

## Gouffre de la Fage

The Gouffre de la Fage is a major international Bats' site. It hosts 11 species in winter months, totaling over 10 000 individuals. 3 other species occasionally come to increase the site's specific diversity during this « bad » season.

The Gouffre de la Fage is similarly important in summer as 4 species (Grand murin, le Petit murin, le Rhinolophe euryale et le Minioptère de Schreibers) give birth and take care of the babies in the extremity of the southern gallery. This part of the cave was not equipped for visits, and the visit of the cave (over 15 000 tourists/year), does not prejudice bats at that season.

As a contrary, visitors groups had access to the cave in winter till year 2000, and as a consequence disturbed wintering species, in particular the most sensitive ones (Minioptère de Schreibers and rhinolophus species). Negotiations undertaken with the owner and the cave managers allowed putting an end to this winter public access. And so as to enhance the site's singularity, differing from all surrounding geological cavities because of diversity and importance of bat's populations, and so as to make the sensitive species known from the public and at the same time compensate the loss of winter entries, the creation of a pedagogical bats path was proposed. Bats will thus be the centres of the communication there, and other subjects (geology, paleontological interest...) will also be developed. A large part will be given to the presentation of the Natura 2000 process.

The Document d'objectifs (Natura 2000 sites management plan) allowed to work in consultation with all local partners concerned, et its implementation necessitates coordination and **consultation** between G.M.H.L., the 2 owners and the 2 cave managers.

The objectives agreed by all partners are such:

- Put an end to winter visits (with a transitory phase)
- In compensation, creation of an interpretation plan, including the increase of summer visits and of school visits
- The non-equipment of the part of the cave where birth takes place

Actions to be conducted (now) essentially concern tourist frequentation aspects:

- Reinforcement of the site's access door to regulate the access to the cave
- Replacing the existing classical lights by « cold lamps » to avoid the cave temperature increase which would negatively affect the cave's use by bats
- Creation of a bats leaflet for the public
- Implementation of a signpost « you enter a Natura 2000 site »
- Implementation of tourist equipments planned in the Interpretation plan (if sufficient budgets are obtained), such as for instance:
  - Movie (re-edition /adaptation of an existing movie)
  - Photoelectrical cell activating sound explanations synchronised with plaster bats illuminations (pedagogical path)
  - Creation of an external path through bat's hunting territories

The Interpretation plan was presented and validated on the 28 June 2005 to the steering committee. , By the Nature Centre called «La Loutre» (the otter). This study was financed by Europe, Conseil général de la Corrèze, French Government, the 2 owners and the 2 Cave managers. Costs to implement it were evaluated to 189 000 €. One of the 2 owners accepted to be the « Maître d'ouvrage » of the project. The next step will now consist of looking for necessary funds and the project is expected to be completed by June 2006.