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Immediate release

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DATE: 22 December 2008

Schools visit winter home for bats

Three East Devon Primary Schools have taken part in a rare opportunity to see bats up close in the Beer Quarry Caves – an internationally important bat hibernaculum in the winter months and also one of the region’s most popular heritage attractions during the rest of the year.

The school visits, by Colyton, Beer and Sidbury Primary Schools, are the culmination of a successful first season for the three year landscape-scale project, ‘Looking out for bats’ led by the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. The educational events started a few weeks ago with a visit by the District Council Education Ranger James Chubb who talked to the pupils about the special adaptations of bats and described a year in the life of a bat.

Having just got ready to hibernate, the bats make the Beer Quarry Caves their winter residence because of its constant warm temperature compared with the outside world. This is why the cave complex is a Special Area of Conservation – an internationally important nature conservation site. Once at the caves AONB Project Officer Pete Youngman, dressed as ‘Batman’, guided the school groups round the caves with the help of Caves Manager John Scott and local bat expert Dr Fiona Mathews, Exeter University.

Looking out for bats aims to survey rare Greater Horseshoe bats, enhance roost areas in this special area and increase people's awareness of these wonderful mammals.

What's so special?

Bats are a very rare species which need looking after. There are seventeen species found in the UK, seven of which hibernate at Beer Quarry caves, East Devon, and one of these is the Greater Horseshoe Bat.

Greater Horseshoe bats at the caves are safely protected behind bars in the winter months but when they leave in the spring little is known about where they go to feed or have their young. Greater Horseshoe bats are known to roost in large roof spaces such as old barns and older houses.

How did this happen?

The three year funding package of £61,000 has been provided by SITA, with additional contributions from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, Axe Vale and District Conservation Society and finally the Sid Vale Association. The SITA Trust makes awards through its Landfill Communities Fund. SITA Trust provides funding to improve biodiversity and the environment around landfill sites throughout England. SITA Trust receives its funding from the waste management company, SITA UK.

If you would like to find out more visit www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk or contact Pete Youngman – batman - at the AONB Office 01404 46663 or email pyoungman@eastdevon.gov.uk.

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Notes for Editors

- Images available from Kimmo Evans 01404 46663, kevans@eastdevon.gov.uk:

- The East Devon AONB was designated in 1963 and covers 268 sq km, or one third of the East Devon district. Core funding and support is provided by Natural England, Devon County Council and East Devon District Council. Sixteen organisations form part of the AONB Partnership from environmental groups to statutory bodies, landowners and community representatives. For more information visit www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk.
- **For information on how to apply for funding from SITA Trust call (01454) 262910 or click on www.sitatrust.org.uk**
SITA Trust
 - SITA Trust was set up in 1997 and runs three funding programmes:
 - o Enhancing Communities – for community improvement projects around landfill sites owned by SITA UK
 - o Enriching Nature – for biodiversity projects within the vicinity of landfill sites in England
 - o GreenPrints – launched in June 2007 to encourage 16-25 year olds to volunteer their time and energy to improving green spaces in their local communities
 - Each year, SITA Trust commits over £7 million nationwide through the Landfill Communities Fund

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