

BATS IN BUILDINGS – GENERAL GUIDANCE

Legislation

All British bats are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and have European protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended), which implements the EC Habitats Directive in the UK. It is an offence to deliberately capture, injure or kill a European Protected Species (i.e. bat) or to deliberately damage or destroy the breeding site or resting place (roost) of such an animal or to obstruct its access. A roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time. 'Damage' would include operations such as timber treatment in roost areas. It is also an offence to deliberately disturb a bat that may significantly affect its ability to survive or the local distribution or abundance of that species.

Which bats use buildings?

All our UK species have been recorded in houses, but some very rarely. Pipistrelles and long-eared bats are the species most usually found.

Pipistrelle bats: they sometimes use houses as maternity roosts, choosing confined spaces. These are usually on the outside of buildings, such as under soffits or behind barge boards or hanging tiles, where the bats can rarely be seen.

Brown long-eared bat: this species mostly prefers older houses with large roof spaces. Small clusters may be seen at junctions of roof timbers or under the ridge. It is the bat most frequently seen inside lofts, and small numbers may stay longer than other species.

Where do bats roost in buildings?

Different species of bat prefer different places; some creep into tiny spaces, cracks and crevices. Only occasionally do they hang free or are easily visible. Outside they may roost:

- under weather boarding or hanging tiles
- above soffits and behind fascia and barge boarding
- between window frame and wall brickwork
- in gaps behind cladding tiles or wood
- between underfelt and boards or tiles
- inside cavity walls

Inside roof spaces they may roost:

- along the ridge beam
- around the gable end
- around the chimney breast.

When do bats use buildings?

Bats use buildings at any time, but are most often found in houses between May and August.

Mother bats have only one baby a year, suckling it for several weeks. The mothers gather in maternity roosts to have their babies in summer, and this is the time they are most likely to be seen using buildings.

The bats move away when the young can fly and feed themselves, and have usually left by September.

Immature individuals, adult males and non-breeding females will occupy a variety of roosts, individually or in small groups, at any time of year.

Disturbance or the use of chemicals at maternity roosts in houses can have a major impact on bat populations gathered from a wide area.

Bats do roost in houses in winter, usually individually, but are difficult to see.

Looking for the evidence

Bats do not make nests or cause structural damage. The most obvious sign of their presence is droppings.

Bat droppings consist largely of insect remains and crumble easily between your fingers to a powder of semi-shiny fragments.

Rodent droppings are smooth and plastic, quickly becoming hard. They cannot be crumbled. Bat droppings do not present any known health hazards.

Droppings may not always be readily visible in a loft.

Large accumulations may reflect use over a number of years rather than large numbers of bats at any one time.

Bat droppings are frequently mistaken for mouse droppings, so do the 'crumble test'.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Advice/Mitigation/Legislation:

Steve Lucas, Regional Species Officer, Countryside Council for Wales, Llys Tawe, King's Road, Swansea SA1 8PG. Tel.: 01792634 960, e-mail: s.lucas@ccw.gov.uk

Ruth Harding, Countryside Council for Wales, Beechwood Offices, Talley Rd, Llandeilo SA19 7HR. Tel.: 01558 825800, e-mail: r.harding@ccw.gov.uk

On bats:

Richard Dodd, Wales Bat Officer, Bat Conservation Trust, Unit 7 Castleton Court, Fortran Road, St Mellons, Cardiff CF3 0LT. Tel.: 029 2036 2531; e-mail: rdodd@bats.org.uk

WAG Development Licences:

Welsh Assembly Government, Unit 9 Cefnllan Science Park, Aberyswyth SY23 3AH. Tel.: 01970 610216

Carmarthenshire CC Biodiversity Officer

Isabel Macho, Conservation Section, Carmarthenshire County Council, 40 Spilman Street, Carmarthen SA31 1LQ. Tel.: 01267 224653; e-mail: IMacho@carmarthenshire.gov.uk