

Inspection of bat roosts and hibernacula

For those entering a bat roost or hibernacula to monitor the bats or inspect the structure or fittings. For Contractors, licensed volunteers, fire officers, security staff, building staff, woodland officers, Property Managers.

Key points

- Bats are found roosting in a large proportion of National Trust buildings, often in the roof space.
- Bats use underground sites in winter – cellars, disused mines, ice-houses, service tunnels.
- The law protects bats and the roost site from disturbance.
- Monitoring bats is an important part of their conservation management.
- At times it is essential that roof spaces, other roosts and underground sites are entered to monitor the fabric, water and electrical systems and security systems.

1. BACKGROUND

- Bats roost and hibernate at a large number of National Trust properties. Some of these are monitored regularly as part of local or national studies on population changes.
- Any monitoring that disturbs the bats (such as entering the roost or hibernaculum, or handling) requires a licence from the relevant statutory nature conservation organisation (SNCO). This licence will usually only be issued to trained personnel. Licensed bat workers should operate in accordance with guidance in the Bat Workers' Manual (JNCC 1999).
- Counting bats emerging from a roost without disturbing them (no lights, no noise) does not require a licence: this activity is an opportunity for non-experts and volunteers to become involved with bats and should be encouraged. Standard counting methods are available on request from the Bat Conservation Trust (National Bat Monitoring Programme).
- Some roosting places need to be entered to carry out maintenance checking or other work. No entry is allowed if the bats will be disturbed. Seek advice before entering from the local SNCO (English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment and Heritage Service in N Ireland). A bat database of known roost sites is maintained at the Conservation Directorate.

2. POSITION

- Detecting change in wildlife is an important part of the Trust's work, and monitoring species ensures that right conservation measures can be taken. Regular counts of bats at sites provide an invaluable record, especially when used as part of the National Bat Monitoring Project operated by the Bat Conservation Trust. Monitoring, however, must never be so invasive that the species is unduly affected.
- Work must go on at all properties. Some roof spaces, outhouses, cellars and mines are used for other purposes than bat roosts, and some may need regular checks of structural soundness or of fire precautions. Entry, however, is not usually permissible if bats are

present unless under licence (bats have full protection under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act).

3. ACTIONS

Monitoring bats.

It is important that only one designated person co-ordinates the monitoring to prevent unnecessary disturbance. Some sites have been counted for many years, perhaps before the National Trust actively gathered records, and new Trust employees may be unaware of who is visiting the site. It is important, therefore, that all sites being monitored should have the data sent to the National Trust to avoid duplication of effort and unwittingly increasing disturbance. Due to the specialist nature of this work the National Trust relies heavily on local experts to carry out the surveys. Any surveyor entering a roost must have a current bat licence. Copies of all bat reports should be sent to the Conservation Directorate for adding to the bat database.

Entering areas where bats roost.

- This can only be done under licence if bats are present as they are likely to be disturbed. The National Trust (Conservation Directorate) now has Bat Roost warning signs that should be fitted at the entrance of all roosts warning people not to enter.



- Bats have different roosting places at different times of the year, so a house roof, for instance, may not have any bats present during the winter months and a cellar used for winter hibernation may have no bats present during the summer. When no bats are present then it is permissible to enter the site as long as nothing is done to affect the roosting area or entry points of the bats. It is always sensible to seek advice from local bat workers or the SNCO on this matter.
- It may be possible to enter when bats are present if accompanied by a licensed bat worker.
- A bat database is maintained at the Conservation Directorate on which known roosts are recorded.

Likely places for bats to be roosting.

Buildings:

- Roof voids, attics and servants' quarters are likely to be used on older properties, bats roosting along the ridge beams and squeezing into opened wooden joints. They may be hidden behind underboarding or roofing felt.
- In churches, castles and large halls they may squeeze into gaps where roof timbers slot into stone or brick walls, or in crevices between two stones or bricks, usually at roof height. Pipistrelles, for instance, may also be found around window and door frames, mortar gaps on walls, behind hanging tiles and weather-boarding and in the boxed in roof eaves especially at a gable end.
- In most cases the mouse-like droppings of bats will be scattered on the floor of the roof void or on the exterior wall beneath the roosting place, and these signs should warn you of the presence of bats.

- Most species leave these sites during winter as the temperature changes can be too extreme between day and night for them to be able to hibernate. Long-eared bats, however, have been found in decreasing numbers still in attics until December and beyond.

Underground sites:

- Bats hibernate between November and March in places where the temperature is low and buffered from outside changes such as cellars, ice-houses, mines, grottoes, cavity walls, outside door lintels, bridges, tunnels, tree cavities.
- Some species hang out in exposed places such as the roof, but many tuck deep into crevices and are barely visible, even to a trained eye.
- They are reliant on a stable temperature to survive the winter and any disturbance can have a detrimental effect – human body heat can arouse them, warmer air can be wafted in from outside, noise and lights can cause them to awake. Even trained bat workers only enter such sites once or twice during the winter months to monitor the numbers.
- Unfortunately the bats rarely leave signs such as droppings to indicate their presence, so it is best to assume that any underground site could have bats in it during the winter months.
- In summer such sites are often used by bats during the night as temporary night roosts.
- If the actual positions of individual bats are recorded then the most important parts of an underground site will be highlighted, and this can help with improvements.

Also see Wildlife and Buildings, published by the Estates Department, 2001 and at www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wildbuildings.

Bat boxes:

Can be used in summer or winter. The checking of these causes disturbance so should be carried out only by a licensed bat worker. Repairs to empty boxes should be carried out regularly. Boxes unused after a few years should be moved to new sites.

Trees:

Can be used in summer or winter. Holes, cracks, splits or loose bark in branches or the trunk can house bats. Monitoring numbers using the tree usually involves counting emerging bats at dusk. Check the tree carefully for potential weaknesses so remedial action can be taken.

Further information

Guidance notes - Bats and trees, Fire-doors, alarms and bats.

Model Risk Assessment (Intranet) for lone working, working in confined spaces, entry into disused mines, bat survey in caves and mines, bat survey in buildings and other structures.

See also notes in Bat Workers' Guide (JNCC 1999) pp19-23.

Bats and Trees, Bats and Buildings, Bats in Bridges leaflets from BCT, 020 7627 2629

National Bat Monitoring Programme, BCT; details on www.bats.org.uk

Wildlife and Buildings, Estates Department, 2001. Also www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wildbuildings

Conservation Directorate Guidance Note Information

Author: Phil Richardson, Bat Conservation Officer

Contact: Conservation Directorate, 33 Sheep Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire GL7 1RQ

Tel: 01285 651818

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