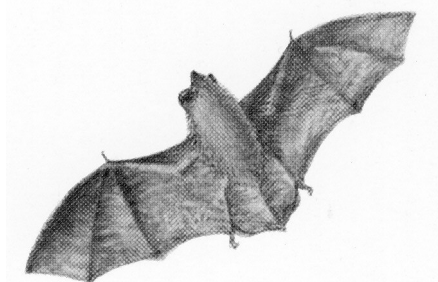


Pipistrelle Bats – our furry flying friends

Many of us on the peninsula are lucky enough to share the roofs of our houses and sheds with these delightful little creatures.



This year we have had bats in the roof above our sitting room, tucked somewhere between the slates, the blue plastic and the plasterboard. The room is open to the roof – there is no loft – so they don't have a lot of space. However that suits them just fine – they love to be squeezed into a narrow gap. In the evening we would hear them chittering and chattering as they prepared for an evening's hunting. (Incidentally these sounds that they make in the roost are not ultra-sonic – they can be heard by anyone with reasonable hearing.) We watched them drop out of the roof a few weeks ago and counted fifty! This is likely to be a maternal roost – mothers and babies. And this would explain why one of the bats we rescued from inside the house (I found it in the sink one morning!) appeared unable to fly – probably a juvenile. We "posted" him back into the roof and he happily clambered in, seeming to recognise where he was.

This bat was just one of several which have managed to get into the house. They have been finding small gaps at the edge of the rafters in the sitting room and then fly around the room looking for the way back in. Sometimes they find it, sometimes we can persuade them to fly out of the door and sometimes we catch them when they settle somewhere within reach. In the (gloved) hand you realise just what tiny bodies they have – 40mm long and weighing between 4 and 8 grams. Despite baring their teeth and chattering crossly they really are cute!

We have noticed that when flying around the sitting room they will often fly down and swoop just a few inches over our heads - maybe this is why people are afraid of getting them tangled in their hair. I am sure the reason for this behaviour is quite straightforward - they recognise that large warm mammals are usually associated with a swarm of nice juicy midges!

Footnote: Contrary to rumours, bats do not normally carry diseases, but as a very small percentage (0.1%) of two species of British bats carry a (treatable) version of rabies it is wise to use gloves when handling them. (So far the disease has not been found in pipistrelle bats). The excellent website www.bats.org.uk has everything you would ever want to know about bats.

Rosemary Royle

PS: Subsequent to last month's article on the Great Green Bush Cricket both Marina Titley and Bridget Lister have told me that they also have had close encounters – Bridget in the strawberries and Marina in the kitchen!