Rare bats found in Ayrshire

27/09/2011

A team of volunteers found the rarely recorded Nathusius' pipistrelle and Leisler’s bats. Evidence was found for the first time that Leisler’s bats are breeding in this part of Scotland. Altogether seven species of bats were recorded on site with two further species possibly being present – which, if confirmed, would mean all known Scottish bat species in one location!

The HLF-funded Scottish Wildlife Trust’s Developing Ecological Surveying Skills (DESS) training team joined volunteers from the National Trust for Scotland Ranger service, Ayrshire Bat Group, the NTS Bat Group, Central Scotland Bat Group and other keen bat surveyors at Culzean Country Park.

The survey was part of the Scottish Leisler’s Project, run by bat experts John Haddow and Stuart Spray.

Commenting, DESS Programme Leader Claudia Gebhardt said: “Finding these rare bats in Ayrshire is a real achievement. Before this discovery, nobody knew if these species actually occurred in this part of Scotland.

“Using mist nets and an acoustic lure, we managed to attract the high flying Leisler’s bats down to our level. We radio tagged the three Leisler’s bats caught and followed their nocturnal movements over the following nights.

“The success of the project is due to the hard work of John Haddow, who survived on only a little sleep for two weeks, and also to the invaluable help of volunteers from all the different organisations. Finding breeding Leisler’s bats is a groundbreaking result on its own, but we have also gained great insights into the behaviour of Leisler's bats. The success of this project was largely due to current technology which is still developing and will in the future further advance our understanding of Scottish Bats. Any increase in knowledge is important and will assist in conservation management of these protected species.”

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland said: “We have some wonderful native wildlife in Scotland and collectively we have a responsibility for its survival. Discovering rare species, such as these Leisler’s bats, is always exciting and by learning more about them, we can help safeguard their existence for future generations.”

Deirdre Mackinnon, Senior Ranger Culzean, commented: “We all had an amazing fortnight. Catching the Nathusius’ pipistrelle on the first night was unbelievable. Following that we were so excited to discover the Leisler’s bats and then to have the unique experience of following them during the night, recording their feeding patterns and finding their roosts.

"It was well worth the late nights, early mornings and all-night sessions. This new bat information confirms that Culzean is indeed a very special place for wildlife.” She also added: “Culzean, which is owned by the National Trust for Scotland and managed in partnership with South Ayrshire Council, is well known for its environmental education programmes and this new information about our bats will add a new dimension to our work.”

Further information

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