



Europeans from at least 30 nations celebrated bats with bat walks, bat watches, lectures and exhibits during the tenth annual European Bat Night on August 25-27, the United Kingdom's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) reported on its website.

“The aim of European Bat Weekend (as it's called in the UK) is to bring people a little closer to bats and to help them understand more about these amazing mammals and their contribution to biodiversity,” Defra reported, adding: “The UK's bat populations are in sharp decline.” Sixteen bat species are found in the United Kingdom, with a total of 45 in Europe.

The UK celebration is part of a series of events held across Europe during the last weekend in August to celebrate European Bat Night. France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and many other countries participated. Croatia added its events for the first time.

“Why all the excitement?” *New Scientist* magazine asked in an article on the events. The answer: “People seem to have cottoned on to the fact that bats are strange and fascinating creatures.

“They are the only flying mammal,” the magazine continued. “Their formal name, Chiroptera, comes from the Greek for “hand wing,” as the open wing resembles an outspread hand but with a membrane between the fingers that also links wing to body. Their sophisticated high-frequency echolocation system makes bats formidable night flyers and hunters. ... With numbers of bats worldwide in decline, conservationists are keen to build on this enthusiasm.”

Defra notes that the UK is an active and original member of the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats, which is known as EUROBATS, which establish European Bat Night. The Agreement was set up in 1991 by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, in recognition of the essential role that bats play in ecosystems and economies.

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