

Bats and Buildings

Specialist Support Series



Bats use buildings increasingly for roosting, as natural roosting places in tree holes and caves become more scarce or disturbed. All buildings, in particular the walls, eaves and roofs, are potential roost sites. Anyone working regularly in these areas, such as surveyors, architects, plumbers, roofers, pest technicians, double glazing installators and insulators, should be aware of signs to look for.

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Bats and the law

All 17 species of bat in the UK are protected by law. This differs slightly from country to country, but in summary it is illegal to:

**kill, injure or disturb bats
obstruct access to bat roosts
damage or disturb bat roosts**

because of the following legislation:

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: *England, Scotland and Wales*
- Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985: *Northern Ireland*
- Wildlife Act 1990: *Isle of Man*
- Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000: *England and Wales*
- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004: *Scotland*
- Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

In this context 'damage' would include such operations as treatment with chemicals found in wood preservatives. 'Disturbance' includes any work in or affecting a bat roost.

Under the law, a roost is any structure or place used by bats for shelter or protection. Because bats tend to re-use the same roosts year after year, **the roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time.**

In order that legislation is not contravened, any building maintenance or other operation that needs to be carried out where there are bats or evidence of bats must be notified to the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) or government department in order that it can advise on whether the operation should be carried out and, if so, the method to be used and the timing.

Where works likely to affect bats and/or roosts are proposed for a house, your SNCO (English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage or Environment & Heritage Service Northern Ireland) must be informed in order to advise on how you should proceed.

Where works affect other buildings or structures, eg tree or bridge works/maintenance, any demolition (including houses), building maintenance, barn conversions, works to churches etc, then the appropriate Government department (Defra, Welsh Assembly, Scottish Executive, Environment & Heritage Service Northern Ireland) must be informed and a Habitats Regulations Licence application submitted to and approved by them before any work can commence. Procedures for this can be quite lengthy, so bat surveys should be undertaken as early as possible in the proceedings. **In all cases, a timely survey by an experienced bat worker can save delays later.**

Where do bats roost in buildings?

Different species of bat prefer different places; some creep into tiny spaces, cracks and crevices. Only occasionally do they hang free or are easily visible.

Outside they may roost:

- under weather boarding or hanging tiles
- above soffits and behind fascia and barge boarding
- between window frame and wall brickwork
- in gaps behind cladding tiles or wood
- between underfelt and boards or tiles
- inside cavity walls

Inside roof spaces they may roost:

- along the ridge beam
- around the gable end
- around the chimney breast

Looking for the evidence

Bats do not make nests or cause structural damage.

The most obvious sign of their presence is droppings.

- Bat droppings consist largely of insect remains and crumble easily between your fingers to a powder of semi-shiny fragments.
- Rodent droppings are smooth and plastic, quickly becoming hard. They cannot be crumbled.
- Bat droppings do not present any known health hazards.
- Droppings may not always be readily visible in a loft.
- Large accumulations may reflect use over a number of years rather than large numbers of bats at any one time.

Bat droppings are frequently mistaken for mouse droppings, so do the 'crumble test'.

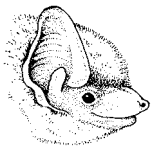
When do bats use buildings?

Bats use buildings at any time, but are most often found in houses between May and August.

- Mother bats have only one baby a year, suckling it for several weeks. The mothers gather in maternity roosts to have their babies in summer, and this is the time they are most likely to be seen using buildings.
- The bats move away when the young can fly and feed themselves, and have usually left by September.
- Immature individuals, adult males and non-breeding females will occupy a variety of roosts, individually or in small groups, at any time of year.
- Disturbance or the use of chemicals at maternity roosts in houses can have a major impact on bat populations gathered from a wide area.
- Bats do roost in houses in winter, usually individually, but are difficult to see.

Which bats use buildings?

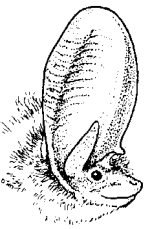
All our UK species have been recorded in houses, but some very rarely. Pipistrelles and long-eared bats are the species most usually found.



Pipistrelle bats

There are three different species of pipistrelles: the common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and the rarer Nathusius' pipistrelle. They sometimes use houses as maternity roosts, choosing confined spaces. These are usually on the outside

of buildings, such as under soffits or behind barge boards or hanging tiles, where the bats can rarely be seen.



Brown long-eared bat

This species mostly prefers older houses with large roof spaces. Small clusters may be seen at junctions of roof timbers or under the ridge. It is the bat most frequently seen inside lofts, and small numbers may stay longer than other species.

Pest control in a bat roost

The control of pests such as wasps, bees, hornets, cluster flies and rodents may unintentionally affect bats or their roosts, so care should be taken when controlling pests in an area where bats are, or are known to have been, present.

- Rodenticides should not be placed in an open tray below roosting bats.
- Insecticides recommended as safer for use near mammals are based on boron, permethrin or cypermethrin. Obtain details from SNCOs.
- Ask for advice too on the range of fungicides which may be used in sites used by bats.
- Sticky traps should not be used in bat roosts.

Advice must be sought from your SNCO before any action is taken in order to keep within the law.

Best practice for working in bat roosts

- In order to work within the law, seek advice from the appropriate SNCO in any situation where an operation may affect bats or their roosts.
- If operations have already started when bats or their roosts are discovered, work must stop and the relevant SNCO must be contacted immediately.

SNCOs (Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations)

English Nature

Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA

Telephone 01733 455000

www.english-nature.org.uk

Countryside Council for Wales

Maes Y Fynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bagnor, Gwynedd LL57 2ND

Telephone 01248 385500

www.ccw.gov.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage

12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh EH9 2AS

Telephone 0131 447 4784

www.snh.gov.uk

Environment and Heritage Service (N. Ireland)

Environment Services, Commonwealth House, 35 Castle Street, Belfast BT1 1GU

Telephone 02890 546 558

www.ehsni.gov.uk

When a Habitats Regulations Licence is required you need to contact your government department. Your SNCO will be able to advise of its address.

The Bat Conservation Trust

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Bat Helpline 0845 1300 228

www.bats.org.uk

email.enquiries@bats.org.uk

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) is the only national organisation solely devoted to the conservation of bats and their habitats in the UK.

BCT produces a wide range of publications and resources covering all aspects of bats and their conservation.

Registered charity number 1012361