

# Providing bat roosting places

*Making available roosting places for bats in buildings and trees. Countryside staff, Regional/Country Nature Conservation Advisers.*

## Key points

- The National Trust has significant populations of bats roosting on its properties.
- Extra provision could be made for roosting in some areas presently unused
- Providing extra roosting places could help conserve some of our rarer bat species.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Most National Trust properties surveyed have shown signs of being used by bats. More roosting places can, however, be made available to them. This may be desirable in its own right or be necessary if, for instance, a known roosting place is to be, or has been, lost.

- Many species require more than one roosting place during the summer so they can choose between sites with different temperatures and humidity.
- Males and females often roost separately.
- At night, many species will use a night roost.
- Roosts all need to provide shelter from the weather and most need to have restricted access – small enough for the bats to enter, but not big enough for birds or other predators.
- Roosts need to be dark.
- Some species prefer squeezing deep into crevices, whereas others hang from exposed roof beams. Some species only use cavities in trees for roosting.

## 2. POSITION

The National Trust realises that many endangered bats use their properties for roosting and celebrate this fact. The Trust encourages the providing of new roosting places for bats to help ensure biodiversity.

## 3. ACTIONS

Before carrying out any roost provision work check to see that bats are not already using the site. No work should be carried out at bat roosts without a licence.

### Attic spaces:

Access for many species is under lead flashing around chimneys or under ridge tiles. The lower edge of lead flashing can be lifted and shaped around a broom handle to give access underneath to the attic. Cement from under one side of a ridge tile can be chipped out to allow entry of bats into the “tunnel” along the ridge. This can be done at random points on both sides of the ridge. The end of the ridge could also be opened for access (on top of the gable wall, beneath the ridge tile). In horseshoe bat areas (Wales, south-west England) access for horseshoe bats has to be bigger – a slot about 70cms long and 15cms wide in a vertical surface such as a dormer window or hay loft door that lead into the roof space.

Roosting places: bats entering under flashing or the ridge need to gain entry into the main roof space so ensure that any roofing felt or underboarding in the access areas have gaps in them of at least 2cms wide and 6cms long. Some species prefer to roost behind boarding, so nail untreated wooden boards on the underside of the rafters from the ridge down at least 30cms each side if no underboarding is present.

#### Eaves:

Pipistrelles prefer to roost more on the outside of the property and will try to gain entry into the wooden eaves "box" made from the soffit and barge board used to box in the overhanging roof timbers. They usually gain access through narrow gaps between the soffit and wall, near the gable end apex. Side eaves may be used, especially on the higher roofs. Warmer south or west facing gable ends are preferred. Simply open up a 2cm slot about 10 cms long between the wall and soffit near to the gable apex.

#### Cladding:

Hanging tiles or wooden boarding may be used to clad the higher part of a wall or dormer windows. Pipistrelles will squeeze under any warped or displaced tile or board and roost behind. Provide access by inserting a small wedge to lift tiles or boards 2cms periodically at their lower edge.

#### Trees:

Many species use trees for roosting, some are entirely reliant on them. Some species go deep inside hollow tree trunks or branches, entering a hole and then moving upwards high into the rot cavity. Some species roost behind loose bark, ivy or in surface crevices. Providing artificial roosting places is possible:

Bat boxes: these can be attached to trees and bats are likely to move in (less likely on a house). The design can influence their use. Wooden boxes may last only a few years as no preservatives are used (that could harm bats), but woodcrete (a mixture of cement and sawdust) boxes last indefinitely and retain more humidity in summer. Pipistrelles will use flat boxes (two planks of wood separated by a 2cm batten around the top and both sides). Other bats use bigger boxes, most of which mimic the tree roost by having entrance slots at the bottom, and dark, draught-free roosting places at the top. Open-bottomed boxes made of a series of vertical narrow slots have been used successfully. Use a ladder to erect, and have two boxes per tree, facing in different directions. Use trees along a woodland edge or avenue. Simpler devices that have also worked include strips of carpet and corrugated iron wrapped around a tree and attached at the top.

Save sections of fallen trees that have large cavities, and convert them into large bat boxes with wooden end planks and drilling a suitable entrance slot at the bottom. Strap them to sound trees.

N.B. If bat box support trees are to be eventually harvested do not use iron nails – choose copper or aluminium, or strap the boxes up with rubber, plastic or fibre straps, remembering to take account of any future growth of the tree.

#### **Further information**

Bat Workers' Manual 1999. JNCC.

Guidance notes: Bats and the Law, Bats and Trees.

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### **Conservation Directorate Guidance Note Information**

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