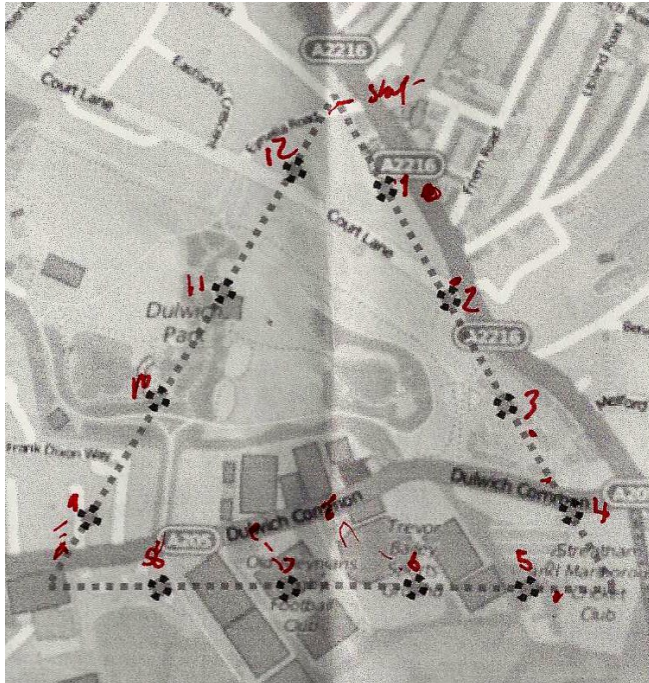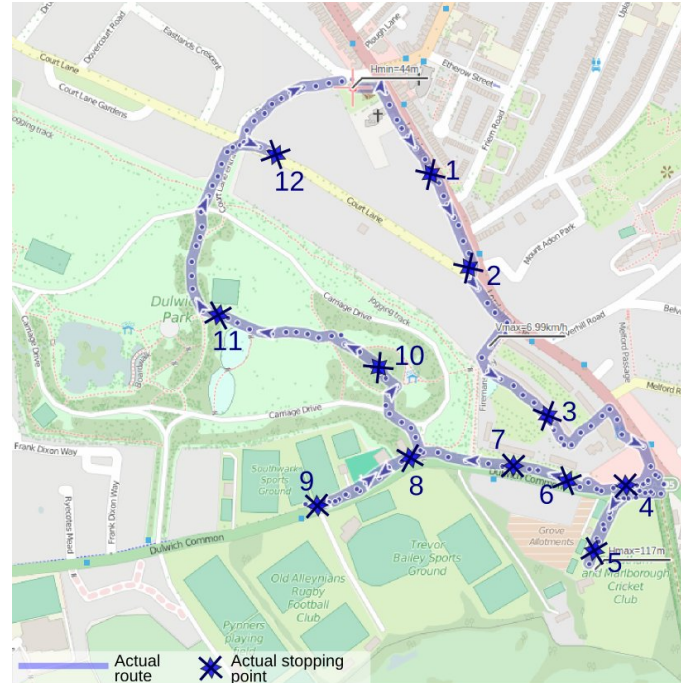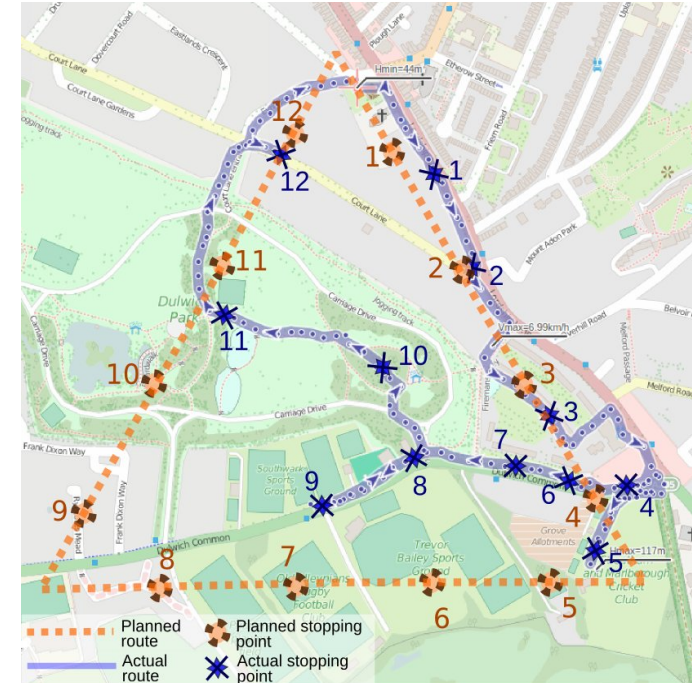# Making things count 1: a data walk along a bat monitoring programme transect

I meant to walk something like this.

My actual route... oops!

Planned and actual route together

On 17th August 2015, I went on a walk along an approximation of a monitored transect within the field survey aspect of the National Bat Monitoring Programme. This involves walking in a rough triangle and monitoring 'stopping points' for two minutes, recording all bat activity there. My intention wasn't to find or record bats, but to try and acquire a greater understanding of how the rigours and processes of monitoring change how we perceive, interact and think about the world.

The above maps show my route. As you will see, my navigation went greatly awry! I knew I wouldn't be able to visit many stopping points exactly, but I hadn't expected to become so confused. That said, from point 11 I somehow got back on track. The below are notes and reflections from the trip, along with a few photos.

GPS	Notes and photos	Reflections made the following day
	Start time: 17.07 Conditions: Slightly breezy Clothing: Shorts, hoody, bags.	The data walk was a skewed take on the bat monitoring program walks, so it seemed appropriate to take environmental conditions. I hadn't brought a thermometer so I just gave an overall impression. I should have gone into more detail – it would have then made the statement of my clothing as a 'control' more meaningful.
	the bus breaking sounded like a screaming child. hybrid bike smoke, odd smell	This initial response, reflects, I think, on the change of affective mode that occurs once I start 'recording'. Phenomena briefly shed their standard significations. The smokey smell was genuinely odd though. I don't know where it came from.
N51° 26.865 W000° 04.387 (Attempt at stopping point 1)	 **(1)** Counted cars, 28 passed, predominantly silver and blue	For my first recording, I engaged with what was most obvious to me – i.e. the busy road. I counted cars only, not vans, buses, bikes or other vehicles. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my counting, as often cars were passing in several directions. Having a second and third person to count might have allowed some callibration, though it isn't necessarily the case that either the average or mode of our observations is most accurate. Colour was determined by an abiding impression, rather than any attempt to count colours. I think there could be as many black cars, but I'm sure red was comparatively rare.

Why did I take this photo? Phone number, various websites. Why did I qualify this as data and not, say, the slats on the blinds, the number of roof tiles? Because it pointed somewhere else? Well sure, but everything points, everything came from somewhere, everything came into being.

Dynosecure 0200 004 999

See above. It amused me that the security alarm number ends with 999. I've felt tempted to just call it, but haven't as of yet.

N51° 26.781
W000° 04.331

(Attempt at stopping point 2)

(2) 76 leaves on the pavement (counting leaves on curbs, visible from single vantage point, but not counting any leaves on or over the road)

My original decision was to count the fallen leaves around me. But this posed immediate dilemmas. First, what counts as the area around me? Is it the entire visible range? A certain distance? How will I measure this? Also, do I count leaves in bushes? Also what counts as a leaf? Is half a leaf a leaf, a fragment a leaf?

I decided I should only count leaves on pavements, as they would be discrete., and that I should count everything visible on my side of the road but not across from it. I was pretty liberal on what to count as a leaf – with only 2 minutes to count, I didn't feel I had time for finely wrought distinctions.

Notably having a second person here would have created two view points, so the parameters would have to be different for multiple participants.

Communication infrastructure always makes me curious. I didn't snoop around too much though, too much ground to cover.

There's some sort of BT house here, what does it do?

467A.. does the garage have its own address?

My home has an odd property, in that it occupies an concurrent space with another virtual property that doesn't exist. Sometimes we say we live in the virtual property, sometimes not. It confuses the hell out of delivery people.

N51° 26.649
W000° 04.216

(Attempt at stopping point 3)

(3) 2 birds in flight. 2 people on balconies. 1 football rolls into view.

Sat in the Lordship Lane housing estate, I felt somewhat self-conscious. Here, above all other places, I didn't want to be enacting a practice of surveillance. The observation of birds was a way of moving away from that at the price of ignoring the specific context. The people on the balconies and the football were thus the reassertion of the context on its own terms, which I chose to acknowledge.

I am old enough for these to still seem curious. More the NFC tap point that the QR code.

Overgrown. This gave me an idea.

Making things count 1: a data walk along a bat monitoring programme transect.

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N51° 26.593
W000° 04.115

(Attempt at
stopping point
4)

(4) 107 weeds counted in the car park

This measure seemed almost meaningful – the number of weeds that could easily be counted in two minutes might well indicate the level of neglect or otherwise towards the car park. Again I counted from a single vantage point but in hindsight I can't really justify this. The car park itself is a discrete area, and I could have easily explored it

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N51° 26.536
W000° 04.159

(Attempt at
stopping point
5)

(5) 11 weird white things, I don't know what they are. 1 plane. 13 audible tennis volleys.

A cricket club. I felt like something of an intruder, but I was probably allowed to be there. Nonetheless I counted a few things. Those big white panels (no idea what they are for). I could here people playing tennis - an adult and two children, I assume they were a family. That children were playing explains the lack of continuous volleys in the period, but again the timing might be off.

Dulwich Common road is horrible.

I mean really nasty. A busy road with almost no crossings. Even the one at the end of the road wasn't a proper crossing, just a set of traffic lights. They had blocked off one path as well, making it very dangerous to try and access the sports facility in which point 6 of my walk lay.

N51° 26.591
W000° 04.154

(Attempt at stopping point 6)

(6) Aggregate of +2 people going from right to left.

With the entrance to the sports facility pretty inaccessible, I just had to stand by the path for this one. I decided to measure the aggregate flow of people rather than the total who pass – so each one that passed from left to right was minus 1, right to left plus 1. 3 people were upon me just before the time was up. Of course I didn't count them.

This, incidentally, is where I started to drastically diverge from my planned route.

N51° 26.608
W000° 04.247

(Attempt at stopping point 7)

(7) 44 clouds (ha), 100% cover.

I think I just meant this as a joke on the introduction to Norbet Weiner's *Cybernetics: Communication and Control in the Animal and Machine*. He recounts a rhyme in which god is said to know how many clouds are in the sky, whereas a meteorologist wouldn't actually recognise 'a cloud' as a meteorological concept.

Here I was trying to pick out clouds in conditions of 100% cloud cover, meaning almost no cloud had meaningful boundaries. An exercise in arbitrary individuation.

N51° 26.615
W000° 04.422

(Attempt at stopping point 8)
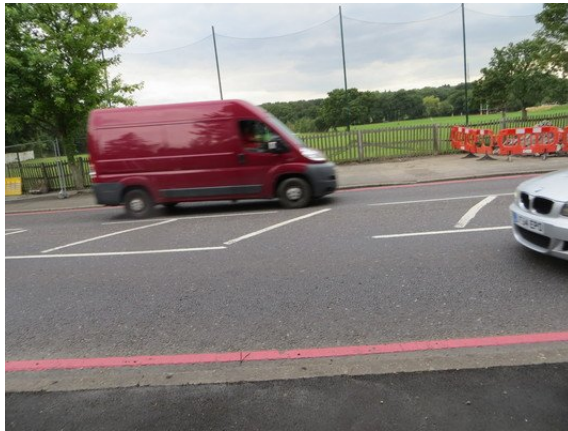
(8) 79 people counted passing, all transport forms included.

So I tried more or less to count every last person, in cars (both passengers and drivers), bikes, all sorts. There weren't any buses that went down this road, which is probably for the best. This is the first time my monitoring behaviour seemed odd enough for someone to pass comment, a van driver asked if I was alright. I don't know if I looked lost, like a drug dealer, who knows?

There's a farmyard smell. 'Dulwich riding school'

Where else?

N51° 26.578
W000° 04.557

(Attempt at stopping point 9)

(9) 162 objects counted with red on them.

A tactical error here. I saw a number of objects with red on them – bricks, barriers and so on, and decided I'd just count them. Too late, I realised that the bushes in front of me were full of red berries. Now, I could have counted each bush as an object with red on them, but this seemed a cheat. Each berry could be detached, and one would expect that it contained distinct genetic code. That said, the red portions of the barriers could detach, and were made of distinct material. I guess the tendency is to see fruit as distinct from a plant, rather than a component part.

N51° 26.696 W000° 04.455 (Attempt at stopping point 10	 **(10)** 3 non human people [1 squirrel, 1 magpie, 1 plane)	And why not? For the duration of the flight, the plane is dependent on its component operations. It thinks, reacts and tends towards continuing to exist.
	5 blackberries eaten on route	Yum. There were more in the park.
N51° 26.736 W000° 04.679 (Attempt at stopping point 11)	 **(11)** 101 bird chirps counted	I think that it was the number that was counted was important. As in – there were at least this many chirps, and I counted to this number. The relation to the chirps and the counting was present, but less direct than was desirable. It was at this point I began to feel really very tired.

N51° 26.878
W000° 04.602

(Attempt at stopping point 12)

(12) 24 numbers (several numeric figures in sequence count as one number)

One last go. Counting numbers. Not, you understand, counting counting. Only some forms of numbers entailed a form of counting. House numbers might. Car registration numbers, I would argue, do not. What I was interested was numeric figures, with quite a narrow literal take on this. I was tired. Again, this was done on the basis that they should be visible from a single spot – this made some sense, unlike in the car park.