

## **Bat box check: Organ Pipes NP: June 2014**

In a rainy windy week we had a dry windless after-noon for checking the boxes and a big team of help-ers. Stephen and I did the ladders, helped by Sarah, Rachael, Michael, William Terry (Macedon Ranges) Paul Bertuch and his student Georgina. Stephen started at the north end, I at the south end. Box 30 had a big group of 37 Gould's. So most bats were in one of the thick-walled boxes, which is good for winter



And box 13 had the first of several Freetail groups



To please the new recruits, we peeped into a couple of glider boxes and eventually found an occupied nest in box 7, so Sarah leapt up the ladder to have a quick look at it. There were no ant problems, so no boxes were propped open.

Pia arrived and took the first bat bags up to the Visitor Centre so the team assembling there could get started: Lindy, Casey, Anita, and the Whyte family joined us along with Robert Irvine.



Glider anxiously peeping at visitor.



**William, Georgina and Sarah**

We collected a few more bags of bats, then went up the hill to join them. It was a busy scene there, with all told 20 people processing, helping, or watching.



Lindy, Pia, Anita Torrance and Casey Visintin did most of the processing while Stephen concentrated on microchipping the Freetails, most of which were new, so he was very busy. I helped Paul get started on

learning bat-handling skills, as he has now completed his vaccinations. By 7 we were finished, which is pretty amazing for the number of bats we had captured and the complexity of the work to be done.

We drove down into the valley and our new recruits had much enjoyment releasing little bats to fly off into the night. As usual, the Freetails just sat on the bags and had a long think about the next move.



So did the Large Forest Bats, huddled onto fingers and bags, reluctant to leave the warmth



#### Forest bat dithering on my thumb

We had captured 85 bats from the boxes, including an amazing number of Freetails: 27. This has been equaled or exceeded only in April '09, 11, '12 and Oct '12. So this is something we have come to expect in April, but a first for June.

This was box-monitoring session 198. So in October we can celebrate 200 box checks, as well as completion of 20 years of bat-watching.

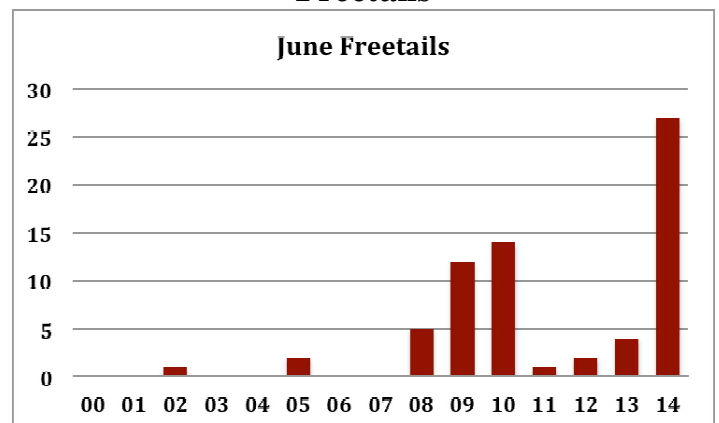
Box	Bat	Species	Adult
			M F

C30	37	Gould's	10	27
C42	6	Gould's	1	5
	10	Freetail	1	9
C15	9	Freetail		9
C13	4	Gould's	3	1
	8	Freetail		8
C19	5	Lge Forest	2	3
C20	4	Gould's	3	1
C01	2	Gould's		2
	85	Totals	17	68

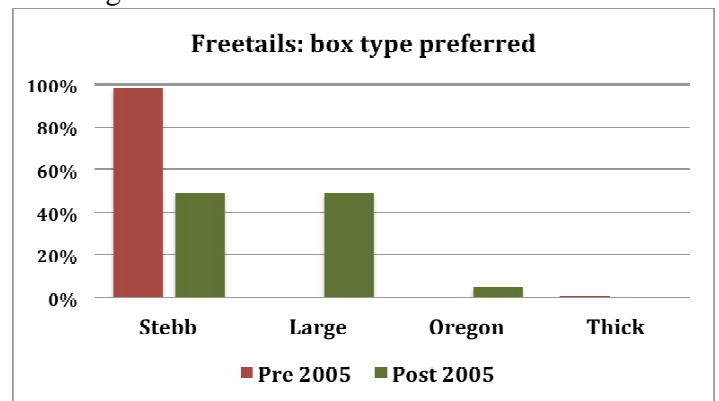
This result returns us to the level of box usage in 2010 for Gould's

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Gould's	53	102	114	102	53
Lge Forest	5	5	3	4	5
Freetail	14	1	2	4	27
Chocolate	3	1			
Total	75	109	119	110	85

#### Freetails



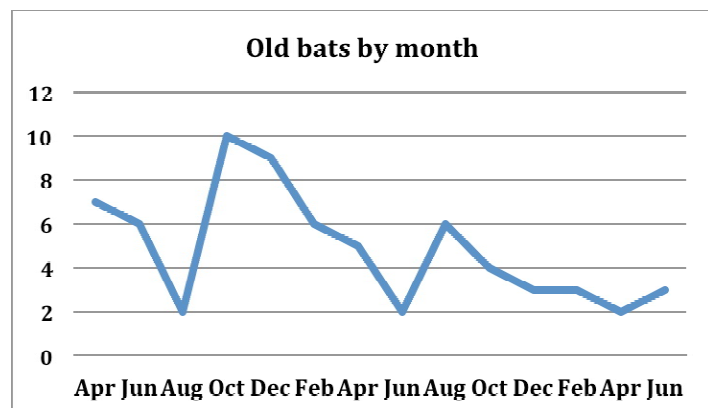
Ten of the Freetails were in box 42, one of the 3 very large boxes (width 300 mm) installed in 2005. The other 17 were in boxes 13 and 15. The Freetails used to use only boxes 13 to 17 (the Stebbings English design), but since 2005 have shifted their preferences quite strongly to these big boxes. Nearly all were post-lactating females.



#### Old bats

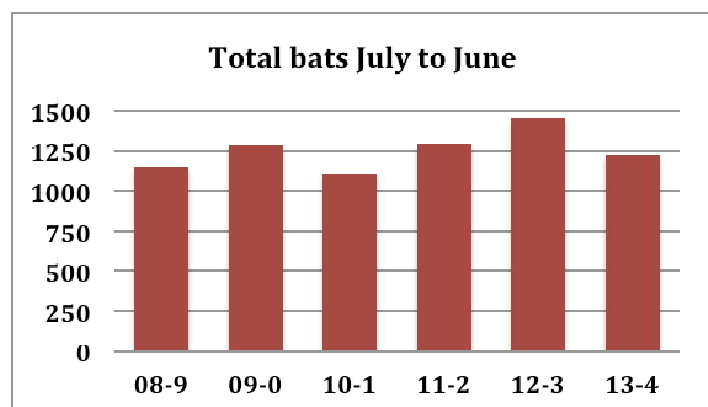


Since I took over in April 2012, we have been following the number of very old bats banded by Natasha in the mid-2000s. This peaked at 10 in Oct 2012, and has steadily declined since. Down to 3 this month: one old Gould's (88866) and two old Large Forest bats (13436 and 13438). I assume they are steadily dying of old age.



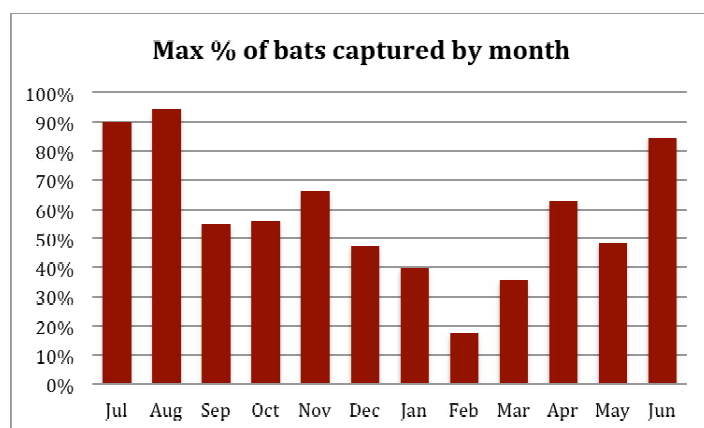
### The bat year

We stopped doing monthly box checks in Feb '08, so for six full years now it has been six checks a year. In that time the total number of bats has remained fairly steady, peaking last year at 1456.



### Thick-walled boxes

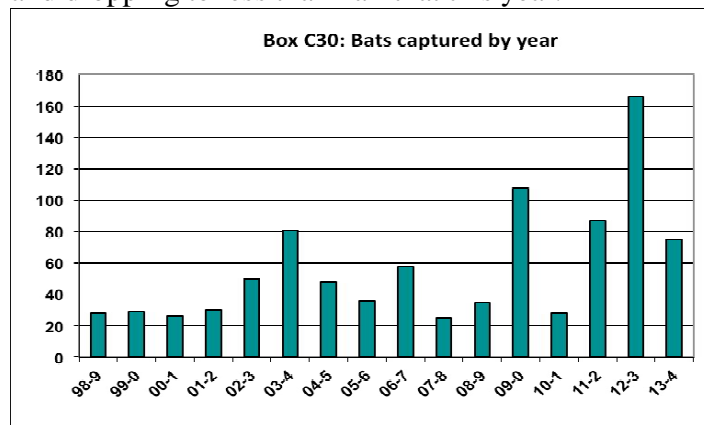
These were all installed in 1998-9, in the hope that they would attract bats to roost in boxes over win-ter. For several years it seemed to be unsuccessful, as usage peaked in spring and autumn. But it has gradually shifted. The next chart shows the largest percentage found over these 16 years for the bats found in these boxes. All the three very large figures are in the winter months:



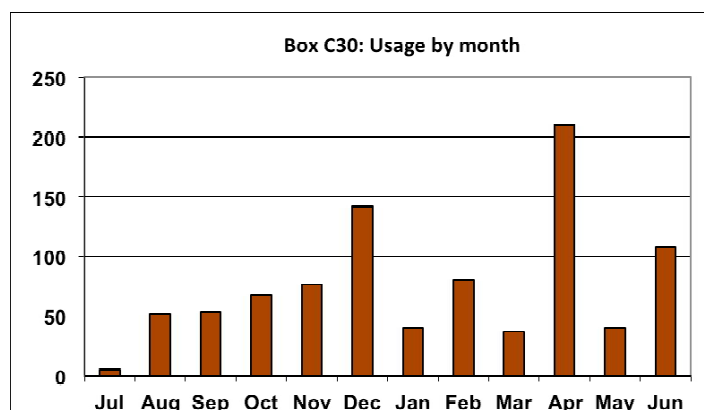
And the smallest percentages are in summer months

### Box 30

It was the box with most bats this month, and is the most-used of the 9 thick-walled boxes with 910 bats against 189 for the least-used, box 33. Usage has fluctuated a lot between years, peaking last year at 166, and dropping to less than half that this year.



It is used more in autumn than in winter, peaking in April. All these thick-walled boxes have more bats in them during the warmer months, but compared to the other box designs, they are preferred in winter, when we have fewer bats anyway.



**Next box check: Sunday 17 August 2 p.m.**