

Bats

Why bats matter

Bats play an important role in many environments around the World.

- Some plant species depend partly or wholly on bats to pollinate flowers or spread their seeds.
- Bats help control pests by eating insects.
- In the UK, some bats are 'indicator species', meaning that changes to these bat populations can indicate changes in other aspects of biodiversity. Factors affecting our bats include the declining insect populations and the destruction or poor management of specialist bat habitats, such as large woodlands.

Threats to bats

In the UK, bat populations have declined considerably over the last century. Bats are under continual threat from building and development work that affects their roosts and habitats, including the severing of 'bat commuting' routes by roads. Domestic threats include cat attacks, and the use of flypaper and some chemical treatments of building materials. Other potential threats include wind turbines and lighting situated on bat habitats or near roosts.

Ecology

We are lucky enough to have 18 species of bat in the UK, 17 of which are known to be breeding here - that's almost a quarter of our mammal species.

All UK bats eat insects. Each species has its favourite food and hunts in its own special way - most insects are caught and eaten mid-air, but larger prey is easier to eat while hanging up. All bats have very big appetites because flying uses up lots of energy. Bats are the only mammals that can truly fly (rather than glide). Their wings are actually hands that have adapted for flight, which means they are very flexible and able to move independently.

Bats mate during the autumn and sometimes into the winter when they hibernate. The females then store the sperm and do not become pregnant until the spring, when the weather gets warmer. Pregnant females gather together in maternity roosts to have their young - some groups use the same site each time. Pregnancy lasts between 6 and 9 weeks depending on the species and can be influenced by weather, climate and availability of food. Females usually give birth to a single baby each year, which they keep close to them and nurture.

Bats are very sensitive to disturbance during the maternity season and may abandon their young if disturbed. For 4 to 5 weeks, the young are suckled by their mothers until they are old enough to fly. They then begin to venture out from the roost to forage for food.

Bats do not make nests, but choose various places throughout the year to roost. Bats roost in houses, both new and old but some species prefer hollow trees, or caves. In buildings they often shelter behind hanging tiles and boarding, or in roof spaces. For several weeks in summer, female bats choose somewhere warm to gather in a maternity roost. They have their babies here and stay until the young are able to fly and feed themselves.

What you must do: Bats and the law

In Britain all bat species and their roosts are legally protected, by both domestic and international legislation. This means you may be committing a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately take, injure or kill a wild bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats.
- Damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts) - even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time).
- Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat of a species found in the wild in the EU (dead or alive) or any part of a bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost..

***Please refer to the legislation for the precise wording - the above is a brief summary only
Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended)
Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) (as amended).***

Building Maintenance and Planning

Many bats use buildings for roosting, including many medieval churches, and it is vital for the future of our bat populations that any building alteration or maintenance work takes bats into account from the outset. This means if work needs to be done to any building that is known to contain a bat roost, or that may contain a bat roost, the relevant statutory nature conservation organisation (SNCO) must be contacted in advance for advice.

Living with bats may not always be easy but by working together we can ensure that people and bats can live in harmony.

If bats are discovered during work, please take the necessary precautions by seeking advice on how to do works lawfully.

For bats found during works in England, please call the National Bat Helpline on 0345 1300 228

Legislation dictates that any structures or place which a bats use for shelter or protection are protected from damage or destruction whether occupied or not. This legislation is incorporated into planning policies, meaning that that planning authorities have a legal obligation to consider whether bats are likely to be affected by a proposed development.

If a bat survey has not already been undertaken to determine the actual or potential presence of bats , the authority should request that the developers commission an appropriate survey.

If a bat survey demonstrates that development is likely to affect bat foraging and/or commuting habitat, linear features such as tree lines should be retained, and compensatory planting should be considered wherever possible.

If a bat survey demonstrates that bats and/or a known roost are likely to be affected by the proposed development and planning permission is to be granted, a condition should be placed on the decision notice requiring the developer to apply for, and obtain, a European Protected Species Licence before work commences.

If a planning authority has not done what is required by law, they may have failed in their duties and you have a right to challenge them.

What you can do to help bats

- Turn your garden into a bat haven
- Plant night-scented flowers
- Build a pond
- Let your garden go a little wild
- Create linear features i.e. hedgerows/tree lines
- Reduce or remove artificial lighting
- Keep cats indoors at night

Further reading and advice

Bat Conservation Trust

The leading non-governmental organisation in the United Kingdom solely devoted to the conservation of bats and the landscapes on which they rely.

www.bats.org.uk

Helpline – 0345 1300 228

Natural England

What you must do to avoid harming bats and when you'll need a licence

www.gov.uk/guidance/bats-protection-surveys-and-licences

[Bats and Buildings,](#)

Guidance for built environment professionals, consultants, building owners and managers on the conservation actions to promote and cater for bats in buildings

[Bats and the Law](#)

An overview for planning, building and maintenance works

[Bats and Trees](#)

Guidance on how to tell if a tree has bat potential and for those worried about works that could disturb bats in an individual tree or small group of trees.

[Bats in Churches](#)

Practical advice to help your church and bats

[Encouraging Bats](#)

A guide for bat-friendly gardening and living

[Stars of the Night](#)

Working together to create a 'batty' neighbourhood