Plecotus auritus*	Male	Adult
23:15	*Myotis nattereri*	Female	Adult- lactating
00:28	*Myotis bechsteinii*	Male	Adult
00:30	*Myotis mystacinus*	Female	Adult- Lactating

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4. DISCUSSION

Chillingwood

This ancient woodland is part of a wider network of woodlands in the NorthEast of the Isle of Wight, which includes the Briddlesford Copse complex. The first breeding colony of Bechstein's bats on the Island was discovered in Briddlesford Copse in 2000. The Chillingwood survey has revealed a juvenile and a lactating female using the woodland, that may be part of the Briddlesford colony or possibly a second colony or sub colony (metapopulation). This is quite an exciting find as there are currently very few records of breeding Bechstein's bats in the UK and only one other on the Isle of Wight. Four Bechstein's bats were recorded/captured during just one night's survey, indicating a strong presence in Chillingwood for foraging and/or roosting. Only further intensive research could establish whether this species is roosting within Chillingwood and whether the bats using this wood are part of the Briddlesford population.

Coombe Plantation

Coombe plantation is a very different type of woodland situated in west Wight, this wood is much younger c.100 years old, but part of a very large complex a range of woodland types. Little proactive (eg surveying) bat work has been done in the woodlands on the west side of the Island. Due to the relatively young age of this wood, it was expected that the diversity in bat species using it for either feeding, commuting or roosting would be low. However within 4 hours of the survey commencing, a total of nine species of bat had been recorded, including the very rare Bechstein's bat and the rare barbastelle bat. Only one Bechstein's bat was caught however, a male, which may have been roosting solitarily in this wood or a nearby woodland. The ride through the center of the woodland appeared to be particularly good for a range of feeding bats, especially for pipistrelle bats, but also for the barbastelle bat. Unfortunately this species was not captured and therefore this bats breeding status remains unknown (i.e were they breeding females?). Breeding bats were captured at Coombe plantation however, including the whiskered bat *(Myotis mystacinus*) and Brandt's bat (*Myotis brandti*), and the natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri)*, three bat species equally associated with trees and buildings for roosting.

Although at an early stage in determining what type of woodlands are important for rare tree dwelling bats, these surveys, combined with information from Wroxall Copse and Briddlesford Copse appear to suggest that any type of woodland may support male bats of these rare species. They also suggest that only large ancient woodlands or smaller ancient woodlands that are part of a larger complex of woodlands support breeding populations of these species. Further data is needed to test this hypothesis and surveys of Rowborough and Rowlands woods planned for 2006 should provide more clarity.

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