The Bechstein’s Bat Project
Article and photos by Derek Smith. All pictures taken during this year’s surveys.

The Bechstein’s Bat Project is a National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) project run by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT). See www.bats.org.uk/pages/bechsteins_bat_project.html for more details and national results over 2008 and 2009. Also see Further Reading below.

One of the main aims of the project is to assess the distribution of Bechstein’s bat breeding colonies, indicated by the presence of female individuals. Harp traps with an acoustic lure (emitting an ultra-sonic sound based on a bat social call) are set up in a wood in each 10km square in a particular county, the woods being chosen according to Bechstein’s bats’ habitat requirements as determined in the pilot study by Frank Greenaway and David Hill. The first four surveys were carried out last year by bat groups from Cornwall, Oxfordshire, Surrey and South Wales (the latter being a joint venture by Carmarthenshire and Dyfed bat groups). Unfortunately, as mentioned in previous issues of this newsletter, summer 2008 was a poor one for Bechstein’s bat breeding and it was decided that three of the 2008 surveys would be repeated this summer: Cornwall, Oxfordshire and Surrey. Surveys are also being carried out in 2009 in Devon, Dorset and Kent.

Surrey 2009

The 10km square in which a female Bechstein’s bat was found last year was not resurveyed.

One Bechstein’s bat was found this year – a male.

Brown long eared bats are generally the species most often encountered in these surveys and accounted for almost half the total number of bats caught. 45 kHz and 55 kHz pipistrelles were caught in roughly equal numbers. Natterer’s bats were found in five woods. Whiskered bats were found and (as mentioned in the last issue of this newsletter) some Brandt’s bats were identified this year.

Each bat caught was examined to determine whether male or female, aged as adult or juvenile (after the young born this year had reached flying stage) and the forearm was measured. Evidence for breeding was looked for. Early in the summer some females were obviously pregnant. Trapping was suspended over the birth period and after this females were examined to see whether they were or had been lactating.

A brown long-eared bat has its nipples examined for evidence of lactation.

Bechstein's bat.

Brandt’s bat. Several were distinguished from whiskered bats this summer.
Each trapping night two harp traps were set up, Ross Baker and Martyn Cooke each having charge of one with the assistance of one or two helpers. Surveying woodlands to choose the best in each 10 km square was carried out by a number of members of Surrey Bat Group. Once a wood was decided on, ownership had to be established, the owner contacted and permission to use the wood sought. Then suitable trapping sites within the wood had to be identified. Ross was the one who did all this and he is to be congratulated for all his hard work.

Further reading:
Bechstein’s Bat Project Annual Report. The full BCT report of the first year’s survey, by BCT Bechstein’s Bat Project officer, Helen Miller, can be downloaded from the BCT website. The easiest way to get it is to go to www.bats.org.uk, click on Publications in the scroll down menu under Publications & Resources and enter Bechstein’s as the key word to search for publications (being sure to include the apostrophe).
Conservation of bats in British woodlands, by David A Hill and Frank Greenaway, British Wildlife, Volume 19 number 3 (Feb 2008). This and other back issues of British Wildlife magazine are available for £3.50. Go to www.britishwildlife.com and click on Back Issues or phone 01747 835511. Alternatively the article can be downloaded free: www.sussex.ac.uk/biology/documents/193woodlandbatsrevised1.pdf

The finger joints of this brown long-eared bat indicate it is an adult. Fingers, strengthening fibres and blood vessels contribute to the delicate beauty of bats wings.