THE NATIONAL TRUST

Guidance

Bats indoors

What to do if a bat strays indoors. For House Stewards, Conservators, Building Managers, Security staff, Property Managers.

Key points

- Bats occasionally enter living areas of buildings, especially in autumn, and may set off alarms.
- Bats are protected by law, but it is acceptable to carefully, using a glove, put the bat back outside.
- They can stay alive indoors for at least two weeks with no food, and can move around between rooms under closed doors.
- It is important to locate the entry point and prevent further appearances.

1. BACKGROUND

- A large proportion of the buildings managed by the National Trust house bats. Usually the bats roost away from the areas primarily used by humans and so are found in roof voids, cellars, out-houses and barns.
- Odd bats occasionally enter rooms in buildings either having gained access by accident or because they are seeking new roosting places. This seems most prevalent in early spring when the bats emerge from hibernation and in early autumn when bats (especially young bats) seek night roosting places or winter sites.
- Sometimes the bat may enter through an open window when chasing a flying insect attracted by the light. An open window near the roost entrance is very likely to have bats entering, particularly the top-hinged style bathroom windows – as the bats swoop up into the eaves they become deflected by the window and enter the house.
- Some bats enter from the roof space where they roost, down through hollow walls or the chimney stack into rooms. This is usually young bats in mid-summer.
- Bats are harmless, only eating flying insects, but handle with care using a glove.

2. POSITION

The National Trust looks after the buildings and their interiors for the benefit of the nation. The Trust is also committed to looking after the wildlife associated with the buildings, some of which, such as a number of bat species, are nationally rare. Bats and their roosts are protected by law, but a bat in the living area of a house can be carefully taken outside by the resident without infringing any laws.

3. ACTIONS

a) Locating the bat:
Once the bat has landed it is hard to locate. A bat in a room will fly around for up to half an hour but will eventually land, often on a curtain or wall hanging. Restrict its flight to one room. Open windows (or an external door) because the bat may find its own way out, but watch carefully. If it does not escape see where it lands. Once it has landed do not disturb it for at least 5 minutes and then it will become torpid and easily approached.
If the bat is known to be in a room but its location is unknown firstly check the curtains or similar hangings on both sides, then the corners of the room at ceiling height, then the floor. Other

places to check would be light fittings, behind pictures, on the sides of soft furniture and behind furniture against a wall. A grounded bat may only be the size of a matchbox and is often stationary so the search has to be careful and thorough. Bats can easily escape under closed doors if there is a 15mm gap.

b) After locating the bat:
Using a gloved hand carefully pick up the bat (if it is hanging up, lift it upwards to unhook the feet), take it outside and hang it up on a wall at head height or above. Alternatively cover the bat with a box and urge it in carefully with a piece of paper or card, then take the box outside and leave it open on a high surface for the bat to escape (not at ground level). See Safety Note "Contact with bats".

c) Cat-caught bats:
Bats may be brought indoors by a cat and may be injured so will not be able to fly away. In such cases contact the local bat group for help (details available during office hours from the Bat Conservation Trust 020 7627 2629 or the local statutory nature conservation organisation – English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment & Heritage Service of N Ireland).

d) Prevention:
It is best to try to prevent bats entering the rooms in future (note: this refers to rooms used by people, not a bat roost). The obvious entry points are open windows at dusk in summer and the chimney. The former is easily solved by keeping the window closed after sunset or fixing a net curtain across the opening. Chimneys are more difficult: some species may actually fly down wide chimneys, but it is unusual and most enter through mortar gaps in the chimney-breast, usually at roof void height. If the roof void is a bat roost then the odd bat could squeeze through such gaps and fall down the chimney. Such mortar gaps need filling. If this means disturbing the bats in the roof void then seek advice from the statutory nature conservation office (SNCO) (see NT Guidance Note: Bats and the Law).
In large, old houses bats can enter rooms by other methods. Bats in roof voids may drop down cavities between the inner and outer walls or dividing walls and squeeze out into rooms wherever something cuts into the inner wall – water and waste pipes in bathrooms and kitchens, floor joists, boiler flues. Sealing such gaps will prevent further entries. In the case of floor joists the bats may then squeeze out between 15 mm gaps or more between the skirting board and floor-boards. Badly fitting window frames may also allow bats to enter a room: some bats actually roost in the hollow frames of sash windows, entering on the outside where mortar has fallen out. Any 15 mm gap on the inside around the frame could allow the bats indoors. Seal up the inner gaps (not the outside gaps – they are protected by law if bats are roosting).
Remember: a bat entering through an upstairs bathroom can easily make its way into a downstairs drawing room by squeezing under or over closed doors. The room in which the bat was found may not be where it entered the building.

Further information

Bat Conservation Trust (for local Bat Group details), 020 7627 2629
Details of bats and the law: NT Guidance Note or website www.bats.org.uk
Model Risk Assessment WRK 025 of 06.12.2002, Handling of bats
Safety Note, H&S department, No 7/2002 Contact with Bats.

Conservation Directorate Guidance Note Information

Author: Phil Richardson, Bat Conservation Officer

Contact: Conservation Directorate, 33 Sheep Street, Cirencester, Gloucester GL7 1RQ
Tel: 01285 651818

Guidance Note No. Bat 9 **Date of issue:** September 2003