NATURE CONSERVATION AND MINES

David Heaver

Paper presented at the NAMHO Conference, Forest of Dean, 25th -26th September 1999

The role of English Nature and its objectives for cave and mine conservation are outlined.

In the view of English Nature, there is no distinction of interest between nature conservation issues and that of geology, mine history and archeology - all require levels of conservation within the mine environment for the enjoyment of mine explorers now and in the future. There is a range of interesting species found underground, though most of the information comes from cave systems rather than mines.

The bulk of English Nature's interest in the Forest of Dean stems from Horseshoe bats which have one of their international strongholds here. A number of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) have been notified to complement the breeding roosts.

In recognition that isolated site conservation will not deliver the nature conservation needs of the bats, a larger *Strategy* has been drawn up which attempts to address the landscape around the roosts, as well as issues about mine usage.

Part of this was the idea of a Code of Conduct for mine users, something that has mutated over time under the influence of cave and conservation access groups into becoming mine conservation plans. English Nature see great benefit in working with groups such as the cave and conservation access groups. The formation of the Forest of Dean Cave and Conservation Access Group brings together the five main mining groups in the Forest, and through its members it has a local as well as a national role. Working in partnership with the main recreational users of the mine systems seems the most productive route to follow and should deliver widely shared aims and actions for the conservation of all features of importance in our mines in the Forest of Dean.

The Worldwide Range of the Subterranean Faunas
Some 300 species of pseudo-scorpions
22 families of beetle
60 species of cave fish
many bat species

Recent examples of cave/mine life in Britain
The rove beetle *Alconota subgrandis* described as new to Britain in 1981 from Otter Hole,
The millipede *Brachychaetuma melanops* is also recorded from Otter hole as well as the South West Coast and may be a cave dwelling relict from a warmer period in our history.
The Money Spider *Porrhomma rosenhaueri* is only known in the UK from Lesser Garth in South Wales, and is listed as Vulnerable in the Red Data Book
The crustacean amphipod *Niphargellus glenniei* is found only in 14 sites in Devon cave systems, where it may be endemic to the UK.

Horseshoe Bat Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Forest of Dean

Site Name	Principal Species Involved
Buckshraft Mine and Bradley Hill Railway Tunnel	Greater Horseshoe bat
Devil's Chapel Scowles	Lesser Horseshoe bat
Old Bow and Old Ham Mines	Lesser Horseshoe bat
Westbury Brook Ironstone Mine	Lesser Horseshoe bat
Wigpool Ironstone Mine	Lesser Horseshoe bat

Lesser and Greater Horseshoe Bat Conservation Strategy
The main strands of the strategy relating to underground sites are identified below. Where appropriate the most relevant organisations/individuals with a role in securing the success of the measures are identified:

SSSI notification of most important hibernacula (English Nature, landowners)
Continued monitoring of roost and hibernacula use (English Nature, Gloucestershire Bat Group)
Agreement of a Joint Working statement between English Nature and the Gloucestershire Bat Group
Development of a Code of Practice for underground visitors (English Nature, Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise, Caving Clubs, Other Clubs/Associations)
Integration of action between English Nature and Countryside Council for Wales and respective Bat Groups

Project 12
Development of a Code of Practice for underground visitors
It is proposed that a Code of Practice for underground visitors is developed that highlights both the health and safety and nature conservation issues and ensures that the balance between access and retention of the bat interest of sites (currently achieved) is maintained.

English Nature Objective: Maintain appropriate levels of access to underground systems to ensure a balance between health and safety, nature conservation and recreational use is achieved.

Cave Conservation and Access Groups Policy
Makes firm links between caving and nature conservation interests and allows the establishment of sensible and easily understood site conservation plans. It allows internal policing - the notion of personal responsibility and adds new dimensions of expertise and practice to underground conservation

Principal Aims of the Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group
To maintain and implement a conservation plan for all underground sites in the Forest of Dean
To maintain present access negotiate future access if required
To record all exploration & scientific work
To act as a medium through which all relevant matters may be discussed

David Heaver