

Organ Pipes bat box check: 13 Feb 2011

We had a fine warm windless day for climbing ladders and capturing little bats and a good team with lots of new recruits to help with the work. As well as Natasha, Ian, Catherine and Steve, there were Paul and Angela Bertuch with friends Claire Meade and Jake Hudson. As usual we split into two teams to do half the boxes each. Steve and Catherine came with me, along with Angela and friends.



Very early we found several large groups of bats at the south end and threatened to run out of bags but we just made it. There was a glider in C29 and a pair of dead ringtails in C33 – mother and juvenile – ants in several boxes which had to be propped open, and glider nests in C43 and C28. The glider boxes are deteriorating again so it indicates the gliders are doing okay at the park and a bit desperate for good nesting sites.



There were also some beautiful spiders in a few boxes such as this *Araneus eburnus*, an orb-weaver, in one box. But the most startling discovery was bald newborn bat pups in several boxes, so many of the female bats seem to have bred twice this summer. There will be very little time for these juveniles to put on enough fat before winter. As often happens this time of year, some of the young bats were spooked when our ladder hit the tree beneath their box, so we had some chases of escapees – one flew out of three boxes and was

finally captured from its fourth hideout.



C42 had a big group of Gould's in it, including some mother bats with very young pups



The original ten boxes had fire-hose hinges on their lids which after 18 years have finally shredded, so I stayed around for a bit to do some repairs, replacing the hose with some new nylon tent repair patches for C5, C6, C7 and putting new screws into the lids of C8 and C30, with some help from Robert Irvine.



The saltbushes all over the flat were fruiting, with multitudes of little red berries. We finished emptying boxes about 5:30 and found Debbie had brought the Gustus family from Frankston to see some bats: Tony, Melinda and son Carl. Paul is keen to set up a bat box project near home and came along to see what is involved and meet the people who have been doing it, as well as showing me the Oregon boxes he has been making at home.



We set up in the Jack Lyale Centre. Catherine and Steve had to go off to work on their postgrad projects so there were just Natasha, Debbie and me to assess the bats. We had 254 of them and it kept us busy until 10:30. Tony and Melinda Gustus and Angela scribed

Box	Bats	Species	Esc	Juven
C16	42	Gould's		
C31	30	Gould's		
C07	30	Gould's		12
C25	26	Gould's		
C15	19	Gould's		Yes
C39	17	Gould's		
C42	16	Gould's		3
C05	15	Gould's	4	1
C17	13	Gould's		
C23	10	Gould's		
C32	10	Lge Forest Gould's		
C14	7	Gould's	1	
C27	7	Gould's		
C06	4	Gould's	1	
C13	1	Gould's		
	1	Freetail		
C40	1	Gould's		
C35	1	Gould's		
C41	1	Gould's		
C24	1	Gould's		
	254	Total	7	16+

(Preliminary data from boxes, not the assessment sheets)

So there were bats in 19 of 37 boxes, and with four of them occupied by dead possums, living gliders and nests, there were only 33 available for the bats to use, so 58% of boxes had bats in them.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Bats	153	184	204	148	203	254
Incr		+20%	+11%	-27%	+37%	+25%

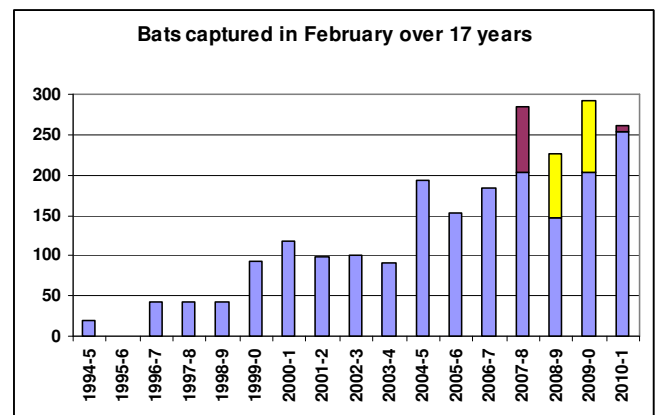
This looks like a big increase on last year, but in 2010 an estimated 89 bats escaped, few of which were

recaptured, so the growth is more apparent than real



Ian with scales, Angela scribing, Natasha with bat
Freetails began to appear in Feb only two years ago. The big change this year is the number of Gould's captured, mainly as there were very few escapees, unlike the previous two years.

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Gould's	161	141	200	243
Large Forest	23	5	2	10
Sthn Forest				
Freetail		2	1	1
Total	184	148	203	254



At the release, around 11 p.m., we got some good photos of bats flying off: one with Natasha



One with Debbie



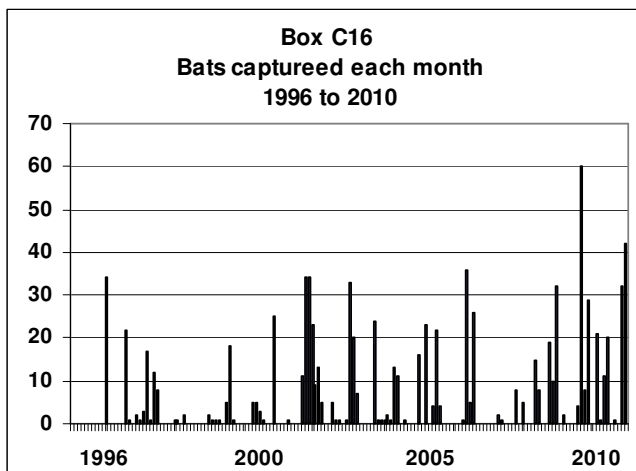
And one Natasha took of me



Natasha, Debbie and I stayed on to return females with young to about 6 boxes, and discovered hundreds of big orb weaver spider webs stretched between just about every pair of trees. We finally got away just on one o'clock after being at the park 11 hours.

Box C16

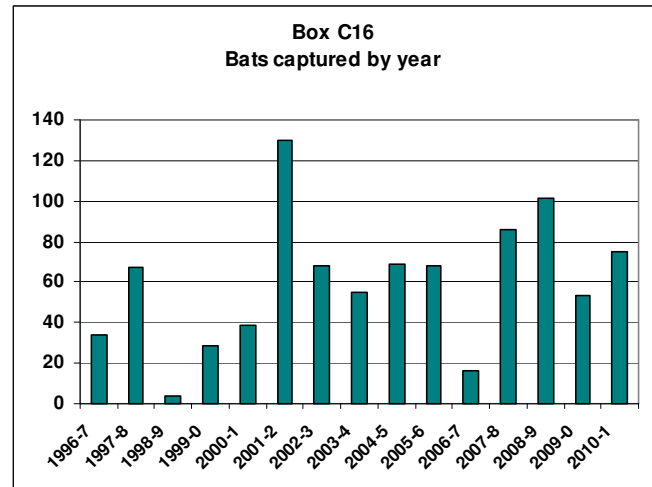
This box was installed, along with C13 to C17, in March 1996, so has been there for 14 years. In all that time, C15 has been the box attracting most bats, for most of the time 50+ bats more than any other box. In the last few years C16 has been catching up and this month overtakes C15 to become the most-used box, with 894 bats to C15's 874.



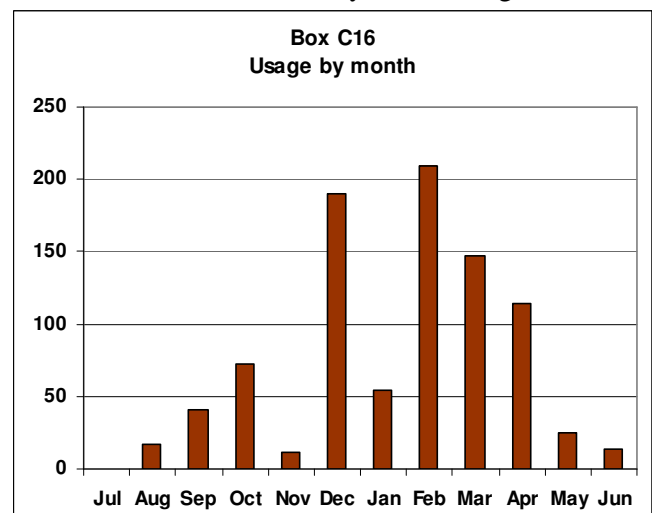
We have found bats in it 79 times, as compared with 68 times in C15. It faces east, whereas C15 faces west. The history of our project shows that east facing

boxes are slightly favoured over west-facing boxes.

Usage of the box has varied in intensity but been quite intense in the past three years, with many large female groups, the largest being 60 in Dec '09. In terms of annual totals, it peaked in 2001-2 and had a big dip in 2006-7 but is otherwise fairly steady in its usage by mainly Gould's bats. In its peak year 2001 it started to be used by Freetails and has now had 19 of them out of a total of 258 to date



Its seasonal usage peaks in Dec & Feb, it is largely avoided in winter and heavily used through autumn



Next month: our annual harp trapping, on the weekend of 11 – 13 March. Set up traps after the park closes, so around 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, inspect and take down traps before the park opens, so around 7:30 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. The boxes will not be checked that weekend.

April box check will be on Sunday 17 April 2 p.m. – to avoid the Easter/ANZAC weekend