



# Open Country Case Study

## Working with Disabled People

### Chapter 1 – Getting the word out

In spring 2009, the Count Bat Project Officer ran a one-day regional workshop in Leeds to give bat groups, park rangers and other community and environmental groups the chance to learn about the Count Bat project and inspire them to develop opportunities for getting more people involved in bat conservation. Amongst the audience was Dan McAndrew from Harrogate Borough Council and a member of the North Yorkshire bat group. He listened with interest and thought



immediately about a local organisation called Open Country that he knew that would be great to engage and involve their members in bats.

Open Country works with disabled people to access the countryside in North and West Yorkshire. They had recently purchased a couple of bat detectors and had already taken their members out on bat walks in local parks in Leeds with the Wildlife Trust, but were keen to have more bat events and explore new areas for batting.

Dan approached them to see if they were interested and David Shaftoe, the Senior Project Officer, that they were so a meeting was arranged to get the Count Bat Project Officer together with John Drewett (Chair) and Andrew Westgarth (committee member) of North Yorkshire bat group to discuss ideas for getting the group involved.

Dan suggested that the project could be based in Ripon where it could provide many accessible routes along the River Skell as well as a wealth of bats in the area. Our first meeting was held at the Water Rat Inn located by the river and right in the heart of the city, later on this proved to be a good venue for some of the bat events. Additionally Fountains Abbey was nearby, this is a National Trust site that is surveyed regularly by the bat group and is a good place for bat watching.

## Chapter 3 – A bit of a shaky start

Despite the initial enthusiasm shown at the meeting, the project got off to a slow start. A public bat walk was pencilled in the diary for June later that year in which Paul Rowland, Activities Officer at Open Country, was going to attend to scope out the suitability of the bat walks in Ripon for his members. Count Bat provided the bat detectors and made the posters, but unfortunately the bat walk was cancelled at the last minute due to low uptake (we later discovered that it clashed with another bat walk taking place in Ripon that same night), and no-one told Paul who waited around for an hour for people to turn up at the meeting place.

*“I made my way to the marina on Friday night but unfortunately couldn’t find a soul! I arrived at 9.40 and stayed for an hour, walking around the car park and up and down the tow path in case I had missed anyone. But the only other people I saw were two lads fishing by a lock.....*

*On the plus side, I had a detector with me and there was a swarm of pips right next to the marina, two herons and tons of toads!”*

*Paul Rowland*

All was forgiven though and, luckily, following another meeting between David Shaftoe and the Count Bat Project Officer at Open Country HQ the project was back on track with David agreeing to run an accessibility training workshop for the bat group in spring 2010. The aim was to give bat group members and other environmental workers the confidence to get involved in the project and gain new volunteers.

## Chapter 4 – Accessibility workshop

During a crisp day in March, 16 people gathered for the accessibility training workshop at Quarry Moor Nature Reserve in Ripon. The majority of the group present were from the North Yorkshire bat group, but there were also members from other bat groups including West Yorkshire and Bedfordshire as well as local



residents and representatives from the local Wildlife Trust and RSPB.

David Shaftoe delivered the training with the assistance of Pam Harrison, an Open Country volunteer and a wheelchair user. The morning session began with an indoor classroom talk about the principles of working with people with disability, which was then followed by an outdoor disability

empathy exercise that involved attendees using props (such as sitting in a wheelchair and wearing specially adapted glasses to demonstrate the barriers people with mobility difficulties and/or visually impairments face on a daily basis. The session concluded in the afternoon with a talk and discussion around physical, sensory and social access to events, and a look at the information needed when promoting bat events to this audience group.

One of the attendees, Cassandra Richardson, who has dyslexia spoke about the need to use clear, short sentences and provide information in simple and straightforward language with concepts explained to help people like her to easily understand.

*"Excellent. Before today I have not always been sure of the most appropriate way to communicate with people with disabilities."  
Charlotte Sanderson, North Yorkshire bat group*

*"I think this is a specialised and sadly undervalued area of work. Any additional training would be useful." Bernadette Lobo,  
North Yorkshire bat group*

*"Thanks for running this course. It has been an eye opener." Cassandra Richardson, West Yorkshire bat group*



Feedback from the training was positive:

The result was that six people from the bat group said they wanted to join and help out with the bat events with Open Country.

## Chapter 5 – Bat walks in and around Ripon

Following the workshop, a bat walk was organised for the Open Country members. This took place from the Water Rat Inn and Open Country organised transport with their minibus for their members to be collected and dropped off for the evening walk. The event was free of charge and was promoted in the quarterly newsletters produced by David and his team. This meant members were given plenty of notice in advance so they could put the date in their diaries and work out with their carers their plans before the event took place.

A total of 20 people came along to the bat walk, including 14 from Open Country. Dan McAndrew led the bat walk with 3 other bat group volunteers and their friends

that were recruited from the accessibility training. Count Bat provided the bat detectors and the Count Bat Officer carried out a risk assessment for the event.

The walk started 15 minutes after sunset and we walked along the river Skell. The footpath followed the edge of the river, which enabled the group to look over the water and spot bats easily as well as listen to them. The Count Bat Officer and bat group volunteers were on hand to help people tune into the echolocation calls on their bat detectors and answer questions. Everyone enjoyed listening to the bat calls and picking out the different sounds of the Daubenton's and soprano pipistrelles that were heard.

We also managed to get a good view of pipistrelles at a bridge crossing and the members watched their twists and turns over the water for twenty minutes. They all then headed back to the pub buzzing with excitement from the night's activity and sat talking about it over a nice drink.

## Chapter 6 – Otley bat evening

Following the success of the bat walk in Ripon, a second event was organised for the members. This took place in the summer and included an indoor talk as well as a bat walk in the nature reserve at the Chevin in Otley. Maggie Brown of the West Yorkshire bat care hospital agreed to lead it and brought along her captive noctule and pipistrelle bats to show the group. This enabled them to get an idea of the size of bats and the Count Bat Officer provided sensory props for the members to touch and hear to further demonstrate the differences between different bat species. This included toy bats, life-sized foam bat shapes and bat detectors with raised tactile strips, along with audio recordings of different bat calls.



Richard, the manager of the Chevin, played some video of a brown long-eared bat that was flying in the roof of the hut during the previous night, which was exciting.

Everyone went down to the riverside in the minibus and we walked through the reserve, where we had an excellent view of a noctule quartering the field, occasionally disturbed by a swift that presumably was after the same insects. As it got darker Maggie directed the group to tune their detectors to listen to the Daubenton's and pipistrelles that were flying in the shadows under the footbridge.



Walking back to the minibus the group was treated to a superb display of a number of Daubenton's feeding close to the roost by the road bridge.

Although there were enough detectors for everyone, most of them had to be turned off whilst watching the noctule because of the noise! Having enough meant that people could spread out along the footpath at their own pace as the evening went on. It was a good evening.

The toy bats and a raised thermoform image of a bat and moth were a help at the beginning of the evening, and leaflets were handed out, including some BCT large-print leaflets. None of the visually impaired people could use Braille but they appreciated having the materials provided. David thought that the bat walks were the best activity for people with visual impairments.

## Chapter 7 – Making homes for bats

It seemed appropriate that after watching bats in their natural environment the members from Open Country got to take part in active bat conservation as well. Earlier David and the Count Bat Officer had talked about running a bat boxing building session, so a further



event was booked in 2011 and David organised with the Wildlife Trust for the event to be held in a room at the Nosterfield Quarry Education Centre.

Thirteen people came from Open Country and Lynn and Darcey Mason who had previously attended the Ripon events joined us for the day to help with the event. The Count Bat Officer provided the pre-cut wood based on the template of the Kent bat boxes which were easy to assemble and meant that everyone could do it, including people with learning difficulties or dexterity problems. The session provided some light amusement and banter as the members compared with each other and the staff about who had the best craftsmanship!

Five of the bat boxes made were taken back with Open Country to put up in the parks in Harrogate where they first did some bat walks, bringing the Count Bat project full circle as the original inspiration for the project that was provided by Dan McAndrew. The rest of the bat boxes have been put up around the Nosterfield Quarry conservation area.

### Fact File

- **Partners:** Bat Conservation Trust, Harrogate Borough Council, Open Country, North Yorkshire Bat Group, West Yorkshire Bat Care Hospital, Tarmac Nosterfield Quarry.
- **Target group:** People with learning disabilities, visually impaired people and physically disabled people.
- **Resources:** Bat sound audio CD, tactile bat toy, including foam bat cut-outs, at detector with raised strips or bumpons, large print of '*What bat is that?*' leaflet, A4 pictures of bats.
- **Key points:** Plan ahead and get events in the calendar and newsletters to give everyone plenty of notice, especially for the people and their carers. Use props and visual aids to demonstrate your talk. Organise events near good public transport links or car parking facilities

### See also

- **E.1.e** - Improving Access to Bat Events - Film
- **A.3.a** - Accessibility Guide - Making Bat Events Accessible to Disabled People
- **C.1.b** - What bat is that large print leaflet
- 'Bat sounds and music' (**B.8**) folder