

BAT BOX CHECK, ORGAN PIPES NP 28 DEC 2011

We had a fine sunny fairly windless day, far better than the windstorm on the date set earlier in the month. We began with just Natasha, Ian and me, but soon Eva Reda arrived, delivered by father Andrew, so we could manage both ladders.



Eva stayed with us until near 10 o'clock and was most helpful with carrying bats, data recording and scribing as we assessed bats in the Jack Lyale Centre. We are likely to see her again – an eager recruit.



We quickly started filling bags but, as often happens in December, the young bats were easily spooked so quite a few escaped as the ladder was being placed against their tree, or sneaked past our hands and flew off. The data sheet shows 67 escap-ees, some of which may have been captured after they entered boxes not yet checked, but many flew about near the tree canopy for a long time.

There were many quite large groups of females with well-grown fully furred pups – five boxes had groups of 20 to 52 bats inside.

Box C7 had a pretty surprise of three gliders staring up at me as I opened the lid, so of course Eva had to climb up and enjoy the blissful picture too. C41 was hanging upside down as the upper coach bolt had been absorbed into the tree and ripped through the top of the box. The lid of C17 had warped and fallen to the ground.



Big group in box C15



Glider group in C7

Tanya joined us for the evening's bat assessing and later Debbie arrived, but Ian had to leave, so we were hard pressed for scribes, with over 340 bats to go through.



Tanya, Debbie, Natasha, Eva

We seem to have missed the birthing period by several weeks as most pups were nearly full grown with forearms close to 40 mm but still hadn't put on weight, many being under 10 grams. Many of the adult females were still lactating, like this one with a ring of milk easily seen around the nipple area.



One nearly full-grown male pup had a very firm grip on mum's teat



One little bat had very unusually pale fur on both ventral and dorsal surfaces, not quite albino, but close



There were several banded bats, including one very old bird-banded Gould's and a couple of Forest Bats with bands, so probably over 7 years old. There were several Freetail bats to record in the picture ID file, one with an unusual white collar that we have seen before. We finished bat assess-ing after midnight, then had to put many of the big groups back into their boxes after releasing the males and groups with no pups.



Large Forest Bat with wrist band



Tanya releasing a Freetail



Debbie with Freetail having its usual long think about whether it really wanted to fly off. Well over 200 of the bats had to be put back in boxes which is a very slow process, finding the box in the dark and returning bats one by one, so we finished up at 2:45 a.m., all very tired after a 13-hour shift. We had captured 343 bats, plus the 67 escapees totals 410, though some escapees may have been later captured in other boxes. I found four smarties hiding in box 14 when returning a large group of mums and pups to that box.

There were almost no dependent young, but a large fraction of all the bats were half-grown juveniles, and almost all the juveniles had many Spinturnix mites running about on their wings.



Box	Bats	Species	Adult	Juv	Esc
C32	52	Gould's			
C09	45	Gould's			7
C15	36	Gould's			
C37	34	Gould's			9
C14	26	Gould's			3

	1	Freetail					
C38	21	Gould's					5
C27		Gould's					21
C28	16	Gould's					
C16	15	Gould's					1
C19	13	Large Forest					
C23	13	Gould's					
C39	12	Gould's					2
C25	10	Gould's					3
C35	10	Gould's					
C01	7	Gould's					5
C43	7	Gould's					
C40	6	Gould's					
C05	6	Gould's					10
C30	5	Gould's					
C29	2	Gould's					
	1	Large Forest					
C13	1	Gould's					
	1	Freetail					
C34	2	Gould's					
C42	1	Freetail					1
	343	Totals					67

We had three species for the night, predominantly Gould's as always

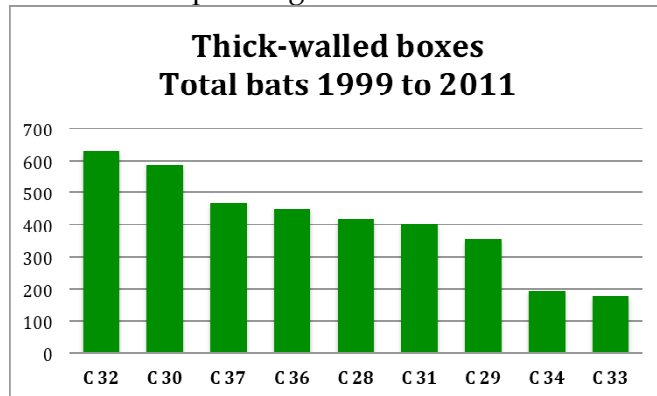
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Gould's	247	321	288	177	321
Lge Forest	9	75	61	16	14
Sthn Forest		1		1	
Freetail	2	26	24	2	8
	258	423	373	196	343

Apart from last year's blip, with many Gould's perhaps breeding elsewhere, the number of bats fits the December pattern fairly well, though Large Forest bats have been using the boxes much less as breeding sites over the past four years, and the number of Freetails has also declined.

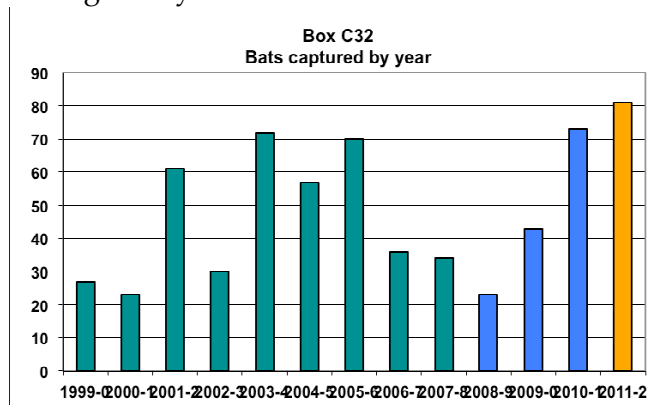
Box 32

This was installed in Sep '99 so has been up for 12 years. It faces northeast, the favoured orientation for intensive bat usage. It is the most-used of the nine thick-walled boxes with 630 bat

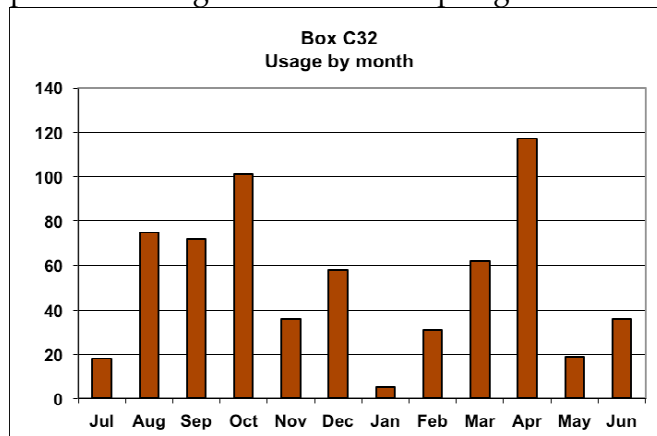
captures, while the least-used is C33 with 177 – C33 has had big issues with ants and a lid that somehow keeps being knocked off.



Its usage has varied a great deal over its 12 years, peaking in 2003-4. Since 2008 we have only checked the boxes each second month so these columns need doubling in height to be equivalent, showing that usage of this box has increased a great deal the past two years and is now at its peak, although we are only halfway through the year.

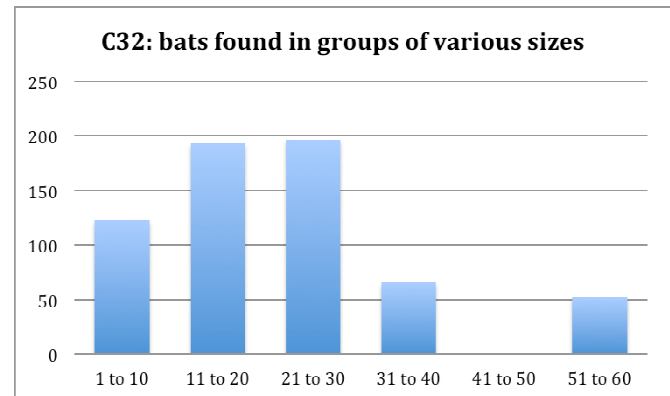


The big group of 52 found in it this month is unusual as it is generally avoided in summer, its peak use being in autumn and spring.



Only 6 bats had been found in it over the previous eleven Decembers.

We have found bats in it 56 times so it has an average group size of 11 bats - about the same as C30 and C36. The range of mean group size for the 9 thick-walled boxes is 4.4 for C34 to 13.8 for C37, so C32 attracts relatively large groups for this box design. The 52 this month was far larger than any previous group found using it. The chart shows bat groups using this box are far more often between 11 and 30 bats



Next box check: Saturday 18 February, 2 p.m.