

## Bat box check: Organ Pipes 14 August

At 2 p.m. there were only Natasha and me to check all those boxes, but soon Robert Irvine arrived and as usual rounded up several casual park visitors who stayed for the afternoon to help carry bats and secure the ladder, which was very generous of them



Giovanna is an Italian-Brazilian over here to do a virology PhD and Elmar is a German engineer, both having their first experience of bats.



First stop for me was box C16 which had a big group of Gould's



Several boxes had jumping spiders or Clubionids on the lids – pretty little things. There were few spiders inside the boxes, which is unusual. Box C4 had two Freetails and a Gould's. One of the Freetails had a

large lump of an implant on its back, which is a first for us.



The implant was very easy to feel and see under a patch of bare skin, and it moved about quite easily inside the bat



Box C41 had a very large ant colony all over it, with thousands of ant eggs, so the box was left propped open with a big stick. By the end of the round we had two hangers loaded with bat bags, and estimated about 115 bats, a pretty good haul for August – it's

not all that many years ago we got that many in mid-summer.



I checked on three of the glider boxes, two of which were lidless, both with sleeping ringtails inside, and one which was leaning off its tree at about 40°, its back batten almost snapped in two. It had a fresh nest with a glider asleep inside it. I pulled it off the tree and hammered it back in a vertical alignment.



Nearly all the glider boxes look very dilapidated, with rotten wood, missing lids, askew on their trees, etc. so

I decided it's time I started replacing them as almost none seem to be still available to the gliders.



Box 6 is the one restored to a vertical alignment.



In the evening, we had several new recruits, including the Reda family: Andrew and children Eva and Alex



Plus Tanya Loos, newly liberated from a major project, rejoined us and got in some practice at bat assessing.



Fiona brought daughter Jody who helped Debbie



And Robert Irvine had urged a local Sunbury vet, Ruth Palamountain, to come along to a bat evening



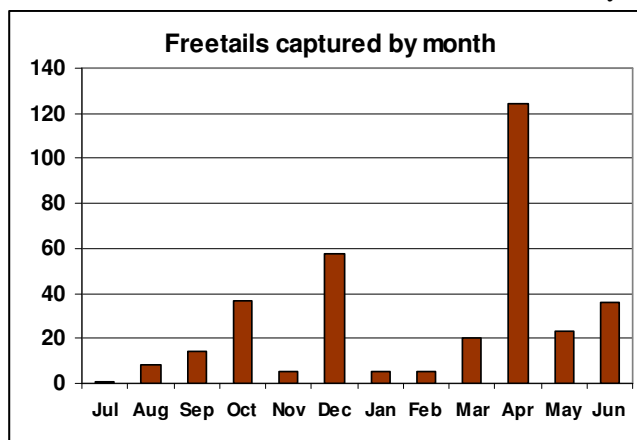
Bat assessing was all over by 9:30 and we drove into the valley, lined up and emptied the bags, little bats flying off in all directions, bringing happy smiles to bat enthusiasts as always. Sylvia Osterrieder got herself photographed with a Gould's echo-locating as it passed her shoulder. They had all warmed up from the handling, though most had been very cool and torpid when collected from the boxes a few hours earlier. We had ended up with 119 bats of three species, which is pretty amazing for August.



And Natasha joined in to release some of the bats, too



We've had at least one Freetail each month of the year

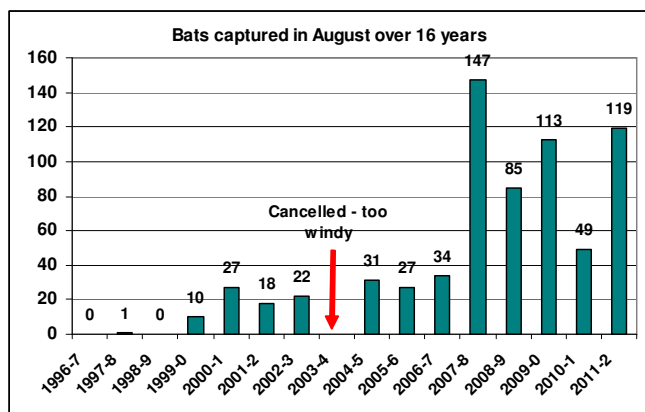


Comparison with previous August results shows wild swings from year to year.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Bats	34	147	85	113	49	119
Incr		+332%	-42%	+33%	-57%	+153%

Nearly all the fluctuation is due to the Gould's

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Gould's	76	109	43	113
Large Forest	4	4	6	3
Freetail	5			3
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>119</b>

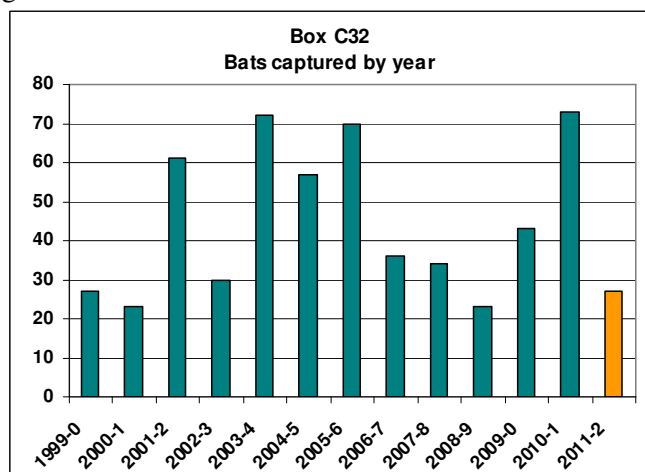


Altogether there were bats in 10 of the 37 boxes, 25 of them male and 94 females, almost 4 to 1.

Box	Bats	Species	M	F
C32	24	Gould's	4	20
	3	Lge Forest		3
C16	21	Gould's	3	18
C15	20	Gould's	7	13
	1	Freetail		1
C36	17	Gould's	7	10
C37	11	Gould's	2	9
C20	9	Gould's	1	8
C28	8	Gould's		8
C42	2	Freetail		2
	1	Gould's		1
C18	1	Gould's	1	
C34	1	Gould's		1
	<b>119</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>94</b>

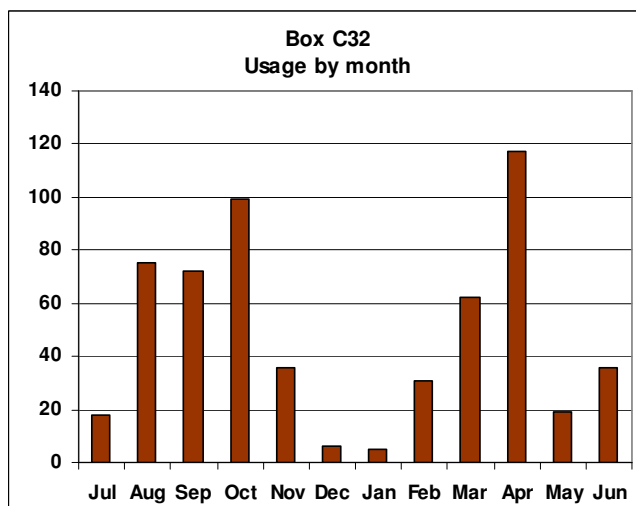
### Box 32

This box was installed, along with 31 to 34 in Sept '99 and its first bat was found in it 3 months later. It has now had 576 bats captured from it, slightly less than the most-used thick-walled box, C30, with 582 bats. It has fluctuated fairly widely from year to year, peaking in 2003-4 and again last year with 72 and 73 bats for the year. The figure for the current year is for only one box check of the 6 we will do, so it's off to a good start.

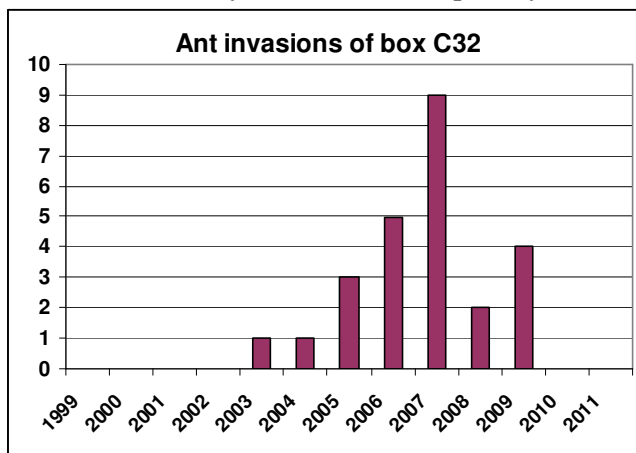


The big dip from 2006 is mainly due to ants taking over the box for all of 2007. The dip in 2002 was because of the box falling from its tree and taking several months to be repaired and re-attached. In 2009 it had problems with the lid which was loose and repeatedly fell off.

The seasonal pattern shows a bi-modal usage peaking in spring and autumn, with very little use in summer. Ant invasions have peaked in Nov and Dec and made the box largely unavailable to bats during early summer. So the problem is not with the box but with the ants.



Ant invasion of this box peaked in 2007, which is true of the boxes in general – it was a very bad year for the bats, in which many boxes were occupied by ant nests



**Next bat box check will be Sunday 9 October at 2 p.m.**