

Organ Pipes NP bat box check 23 June

It was a very overcast day, but fairly windless and mild. Waited at the park gate until 2:30 and not one person turned up, so decided (reluctantly) to get started on my own, hoping somebody would turn up eventually. Found a family of three feral goats just below the bollard, and a large pile of their droppings by the Visitor Centre door.



Box 36 had 59 Gould's in it – by a long way the largest group we have ever found in a box in winter. The previous largest hauls from one box have been 33 (C28 in 2009) and 32 (C32 in 2004)



Eva Reda arrived with two friends after an hour



C6 had a Ringtail, and Eva went up to peek at it.



Then C22 was loaded with 38 bats



Eva, with friends Katarina and Ben. Tanya arrived a bit later



We got to the last box just on twilight – fairly quick work after C22 as all the rest were empty. As it was getting dark I re-attached C9 to its tree by C36.



The Visitor Centre door was open so we went inside and assessed bats in comfort for the evening. This is one of the three Large Forest Bats



There were three old banded Gould's, great-great-great-grandmothers by now, in the huge group in C36. Only one of the three was found in April, along with 5 other banded females, which did not return in June.



Tanya and I assessed bats while Eva and Katarina scribed and Ben managed the scales.



Late in the evening Debbie arrived and worked with Tanya on the last few bags, including the two Free-tails.

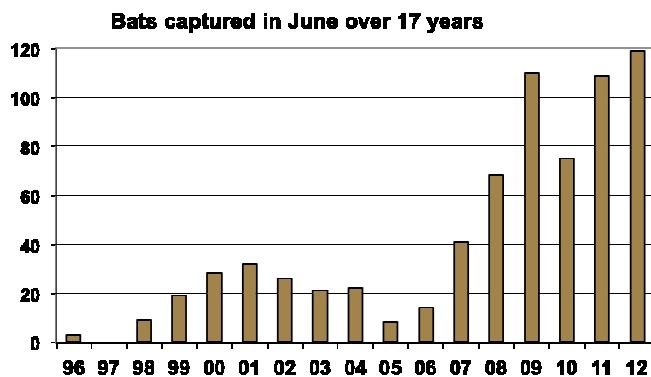


Just after 10 o'clock we drove down into the valley and, with Katarina's father who had come to collect her, opened the bags and let them go. Nearly all had warmed up and flew off fairly quickly but some needed coaxing.

| Box | Bats | Species | Adult | | Juv | |
|-----|------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----|---|
| | | | M | F | M | F |
| C36 | 59 | Gould's | 29 | 30 | | |
| C22 | 35 | Gould's | 10 | 25 | | |
| | 3 | Lge Forest | 1 | 2 | | |
| C30 | 19 | Gould's | 5 | 14 | | |
| C14 | 2 | Freetail | | 2 | | |
| | 1 | Gould's | | 1 | | |
| | 119 | Totals | 45 | 74 | | |

This was marginally the biggest haul for June, with more Gould's and fewer Freetails, no Chocolates.

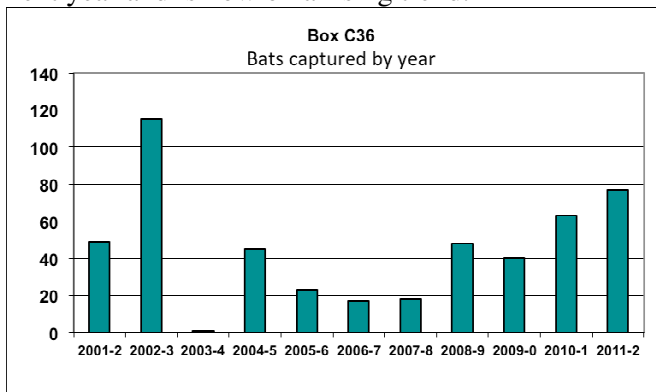
| Year | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Gould's | 58 | 93 | 53 | 102 | 114 |
| Lge Forest | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| Freetail | 7 | 12 | 14 | 1 | 2 |
| Chocolate | | | 3 | 1 | |
| Total | 68 | 110 | 75 | 109 | 119 |



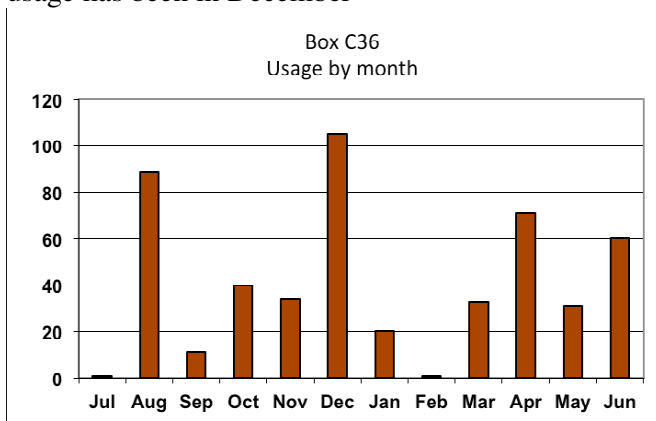
The June catch really took off from 2007 after a decade of being at a very low level. The ratio of males to females is very different at this time of year. In February there were almost 3 females to each male, but by early winter it has fallen to 1.6 to 1.

Box C36

This was installed in August 2001 and is one of the 9 thick-walled boxes of 45 mm timber, intended to attract bats in winter. It has now had 518 bats captured from it over 11 years. We have checked it 106 times and bats were found in it 41 times, about normal for this group of boxes. Its usage by bats has fluctuated widely over the 11 years. It was used most intensively in its second year, almost totally avoided the next year and is now on a rising trend.



Despite being intended as a winter roost, its peak usage has been in December



This month's result takes the winter total (June to August) to 150 or 30.2% of bats found in this box, compared with summer 126 or 25.4%. It is least used in spring when bats return en masse to our boxes after

wintering elsewhere. The box has been significantly targeted by ant colonies, mainly Jan to Mar and Aug to Sep. It was at its worst in 2007 but they have left this box alone for several years now.

The bat box project and volunteers

The shift to a Saturday box check does not seem to be working, as attendance has fallen to crisis level so it may be worth shifting back to Sundays.

As I reported in February, attendance at our bat box days has fallen away steadily since 2002 so often at 2 p.m. there are only 2 or 3 of us to check the 37 boxes. This month for about 90 minutes there was just me, and I would not have got around all of them before dark on my own. So I think we are in a bit of a crisis and need to do some re-thinking of how this works.

The problems are I see it are these:

- 75% of those who come to help do so only once. So keeping a team of regular and reliable people together is quite difficult.
- Significantly more people come for the evening assessing of individual bats than turn up to help empty the boxes, so it is often not possible to get two teams with two ladders to get around the boxes quickly
- Some of the "regulars" are eastern-suburbs people for whom Organ Pipes is a long trip.
- Each bat box day, who turns up is a total surprise as nobody indicates in advance whether they will be there or not.
- We have lost a few of the long-term regulars recently, which has made assembling a team big enough to do the work efficiently much harder.
- Now that we are looking after a quite large colony of bats, and get around 400 bats in summer months, bat box days can involve 10 to 12-hour shifts in December and February.

I don't have a solution to this problem, and am open to suggestions.

I would very much like to keep it going in a way that works (that is, does not end up with just me or just two people to do nearly all the work).

Any suggestions are welcome

Next box check: probably either 12 or 19 August. Will let you know soon.