

Bat catching, marking, handling and welfare in captivity

For contracted bat surveyors, those carrying out bat research and staff giving permission for such work. Contracted bat workers, Regional/Country Nature Conservation Advisers, Countryside staff.

Key points

- National Trust properties have a large number of bats roosting and foraging.
- Special bat surveys may be carried out by external bodies or through internal contracts.
- Bats may need to be handled to move them to safety or for marking/identification purposes.
- Risks to the bats and the surveyor need to be minimised.

1. BACKGROUND

An increasing number of bats are trapped on National Trust land as part of studies on the ecology or biology of different species. All such work has to be licensed by a Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO – EN, CCW, EHS) and should, therefore, only be carried out by trained, licensed personnel. Guidance for doing such work is given in the Bat Workers' Manual. It is possible to obtain a licence to do such work at a particular site on a small number of bats with minimal training (eg university research). Some aspects of the work are not specifically covered in the texts or licence and often left to the discretion of individual researchers. This Guidance Note gives clarification when Trust land and property is involved. Since all such work is disturbing to the bats it is important to ensure that the welfare of the bats comes first.

2. POSITION

The Trust understands the need to carry out intrusive work on bats to help understand their behaviour and ecology. It encourages such work to help with bat conservation. We must, however, ensure that such work causes the minimum disturbance to the bats. It would be expected that a copy of all findings be presented to the Trust to be used in their own bat conservation programmes (except in exceptional cases).

3. ACTIONS

- Permission must be obtained from the National Trust before carrying out any such work on their land. Those giving permission should ensure H&S policies and licences are adhered to. Property Managers shall request to see copies of relevant licences.
- Any relevant Health & Safety policies must be adhered to. Property Managers shall ensure contractors/researchers are made aware of the Trust's Risk Assessment.
- All methods of catching, marking, tracking and handling bats should be carried out as dictated by the licence and performed in a way outlined in the Bat Workers' Manual.

Some areas not specifically covered require further guidance as they will vary with the particular projects being undertaken.

When on Trust land:

Catching:

- Ensure that you have the Trust's permission to carry out the work. Others may be using the same site for research and so bats could be disturbed more than once, which may be unacceptable.
- Even if you have a licence to mark, take or tag bats you must still gain permission from the National Trust if on Trust land (this is stated on the licence). A copy of the report would be expected by the Conservation Directorate, as well as by the relevant local National Trust office.
- Catching large numbers of bats in a mist net is not advised – a harp trap, plastic cone and bag, or static hand net is a better technique (such as at a roost exit).
- Trapped bats should be removed from mist nets within half an hour or less of capture.
- During mid-summer, female bats may be about to give birth or have young to feed and this should be remembered if essential trapping needs to be carried out. Females should be handled and kept in captivity for only a very short time.
- Trapped bats are often held in a bag whilst awaiting processing. This should be no longer than two hours, preferably less than one hour. Again, at the time of parturition, females should be handled rarely and held for only very short periods of time. Hang the holding bags up, never lie them on the ground. Never mix species in one bag. Always check that all holding bags have been emptied of all bats before leaving the site.
- Double-check nets are empty before taking down.

Tracking:

- If radio-tagged bats cross areas of Trust land, please ensure a copy of the information is sent to the Conservation Directorate of the National Trust for use in its site records.

Marking:

- Details of any bats marked on Trust land should be passed to the National Trust (Conservation Directorate). In future years those bats may be re-located and details of their original capture are important.

Handling:

- Bats should be handled as little as possible and in early summer pregnant bats may be greatly disturbed even by minimal handling
- Avoid being bitten by using gloves or a cloth. Rabies inoculations must be current. The Property Manager can refuse permission to work on Trust land until they have been shown evidence of up to date rabies inoculations and appropriate licences.

Further information

Bat Workers' Manual. JNCC 1999.

Risk assessment on lone working, bats and rabies (see Intranet).

Safety Note on Rabies. The National Trust.

Bats and the Law Guidance Note

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