

## **Bats**

### **Where can bats be found and what are the signs they are present?**

Bats and bat roosts can be found in old buildings, roof spaces, tunnels, bridges or trees. Bats require different roosting conditions at different times of the year, and they regularly move to find the right conditions.

Buildings are often used for bat breeding during the summer (late April to the end of September). Different parts of a building are used for roosts, including under barge and soffit boards, in the eaves, between roof tiles and felt, in the roof apex, and in cavity walls. Bats tend to tuck themselves into small gaps and crevices and therefore cannot always be seen. Most bats enter their roost through small gaps, sometimes only 2.5cm wide.

Other structures which are used by bats include bridges, tunnels, ruins, caves, mines and other underground structures. In winter, bats hibernate in cool but frost-free places such as buildings, bridges, and caves. It is impossible to confirm their presence with certainty. Bridges over water are particularly good hibernacula.

Bats also use trees, roosting in natural splits and cracks, old woodpecker holes, hollow branches and trunks, behind loose bark, under dense ivy cover and amongst roots. Therefore felling, removal of branches and other management of trees may affect bats.

Bat droppings usually provide the best evidence of their presence. Droppings are black and small, about 4 – 8 mm long. Bat droppings crumble into powder when crushed, as they consist of insect remains. In contrast, mouse droppings are sticky when fresh and hard when old. In summer, the presence of bats can be confirmed at dusk – they will make squeaking noises and they will fly out to feed.

### **What are the statutory requirements for protecting bats?**

Under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) (as amended), bats are given the following legal protection:

- bats are protected from deliberate or reckless killing, injury, capture or disturbance.
- the deliberate or reckless damage, destruction or obstruction of a bat roost is illegal, even if caused by an action which has the benefit of planning consent.

Where any work involving disturbance to roof space or timber treatment is to be undertaken, it is the legal responsibility of the contractor to check for bats. This should be done at the site inspection stage. Timber treatment which is carried out on buildings where bats are present will require the use of chemicals which are approved as being harmless to bats.

The law requires that English Nature is notified before any work is undertaken that might affect bats or a bat roost. English Nature must be given reasonable time to respond on whether the work should be carried out, and if so, the method to be used to minimise the impacts on bats and their roosts. Advice frequently given is to time the work outside the main breeding season and to ensure that there is continued access into a bat roost after the work is completed.

It is necessary to be able to prove that reasonable precautions were taken to avoid the damage, destruction or obstruction of a roost. This can only be proved if English Nature was notified.

Bats are also a European Protected Species and are subject to stringent safeguards under the [Habitats Regulations 1994](#). A survey should be undertaken to confirm the presence of European Protected Species where these are believed to be present or where habitat conditions make this likely. This survey should be undertaken by a suitably experienced and licensed ecologist.

If an activity is likely to result in disturbance or killing of a European Protected Species or damage to its habitat, a 'development licence' will usually be required from DEFRA. In order to obtain a licence it must be demonstrated that:

- the project is for the purpose of preserving public health or public safety or other reasons of overriding public interest, and
- there is no satisfactory alternative, and
- the action will not be detrimental to the population of the species.

Where the presence of a European Protected Species is known or likely, relevant survey information should be gathered and presented at the time of the planning application. The planning application will need to be determined, in the light of this survey information and with due consideration of the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, before DEFRA makes its decision about a development licence. If a developer is not granted a licence, this *could* mean that proceeding with the development *even with planning permission* results in illegal acts against European Protected Species or their habitat.

### **What opportunities are there for mitigation and additional wildlife gains for bats?**

If a 'development licence' is issued, mitigation to minimise or compensate for any likely impacts is usually required. This may be significant and required in advance of development commencing, and may involve:

- timing of work to avoid damage to roosts whilst bats are present
- creation of adjacent feeding habitats
- agreement of management practices for adjacent habitats
- monitoring of bat populations following the work.

Roost creation may be required as a mitigating measure, or can be undertaken as an additional wildlife gain for bats. There are a variety of methods for incorporating summer roosts into buildings, which are cheap and simple. These include:

- Bat boxes fixed to walls or trees. They should be above 5 m height. A south-east or south-west aspect is best to gain both sun and shade during the day. Two or three boxes are preferable to a single box.
- Bat bricks positioned high on gable ends to allow access to cavity walls or roof voids.
- Bat tiles to allow access between roof tiles and underfelt.
- Access holes created along eaves near the building corner or at the gable apex. Holes should be less than 20mm wide.

On bridges, roosts can be provided by:

- Installing bat bricks
- Leaving small gaps in mortar to give access to spaces behind the outer brick layer

- Construction of wooden shuttering on the inside walls of bridges.

Habitat creation and enhancement schemes can be undertaken. Feeding habitats can be created adjoining a development, eg grassland, meadows, woodland, and large ponds.

### **Where should I go for further information?**

English Nature. [Bats in Roofs](#).

DEFRA. 2002. [European Protected Species: Guidance Note](#).

DEFRA. October 2002. Circular 2/2002: New Guidance for Local Planning Authorities on European Protected Species and Changes in Licensing Procedures. This guidance modifies the way that planning authorities deal with European Protected Species when processing planning applications.

Useful information on bats, including legislation and mitigation, can be found on the [Bat Conservation Trust website](#).