



Netting Bats on the Wayne

Summer bat netting on the Ironton District yields amazing photographs and 27 bats.



A mother pipistrelle carrying her baby horizontally against her abdomen is caught in the mistnet (mom's head is pointed up next to the wing, and the back of baby's head is just below). Photo by Darren Harris.

"During the summer bat netting last week (17-20 July) on the Ironton District, we took some awesome photographs," said Katrina Schultes, SO Wildlife Biologist. "We didn't catch any Indiana bats, but we did capture a pipistrelle, Ohio's smallest bat, carrying her baby--something I've never seen before, and I've seen A LOT of bats!" marveled Schultes.

Three people plus a handful of eager volunteers worked on the netting, going out four nights to two upland road rut pools, one upland pond, and one bottomland pond. Ironton Wildlife Biologist Kari Kirschbaum, seasonal GIS technician Darren Harris, and Schultes caught a total of 27 bats.

"Netting bats over water is almost a sure thing," Schultes remarked. "Because bats like to eat and drink 'on the wing' and open water usually offers a buffet of flying insects and plenty of drinking opportunities."

Thirteen of the bats captured were northern bats and 12 were red bats. They also found one each pipistrelle and big brown bat.

"The mother pipistrelle carrying her baby was the highlight of my week," said Schultes. She explained bats change roosts frequently, although they probably do so less often when they have young. Still, if the maternal roost tree was damaged or predators disturbed her, the mother would take her baby and move to another location.

"Not usually very far," said Schultes, "especially not when the baby is half the size of mom."

Schultes said she was surprised that the bat carried her baby horizontally, but when they put the mother and baby in a bag and the two got briefly separated, the baby grabbed back on to its mother in the same position so apparently that is the normal way it was carried.

Bats, among the longest-lived mammals for their size, usually only have one young per year. There are exceptions, though: big browns in the eastern U.S. usually have twins, and red bats and hoary bats can have 2-4 pups.

"Can you imagine such a small animal can easily live 20 years or more in the wild?" asked Schultes.

Harris, a graduate student who had previously worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, was a real asset to the team and took dozens of excellent photos of the bats and the process of identifying their gender and age.

"The photographs he took are superb," noted Schultes who did her graduate work with bats and admits to being a bit obsessive about bats. She laughed.

"The experience of netting those bats was incredible – I could talk all day about bats to anyone who would listen!"

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