

the BIG news



Newsletter of the Gauteng and
Northern Regions Bat Interest Group

Editor: Trevor Morgan
Issue #65 - January 2016



MAKWEKWE BUSH CAMP

The weekend of the 9th to the 11th of October took us “die hard batters” to what we understood to be “Kamp Staalraad”; a bizarre Springbok rugby training camp for the 2003 World Cup.

We arrived at around 7pm (after a great deal of difficulty in finding the entrance in the dark) to the bush camp surrounded by glowing, orange mountains due to the raging bush fires in the area. Sharron and Leon had already set up a high mistnet and were relaxing with a sundowner on their deck chairs, with the GNoR BIG chairman wandering around and keeping a watchful eye on them. Erna, Dawn and “Jakkals” were also enjoying a sundowner around the camp fire. The mistnet was soon in business and we had our first Yellow-bellied house bat awaiting extraction. Batting was slow after that, and so it was decided by the various chefs that dinner was to be made around the campfire. With the wonderful aroma of braaied meat in the air, the small harp trap was set up at the corner of the large hall and all lights switched off.

With tummies now full, most of our intrepid batters retired to their comfortable beds, leaving Julio and Trevor to solve the worlds’ problems over a few beverages.

It was just after 1:00am, when Julio suddenly leapt off his chair and ran over to the small harp trap as he said he had heard a fluttering sound emanating from it (okay, maybe he just walked quickly). Sure enough, there was a bat in it, but not just any old bat; it was “Nicholas the Biker” – a *Nycteris thebaica* (Common slit-faced bat), a very unusual, wily character rarely captured in bat traps.

A little while later the small harp trap claimed its next victim – it was a little brown job and we decided after much measuring, weighing and a little dentistry, that it was a *Neoromicia zuluensis* (Zulu serotine).



Common slit-faced bat
Photo: Trevor Morgan



Sundevall's leaf-nosed bat
Photo: Erna Balona

The harp was later moved to another corner of the hall and in the early hours of the morning before dawn we had another good catch; this time it was a very beautiful and bright orange Sundevall's leaf-nosed bat (*Hipposideros caffer*). After measuring and releasing him, he hung himself up on the hall wall and gave himself a thorough cleaning just to make sure he didn't pick up anything nasty from those horrible humans (especially that dodgy Portuguese dude) who had upset his night out hunting. Quite a successful night for us though!

Early next morning Sharron, Leon, Dawn and Jakkals went out fishing in the Klein-sand river, Jakkals was the only successful fisherman as he managed to hook a small barbel.

When the fishermen returned to camp we had a quick breakfast and then hiked up the hill looking for bat roosts, it was hot! The veld still burning from the previous night's fire. There was no water in the stream, so therefore no waterfall either, we headed back down to the river bed below the non-existent falls. While exploring the cliff face we were alerted to the telltale squeak of a free-tail, so Dawn, Jakkals and Julio did some extreme rock climbing to see if they could get to the roost. It was decided that it would be too dangerous to try and net there in the dark, so we headed back to camp with plans of netting at the Klein-sand river after sunset.



It was Leon's birthday so Sharron and the birthday boy had promised us some braaied crocodile tail for our late lunch. Wow! What a spread they put on: croc tail, salads and even pudding! Nom nom nom.

So, back to the batting, we set up the big harp trap under a large tree next to the main farmhouse, then off we all headed to the Klein-sand rivier. Mist nets were erected around an old bridge over the river and across the river about 200m away from the bridge, the small harp trap was set up under a tree along the road. Three *Tadarida aegyptiaca* (Egyptian free-tail bat) and one little brown job were caught in the mist nets by the bridge shortly after sunset.



Egyptian free-tailed bat
Photo: Trevor Morgan

And that was all we got at the Klein-sand rivier. Meanwhile back at camp.....we had caught another LBJ in the large harp, possibly a Zulu serotine.

After a long, hard days work, it was time to relax and reflect on the days events.....



A brief mention of other interesting sightings at Makwekwe:
At the entrance to our camp we found some very busy, tiny and noisy Camaroptera's, their Afrikaans name incidentally is 'Kwêkwêvoël' – maybe where the camp got its name from?

The hall at the camp had some 'interesting' cement 3D murals of the big five on the walls, as well as impressively tasteless hunting trophies. The large gecko's that spied on us weirdo's as we went about our nightly work were a welcome distraction..

During the day, Piet-my-vrou's teased us from the trees, doing their best to hide and look like doves, we also saw a beautiful paradise flycatcher matching its rusty colouring with the dry riverbank. After hearing the Black-collared barbets have one too many noisy complaints on the Saturday and Sunday, we discovered their reason; a pair of Lesser honeyguides had been harassing them and trying to parasitize their nest. One honey guide would distract the barbets away from the nest while the other would try and sneak in, by the time we left on Monday the barbets were still holding fort. What a lovely place and a great weekend was had by all.



New from CHEAP-R-US

A must for any serious "batter";
your very own Warthog Head - Bat
Bag Hanger, complete with squint
eyes and crooked tusks!



Butt that's not all, if you order now
we will throw in the rear end too.
Yes you heard right;
the entire rear end free!
So don't delay, call now and claim
your free Warthog Butt with any
Warthog Head - Bat Bag Hanger
purchased.



T's and C's apply. Bats and bat bags not included.

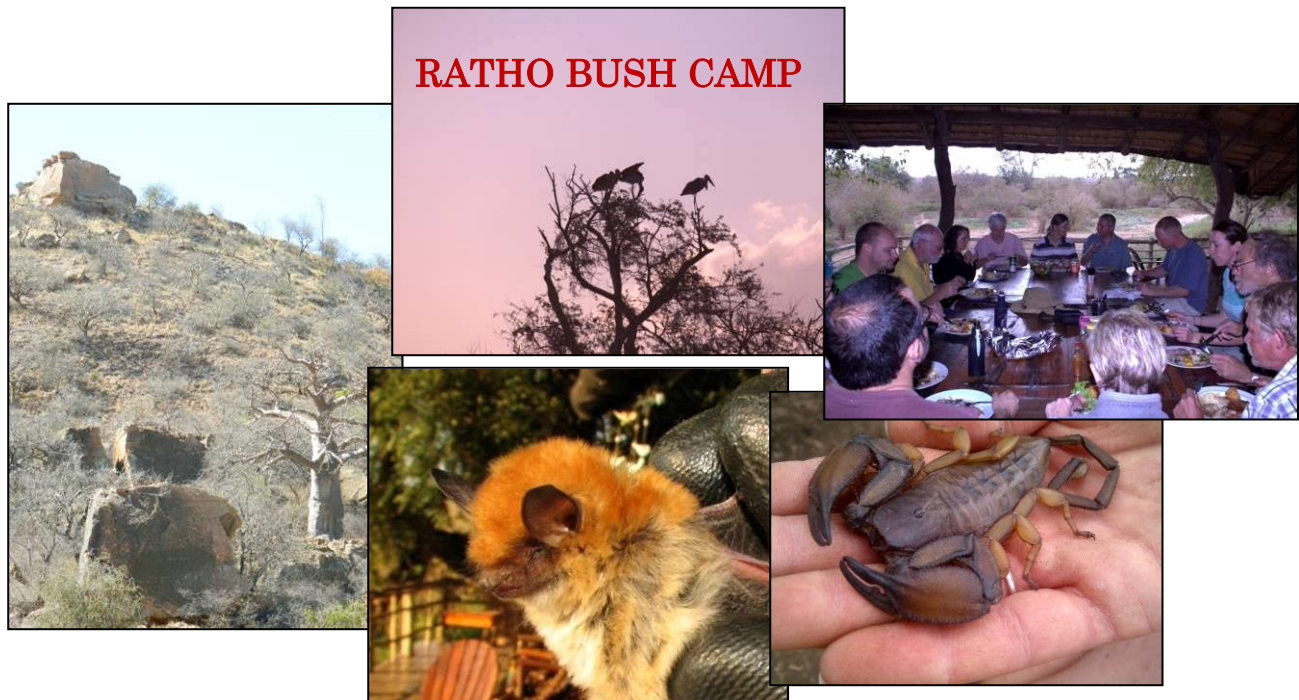
Chairman's Report for 2014 to 2015

GNoR BIG was established in 1994 and is now **twenty one years** old. Every time I note that our group's year of birth coincides with that of the New South Africa, I'm tempted to make a snide remark that compares the long term performance of the two entities. But I shall refrain.

The year reviewed

Our first event of the year was a talk to about a dozen people from an Anglican Environmental group. A small crowd, but still worth the effort.

In September, we held what was probably our most successful outing ever, to **Ratho Bush Camp**. It is a welcoming piece of wilderness on the Limpopo River, not far from Mapungubwe National Park. In Ratho we have finally found a destination to rival Pafuri. There is a great variety of wildlife to be seen there, including an impressive range of bats. Over a long weekend we found at least thirteen species, a similar number to what we have found at Pafuri. Amongst these was the scarce and beautiful Rufous myotis (*Myotis bocagei*), a first for GNoR BIG and a new record for the region.



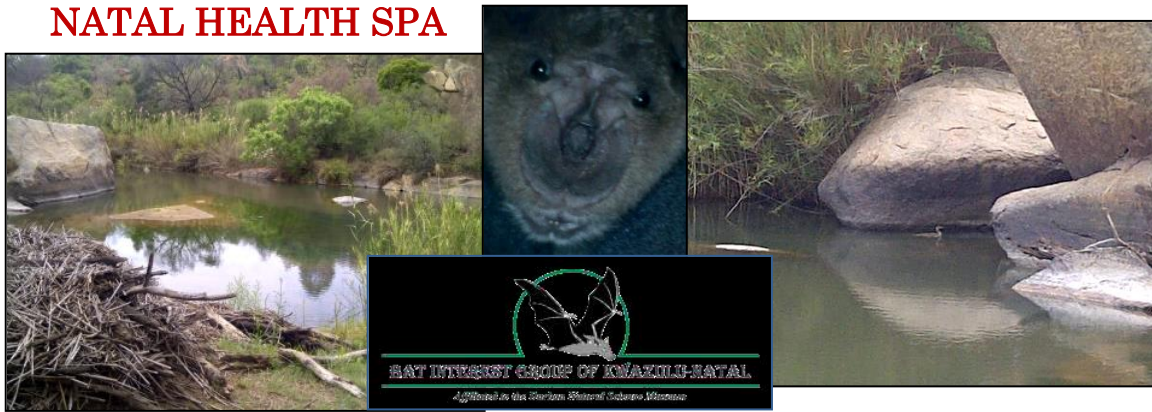
Ratho was also a great social success due to the large group, and especially thanks to Pierre Goffinet who volunteered to do the catering. Every day he conjured tasty rural Michelin standard meals. This required a lot of effort and Pierre has vowed he will not do it again, but we're glad he did.

The following month we held a Bat Walk at the **Pretoria Botanical Gardens** which drew a crowd of 120 people, a decent turnout.

In November, GNoR BIG held its first ever combined outing with our sister group Bats KZN. The idea for this has floated around for a long time and finally we found an opportunity to meet approximately halfway at the **Natal Health Spa**, near Paulpietersburg.

Not a wide variety of bats were found, but as usual, the findings were interesting. This extended also to other wildlife such as birds: I got my first proper look at a pair of African finfoots here, a notable sighting for the area.

NATAL HEALTH SPA



The same month we discovered another special place, **Rhenosterpoort** farm which is not far from Marakele National Park. Full of odd creatures, including some really cool bats. One in particular, the uncommon Botswana long-eared bat, was another first for GNoR BIG and an important record for the locale.



RHENOSTERPOORT

In December, Wanda Markotter gave a talk to Wilderness Safaris with a decently sized audience of about thirty people.

The start of 2015 took us on an outing to yet another special place, **Riverstill Farm** just outside the town of Groot Marico. This quiet hippie hideout had a good variety of bats and other animals. On a camera trap I captured a porcupine, a genet and what was a rather pleasant surprise: a caracal in broad daylight.

And this was another very social outing with about a dozen people in attendance. Riverstill has a pizza oven and the group spent a fun Saturday afternoon, generating and consuming largely delicious customized pizzas.

www.batsgauteng.org.za

RIVERSTILL



Of course Groot Marico is known for its mampoer. However we discovered that the revolting stuff is best used for creating pyrotechnics when tossed on a braai.

The same month Wanda gave another talk, this time to the SA Jagters Pretoria Oos. Impressively, she had about 120 people in the crowd.

In February we held two bat walks at our regular venues of the **Johannesburg Zoo** and **Kloofendal Nature Reserve**. With a turnout of about twenty six people, the zoo was somewhat disappointing. Similarly, Kloofendal only produced an audience of about forty, when sixty or seventy is more typical there.

For these talks we rely on our hosts to do our advertising and sometimes they are not able to secure good audience numbers.

The following weekend was spent at Suikerbosrand and the nearby Alice Glockner Nature Reserves. This came about from a request by Lihle Dumalisile of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) to survey some of the provinces nature reserves. We happily agreed to the work and the first on our list was Alice Glockner, a reserve created to protect the Heidelberg Copper butterfly, found only in this area. Due to the small size, the lack of facilities (including roads) and the mostly unsuitable habitat for bats, it was not suited to a proper GNoR BIG outing. Therefore a few committee members only spent a single evening investigating several mine tunnels.

The next night was spent at Suikerbosrand, mainly as a reconnaissance visit to determine the best sites for a future proper GNoR BIG outing.

In the same month (March) we held another bat walk at **Kloofendal Nature Reserve**, drawing a small crowd of about twenty five people. This time it was due to our poor planning that a good audience was not possible since Kloofendal was given insufficient notice of the event.

The final outing of the year was to **Abe Bailey Nature Reserve**, another on the GDARD list. Although sadly located next to a township, it is nevertheless an intriguing and valuable protected area due to the unusual number of caves present. Despite the low variety of bats, it was an enjoyable outing and there was a number other interesting creatures to be found.



ABE BAILEY

The final event on the calendar was the AGM. This is always worthy of mention since, unlike the unexciting administrative event this would typically be for other organizations, ours is always something to look forward to. This is thanks to the provision of an absorbing talk by someone in the field, and a very social soup gathering afterward.

The activities for the year July 2014 to July 2015 are summarised below:

Activities for 2014/2015	
Aug 14	: Talk Anglican Environmental Group (12)
Sep 14	: Ratho Bush Camp
Oct 14	: Bat Walk Pta Botanical Gardens (120)
Nov 14	: Natal Hot Springs Rhenosterpoort
Dec 14	: Talk Wilderness Safaris (30)
Jan 15	: Groot Marico Talk SA Jagters Pta Oos (120)
Feb 15	: Bat Walk JHB Zoo (26) Bat Walk Kloofendal Nature Reserve (40)
Mar 15	: Alice Glockner NR & Suikerbosrand NR Bat Walk Kloofendal Nature Reserve (25)
Apr 15	: Abe Bailey NR
May 15	: -
Jun 15	: -
Jul 15	: AGM (+ Quality Talk Hosting + Social)



By quickly scanning the list above I am very satisfied with our performance this year. With our continuing highly productive standard, we have averaged at least one event per month and educated many people.

As usual I like to estimate how many people were enlightened and compare with previous years since GNoRBIG's primary function is education.

The table below shows all the activities and the estimated size of audience at our bat walks and talks for the past year, with those of the previous years for comparison:

2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
5 Talks 100	8 Talks 200	5 Talks 145	4 Talks 90	2 Talks 53
4 Bat Walks 275	4 Bat Walks 210	4 Bat Walks 185	3 Bat Walks 310	4 Bat Walks 194
4 Outings	6 Outings	5 Outings	5 Outings	4 Outings
1 Bat Workshop 25				
400	410	330	400	247

2014/2015	
3 Talks	162
4 Bat Walks	211
5 Outings	
	373

It is good to see that although there has been a downward trend in the number of talks given, the net attendance at these was high. However, we do need to give more talks and to wider audiences.

Our bat walks were up to standard and a small improvement on last year.

So overall we have educated an estimated 373 people in the past year which is pretty much where we should be, looking at previous years.

The other major purpose of our group is to explore the world of bats, collecting information useful for their conservation, and to have a good time doing it. In this regard we have held five outings, some rather special, but all a pleasure.

Our official paid up membership currently hovers at thirty six. However this low figure does not alarm me: usually it only takes one or two reminder emails from our Membership Secretary before the number is closer to fifty, where we have been in the last few years.

Our website remains in need of upgrade but is nevertheless in good shape and very effective as our communication portal. The same cannot be said of our Facebook site which has become stagnant and requires revival.

In our continuing advisory role we have responded to many queries from the public. Apart from the assistance and education provided, this exchange is sometimes mutually beneficial. This year, for example, there was the very intriguing find of an *Otomops martiensseni* in the Bela Bela area which is way out of its known distribution range.

In terms of newsletters, it seems that producing the requisite four a year is seldom feasible amongst all of our other activities. We have once again managed only two this year, but they did at least maintain the high quality standard and were very informative.

Other less positive issues which I have complained out before are outing attendance, talk attendance, and the publication of all of our findings for the purposes of conservation.

Although on average outing attendance has been very good in the last two years, there has been a decline in audience sizes at our talks, and it is a problem we need to keep our focus on to rectify the situation.

And the Gauteng survey work we are doing for GDARD makes them direct recipients of our results which is a welcome arrangement. It appears that the lack of dissemination of our data has always bothered me more than others in the group, so I will be personally embarking on an effort to publish some of our findings and interesting records (e.g. the *Otomops* sighting) this year.

To summarize the year, 2014/2015 was a productive and active one, in which **we have educated hundreds of people, saw many bats, and had a lot of fun.**

The coming year

We will continue with the Gauteng survey work with a return trip to Abe Bailey, and a weekend each at Suikerbosrand and Roodeplaat Dam. Although these reserves are not likely to produce many bat species, they are close, the accommodation is free, and we will be doing surveys where no bat work would otherwise be done.

For the rest of the year we have set aside a number of weekends for which we must still find destinations. One suggestion so far is Mt. Sheba in the Pilgrim's Rest area. We are also considering a major outing to somewhere in northern KZN in May 2016.

Three bat walks are planned for our usual venues, the JHB Zoo, Kloofendal and the Pretoria Botanical Gardens. A fourth will be run at a different location for a change, hopefully the JHB Golf Club if it can be arranged. The idea always being that we must try to tap into new audiences.

People

It is at this point that my AGM address and report always becomes rather boring. And I'm happy it is that way because it always comes around to thanking the same, very crucial and hardworking people, the GNoR BIG Committee. With hardly any change for several years now, the same individuals have constituted the engine room of our group and are the reason for our repeated success.



Other people who must be thanked for their often extensive contributions:

Mimi Neumann for maintaining and managing our very important website free of charge.

Representatives of provincial nature conservation departments - Lihle Dumalisile (Gauteng), and John Power (North West), both very supportive and a pleasure to work with.

Staff at Pretoria Botanical Gardens and Johannesburg Zoo.

Karin & Steve Spottiswoode and the Friends of Kloofendal.

The bat scientists Ara Monadjem and Teresa Kearney, for their support and feedback.

And of course Leigh Richards for her willingness to give an interesting talk at our AGM and her good company.

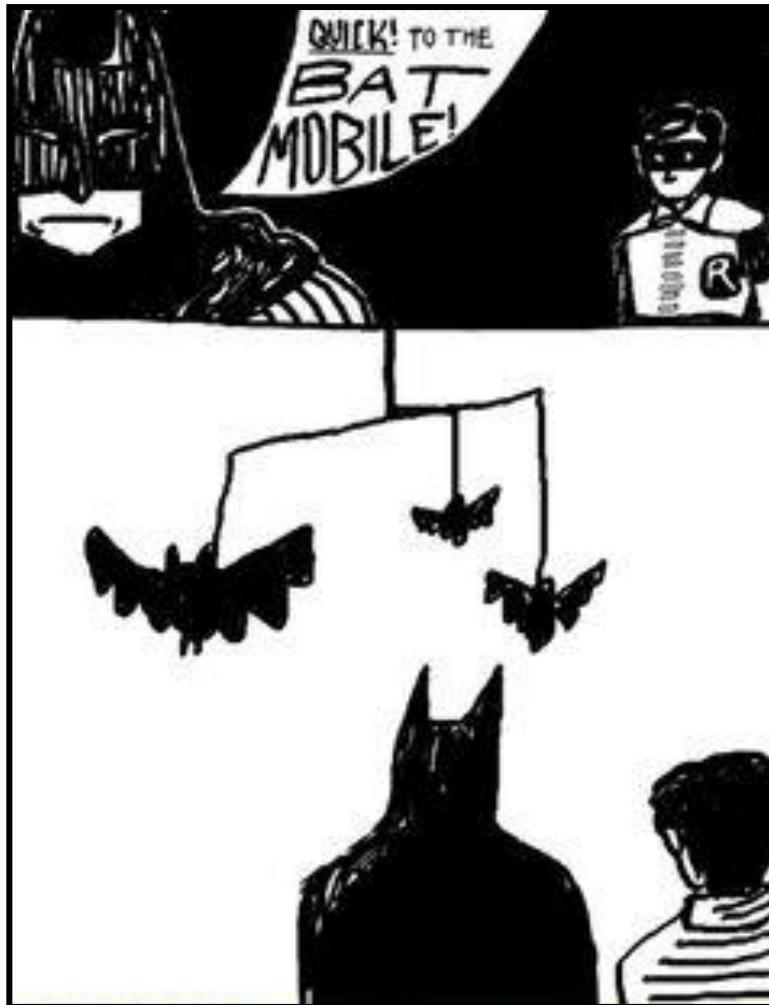
The non-committee GNoR BIG members that are always so helpful and pleasant to be with at events: the Barkhuizens, the Goffinets, Yolandi du Toit and the de Villiers family.

Thanks to Brian Whiting for once again allowing us to use Winchester Marketing as an excellent AGM venue.

Finally, thank you again to the paying members of GNoR BIG themselves without which our great group would not exist.

Julio Balona

Aug 2015





The quiz to test your skills on the identification of southern African bats.
The rules are:

- The mystery bat will be from the southern African region as defined by the countries South Africa, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia.
- It will not be a species that is a rare vagrant to the region (e.g. Bergman's collared fruit bat, *Myonycteris relicta*), although it could be one that is relatively scarce (e.g. Rüppell's pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus rueppellii*).
- There may or may not be supplemental information provided (e.g. frequency of bat call, geographical location, forearm size, etc.)

Identification of mystery bat No. 8



Found in an old mine tunnel,
outside Parys, Free State.
Forearm length = 50mm

The dagger shaped tragus and narrow tapered ears are characteristic of the genus *Myotis*, which means 'mouse-eared'. Another important feature is the ginger coloured hair, only present in our three *Myotis* species. Of these, *M. bocagei* does not roost in cavities (caves or old mine tunnels) and is also too small (FA~40mm). Although there is a record of a *M. welwitschii* found in a cave this appears to be unusual for this species, It can also be ruled out on size (FA~ 56mm) and a black outline on the ears, as well as several other dark blotches on the nuzzle. This leaves Temminck's myotis (*Myotis tricolor*) which has a FA~50mm and is usually found in caves or old mine tunnels.

Mystery bat No. 9

Can you deduce the name of the beast below?



Forearm length = 68mm
The recording of the call of this bat had a peak frequency of 48 kHz.

Bat News Update

by Julio Balona

Interesting new research

Snake and Bat fungi

Rather less well known but curiously emerging around the same time as White Nose Syndrome, and spread across approximately the same region, Snake Fungal Disease also has shares several other characteristics with the bat curse. Both tolerate a wide variety of conditions and biotic as well as abiotic substrates. The snake version is 100% fatal and attacks keratin of which scales are made. It is known to have affected at least seven species to date.

http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2015-06/uoia-sfd061815.php



Semi-sleeping fruit bats

Research by Prof. Colleen Downs of the University of KZN and her students on Wahlberg's epauletted fruit bats revealed an interesting thing about them: a significant portion of them slept with one eye open, the other closed eye covered by a wing. This 'unihemispheric' sleep has apparently never been documented in a non-marine mammal before. Presumably it is an adaptation resulting from the vulnerability of roosting in exposed positions in trees.

<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/news//2015/07/10/ukzn-research-on-sleep-behaviour-of-fruit-bats-featured-on-bbc-earth-tv-channel>

Bats save \$\$\$ for farmers

In a neat experiment in Illinois in the USA, scientists covered sections of corn with netting every night and then removed them the next day, for a full growing season. This created a bat free zone but allowed access to birds and insects. It was found that nearby uncovered control sections had 56% more damage than the bat-free ones, demonstrating that bats had a significant pest control benefit that has been calculated at millions of dollars.

<http://news.sciencemag.org/environment/2015/09/bats-are-worth-1-billion-agriculture>



Facile feeding buzz demonstration

Research into neural function of bats during echolocation used multiple microphones and video in a room at the John Hopkins University in the USA. Without understanding much about neural brain processes what I really appreciated in this report was a video demonstrating a feeding buzz in action.

http://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=136675&org=NSF&preview=false

White Nose Syndrome in China

WNS has been found in bats in China. Not only as carriers, but with the visible fungal growth on their noses, as well as lesions indicative of infections. However, there have been no signs so far of the mass die offs seen in the USA. So it is possible that these bats have a certain amount of tolerance that allows reduced casualties.

This adds yet another layer of complexity to the story of this dreadful disease that continues its march in North America.

<http://news.ucsc.edu/2015/11/bat-disease-china.html>



This eastern water bat (*Myotis petax*) in Jilin Province, China, has visible fungal growth on its face. (Photo by Joseph Hoyt)



Gomantong Cave entrance

Home extension for bats

Canadian cave researchers have proposed an interesting theory that over thousands of years, bats (and birds) can actually enlarge their cave roosts. This is postulated to act via the corrosive effects of acidic guano, as well as from the significant quantities of carbon dioxide exhaled by large colonies in the enclosed space leading to the formation of carbonic acid. To obtain more evidence for this phenomenon they intend to do more measurements which include measuring corrosion rates of limestone tiles that have been left in the amazing and bat filled Gomantong Cave in Borneo over a few years.

<https://eos.org/articles/how-bat-breath-and-guano-can-change-the-shapes-of-caves>

Other stuff

Another photographic record of spider predation on bat



Kerala, India – Nov 2013

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1151015/jsp/frontpage/story_48099.jsp#.Vmv6O49OK01

Bats accumulating air miles

An exhausted Nathusius' pipistrelle was found clinging to a shop wall in England and is suspected of having flown all the way from Europe. This is because a few months earlier one was found in another English city that had been ringed in Latvia six weeks earlier and was first proof that these bats migrate to the UK. This is equivalent to flying all the way from Johannesburg to Cape Town, an impressive feat for such a small animal...

http://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/14101832.Exhausted_bat_found_clinging_to_a_charity_shop_wall_in_Clacton_is_thought_to_have_fown_all_the_way_from_Europe/



Gauteng Bat Interest Group

Treasurers Report June 2015

Cash on hand as at 30th June 2015 – Current account R22 657.91 & Call account R1 046.36
Petty cash on hand is R500.00. The total income for the year was R21 272.23 up R2 435.99 from the previous year against expenses of R14 032.74. The club generated a net income for the year of R7 239.49 vs a small profit last year of R1 171.05 – The bulk of our income once again coming in from our bat walks.
As always without the dedication of the committee and several dedicated members these walks would not be able to take place. Wanda did a talk for a hunting group bringing in additional income – Thanks for the hard work.

Thanks to Trevor, Julio and Erna for the fantastic news letters and to Erna for the work done on keeping our members updated and ensuring membership fees are received timeously.

The club has 8 Bat detectors in stock for sale to members / public at R1300.00 each – thanks to Erna for sourcing these in the UK and acting as courier to bring them in.

Without our website we would not be able to offer our members or the public the service we do so from me a huge thank you once again to Mimi.

Membership Category Fees unchanged from 2013

Full Member	R 95.00
Student/Pensioner	R 65.00
Family Membership	R 130.00
Junior Members	R 65.00
Intuitional Members	R 780.00
Life Membership	R1440.00

Will all those interested in remaining in the club please review their subscription account and take up any queries with Erna our Membership Committee member, The sooner members pay the more interest we gain and the longer we can keep the club financially secure without further increases.

Membership is 26 members in good standing.

Sharron Reynolds

Hon. Treasurer
June 2015

GNORBIG Committee

Merchandise

<p>Julio Balona Chairman & Research Coordinator Cell: 082 359 1295 africanbat@gmail.com</p>	<p>Erna Balona Membership Secretary and Merchandise Cell: 082 927 9532 erna.balona@gmail.com</p>
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<p>Terence Scott: Sponsorship TPScott1987@yahoo.co.uk</p>	

 <p>Baseball caps R60 each</p>	  <p>'Bats' T-shirt with 'Bat Food' on back Black or Navy Blue R90</p>
   <p>Various 'Bat' T-shirts R80</p>	
 <p>BAT INTEREST GROUP Sticker R8</p>	 <p>Bat jewelry R20</p>
	 <p>Echoes of the night CD R50</p>
 <p>'Be kind to bats', Kids T-shirt Black or Navy R55</p>	 <p>'Fruit Bat' T-shirt R75</p>
	 <p>'Gentle Friends' T-shirt Blue or Green R65</p>