

Building works and maintenance, and bat roosts

For those developing, renovating and maintaining buildings where bats are likely to be present. Building managers, Project Managers, Property Managers, contractors, architects.

Key points

- Bats have been found roosting in most National Trust buildings and it is assumed they will be present in all.
- Bats and their roosting places are protected by law from any disturbance or destruction.
- At the early planning stages ensure a bat survey is carried out and the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO – EN, CCW, EHS) has been asked for advice if bats are discovered.

1. BACKGROUND

- Most of the UK bat species use man-made structures for roosting and hibernating and, for some species, these have become essential.
- Bats are long-lived and use the same structures for decades.
- Different species have different requirements of temperature, humidity and roosting area so may occupy different places in a structure. During a year many roosting places are used by a colony of bats.
- Only a few species are visually obvious when roosting, hanging from exposed beams: most tuck themselves deep into crevices in small numbers and are difficult to locate.
- Almost all National Trust buildings surveyed have shown signs of bats. There is a presumption that bats are present at all sites.
- Bats and their roosting places are protected by law, even when the bats are absent.
- Buildings require repair and maintenance, and some change in use may be required.

2. POSITION

The National Trust is happy to have wildlife associated with its structures and realises that some of the UK's scarcer bats rely heavily on their properties for their survival. Trust structures require regular maintenance work, but this should rarely have a long-term effect on the bats. Guidelines about bats are in the Manual of Building (General requirements for all Building Operations, Preparation of a Project Brief, Practice Notes for Major Projects etc.).

National Trust Act 1907.

The National Trust was established in 1895 for the “permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or scientific interest and as regards lands for the preservation...of their natural aspect features and animal and plant life”.

3. ACTION

When any form of structural maintenance, repair or renovation is planned, then a bat survey should be conducted at an early stage of the planning. This is to prevent hold-ups later, as special licences may need to be applied for which require the help of expert consultants. Even for experts, roosting bats can be hard to find, and those in hibernation still more difficult.

Buildings:

To aid those working on buildings a manual of technical guidance is available (Wildlife and Buildings, Estates Department, 2001 and at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wildbuildings) which outlines many of the places in the roof and walls where bats may roost. The work which commonly affects bats includes re-roofing, pointing, extensions at roof height, conversion of use, rewiring and installation of fire doors, smoke alarms etc (see Guidance Note 'Fire doors, smoke and burglar alarms at bat roosts')

In addition, other structures may be used by bats:

Bridges and tunnels:

- Expansion joints
- Mortar gaps between stones or bricks
- Missing bricks or stones
- Wood/stone junctions
- Sheltered sections such as a bend or joint

Underground sites such as ice-houses, grottoes, mines, tunnels:

- Deep in crevices between stones or bricks
- Where wooden frames or supports meet stone or brick
- Bolt holes
- Blind passages

The National Trust (Conservation Directorate) now provides Bat Roost signs to be fixed at roosts to warn people not to enter. Once such signs are encountered then contact the local SNCO (EN, CCW, EHS in N Ireland) if any work is envisaged in the roost site or affecting the access points. Parts of buildings without signs may also have (undetected) bat roosts and should be checked prior to any work (SNCO).

The law demands that the bats are not disturbed or the roosting place affected. Working with bat experts and the licensing authorities usually means carrying out building work at a time when the bats are not present (they do move during different seasons) It also ensures that, once the work has been completed, the roosting places for the bats and their entrances and exits are little changed. In cases where the roosting places are affected, then equivalent provision nearby is expected. Details of this mitigation in non-residential properties and other relevant information concerning the work programme will be supplied by the bat expert and licensing authority (but may take around two months to obtain). Since it will affect when and how the work should proceed **it is essential** to build the bat survey and licensing in at the beginning of the work-planning programme. The details can then be incorporated into the main plan. The costs of this part of the work should be factored into the budget.

Experience has shown that even with correct licensing and careful planning, the work on the ground may be contrary to that which is licensed, and so an offence could be committed. Before work commences at roost sites it is important to ensure that the work force has been briefed about the bats and the legal implications by their sub-contractor/line manager.

Further information

Wildlife and Buildings booklet, NT Estates Dept. 2001 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wildbuildings

Bat Worker's Manual, JNCC 1999

Bats and the Law, Bats & Buildings, Bats in Bridges. Bat Conservation Trust www.bats.org.uk

Manual of Building. National Trust.

See Appendix

Conservation Directorate Guidance Note Information

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Appendix: The National Trust Bat Roost Procedures

