

Bat Conservation Trust

# Living with bats

A guide for roost owners



Brown long-eared bats © Hugh Clark

Guidance and advice on sharing your home with bats, identifying species and caring for grounded bats.

# Frequently asked questions

## How can I tell if I have bats?

Often with difficulty! Some householders have had bats for years without being aware of them.

Look for bat droppings on windows, walls or sills. In the roof void droppings may be below the gable ends or in a line under the ridge.

Bats may be visible on ridge beams inside the roof void but could be tucked away from sight.

Please take care when entering the roof void, particularly during July and August and in the winter months when bats are most vulnerable to disturbance, and do not shine lights up at the ridge. Stop immediately if you suspect any bats are there so as not to disturb them.

During the summer months you can watch to see where the bats emerge from when they come out to feed around dusk time.

Another clue is the chattering sound that bats may make at dusk just before they fly out to feed. Maternity colonies can be more vocal around dawn in July and August when hungry babies call to mothers as they return from their night's insect hunting.

However you may see no sign of bats at all!

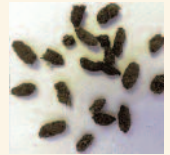


Soprano pipistrelle - life size

© Gemma Russell

## How can I recognise their droppings?

Do the crumble test! Roll a dropping in a piece of tissue between your finger and thumb – if it feels hard then you probably have mice, not bats. A bat dropping is small and dark and will crumble to dust quite easily because it consists of indigestible insect parts. Bat droppings present no known health hazard in the UK, and can be swept up in the autumn to use as an excellent fertiliser for the garden.



© Amanda Adebisi

## Will the bats cause any damage?

Bats are not rodents, and do not nibble or gnaw wood, wires or insulation. They do not build nests, nor do they bring bedding material or insect prey into their roost. Bats are clean and sociable animals and spend many hours grooming themselves. Cover stored items with dust sheets (not plastic sheets) to collect droppings, and make sure that your water tank is covered to prevent any bats from drowning.

## Why do bats use buildings?

### I thought they lived in caves or trees!

Tree and cave roosts have become increasingly scarce causing some bat species to adapt to live in our buildings. Buildings often make better roosting spaces as they are more thermally stable, which is particularly important in the summer months when female bats need warm spaces to rear their young.

## Will we get overwhelmed with bats?

No. A bat mother normally has only a single baby in a year, and not always every year. Bats are most often found in houses in summer, as the females need somewhere warm to have their babies. Like all mammals, they give birth to live young, which they suckle on milk for several weeks until the babies can fly and feed themselves, when they will all move away. If bats find a place for a maternity roost that really suits them, they will often return year after year.

## Looking after your lodgers

All British bats eat insects, which they catch using a sophisticated system called echolocation, listening to the returning echoes of their high-pitched calls to build up a 'sound picture'. They feed on a diet of midges, mosquitoes, moths and beetles, though different species have their own tastes. By growing plants that are attractive to a range of insects, we can make our gardens important feeding stations for bats, birds and other wildlife. Visit [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) for tips on wildlife-friendly gardening, bat boxes, and how to identify the species you might see in your garden.

A problem often faced by bats in gardens is cats. If you own a cat, you can help to save lives by bringing your cat in for the night half an hour before sunset so that bats can emerge from their roost undisturbed. This is especially important from mid-June to the end of August, which is when bats are rearing their young. This also allows the bats to return at dawn undisturbed by cats. If you find a bat that has been caught by a cat, whether or not it appears injured, please call the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** for urgent care advice.

## What happens to bats in winter?

Because insect prey becomes scarce in winter, bats go into hibernation. They find a cool place, free from disturbance, and tuck themselves away, often in a crack or crevice, sometimes in sheds or garages. If you find a hibernating bat take care not to disturb it, as unnecessary waking burns up valuable fat stores. Don't be surprised if you see a bat flying during the winter as they do wake occasionally, to move to a new site or to look for food or water.

## Is there help for my concerns?

Occasionally roost owners may encounter some issues associated with their bat roost, but the majority of problems can easily be resolved. If you have any concerns please seek advice from your Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) or contact the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228**.

On occasion bats mistakenly enter living areas. See later on for what to do if you find a bat. If this happens regularly your SNCO can advise.

Bats and their roosts are protected by law, which means that it is illegal to disturb, kill or injure them or to damage, destroy or obstruct access to a bat roost, whether intentionally or

recklessly. As bats tend to return to the same roosts every year, the roosts are protected whether bats are present or not. Therefore it is always best to seek advice from your SNCO before doing anything that may put the roost at risk.

## Will I be able to have work done in my loft or to my roof?

Having bats does not mean that building work, roof repairs or timber treatment cannot take place. It is advisable that you plan ahead and consult your local SNCO well before work starts and follow their advice on how to proceed lawfully. In many cases they will send a trained roost visitor to inspect your roost, identify bat species and provide advice, free of charge. Alternatively, they will be able to advise you on the best course of action. Never put any fly papers or adhesive rodent traps in your loft if bats roost there. Seek advice from your SNCO if you have a rodent or insect problem at your bat roost.



# Who's living in my house?

There are 18 species of bat in the UK, but only a few are likely to roost in houses. Here we list the species that you are most likely to find, although there are always exceptions to the rule...

Different species of bat prefer different places to roost (or shelter). The most abundant of the British bats are the **pipistrelles**, of which there are three species in the UK. The soprano pipistrelle and the common pipistrelle (below) often roost in houses and are almost identical to the untrained eye. The Nathusius' pipistrelle is quite rare and found less often in houses.

Pipistrelles often choose modern houses and prefer confined spaces around the outside of buildings, usually roosting behind soffits, barge boards and hanging tiles, between roofing felt and tiles, within cavity walls and sometimes behind window frames. They do not usually enter roof spaces, although well established large colonies in older buildings may do so. Their droppings are more likely to be found externally and you may see this species emerge at dusk so keep an eye out for their amazing aerial acrobatics at that time!



Common pipistrelle, Hugh Clark

These tiny bats generally measure between 3.3cm and 4.8cm (head and body length), with a wingspan of 18cm to 25cm. Their preferred diet consists of midges and mosquitoes – a single pipistrelle may eat up to 3,000 insects in one night, one-third of its body weight!



Brown long-eared bat, Hugh Clark

The **brown long-eared bat** (above) is one of the most endearing bats. Its long ears make it instantly recognisable, even in flight. At rest, however, the ears may not always be obvious, being curled back or tucked away completely under the bat's wings.

Brown long-eared bats prefer large uncluttered roof voids; a feature of barns and older buildings. In houses they usually roost singly or in small groups inside the roof void among apex roof timbers, around ridge ends and chimneys, and in ridge tile crevices. Their droppings are often seen in a line under the ridge.

These medium-sized bats spend more time inside the roof space than many other bats, and are generally very quiet inside the roost, not leaving until after dark.

The brown long-eared bat, along with the very rare grey long-eared bat, flies slowly amongst foliage to pick insects off leaves and bark. They are also known as 'whispering bats' because their echolocation sounds are very quiet. The size of their ears means that their hearing is particularly sensitive.

Other species of bat may be found roosting in houses, depending on the style and location of the house. These include:

**Serotine**, one of the largest bat species in the UK, is almost exclusively found roosting in houses across southern England and Wales. Rarer than pipistrelles and brown long-eared bats, serotines usually roost in crevices around chimneys and in cavity walls. Their favoured prey is large beetles, which they find over farmland and grassland.



©Hugh Clark

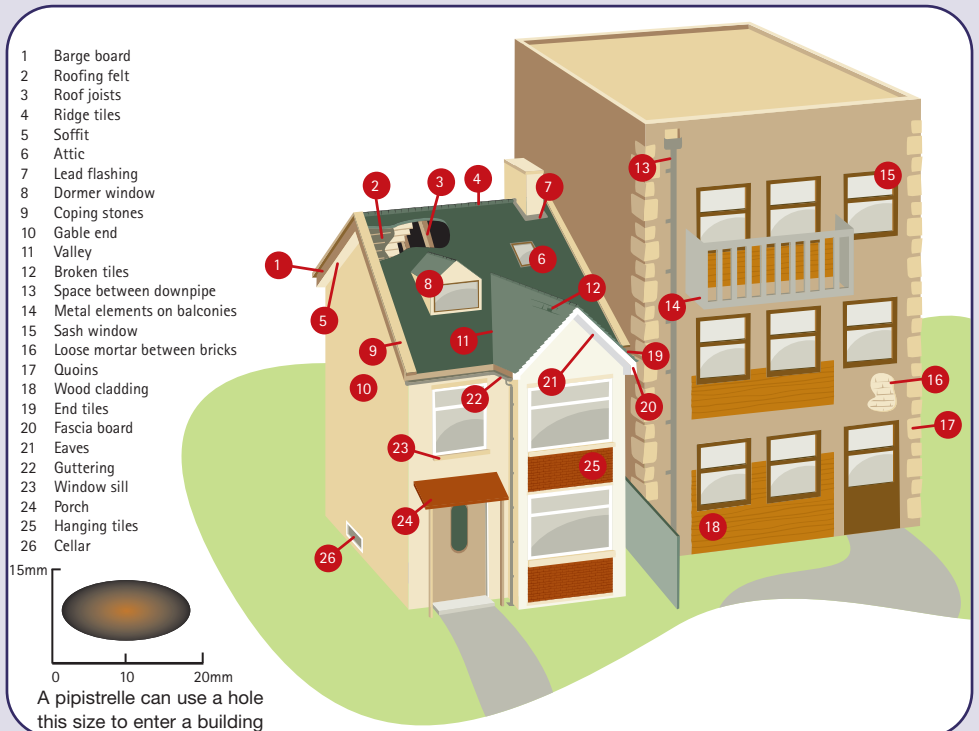
**Horseshoe bats**, probably the most unusual-looking of the UK's bats, are sometimes found roosting in houses in south-western England and Wales. Greater and lesser horseshoe bats hang free in the roost from their feet.



©Gareth Jones

## Where will bats be roosting?

Any structure is a potential bat roost, providing there is sufficient access – bats need only a 20mm gap! Here's a guide to where they might be roosting or coming in and out of your house.



# What if I find a bat on the ground, or

If you find a bat on the ground during daylight hours or flying inside a building, it is likely to need some help. Roost owners may occasionally find bats, particularly juveniles, on the ground in their garden.

Bats should normally be handled only by licensed bat workers, but unlicensed people are allowed to handle them for the purpose of rehabilitation and release. If you find a grounded bat please contact the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** for advice - we're here to help.

## Bats flying indoors

A bat flying in a room has most likely taken a wrong turn and is looking for a way out! If it is after dusk (and good weather), close the door, open the windows as widely as possible, draw back the curtains and remove anything that obstructs the window opening. Dim the lights and give the bat the chance to find its own way out. Bats navigate by sending out high-pitched sounds and listening for the echoes, so the bat should find its way out of the room.

NEVER try to catch a flying bat - you are likely to injure it severely and it may even bite in self-defence. Sometimes young bats which are inexperienced flyers will become exhausted before finding the way out. They may try to land on a wall or curtains, or they may crash land on furniture or the floor. In this case, you should contain the bat as described opposite (with access to water), and try to release it in the evening (see opposite page). This also applies when bats are flying indoors during daylight or bad weather.

## Grounded or injured bats

Sometimes, a grounded bat may just be exhausted and need a bit of time to recover with a little help. It may be injured or in danger from passing predators (such as cats), so it is

better to take it into captivity temporarily and get advice from the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** or your local bat group. Bats are gentle creatures and seldom show any aggression, but they are wild animals and may be frightened or in pain. **You must wear protective gloves and handle the bat as little as possible.**

## Containing and caring for the bat

To contain a grounded bat, place a small box (such as a shoe box or ice cream tub) over the bat and use a piece of flat cardboard to gently and carefully slide the bat into the box. Put a loosely crumpled piece of cloth, such as an old tea towel, in one corner - the bat will feel safer



if it has something to crawl into and hide in. Put a few small air holes into the secure fitting lid and put a few drops of water into a very shallow container (such as a plastic milk bottle top) in one corner for the bat to drink from. Place the box somewhere quiet and dark at room temperature and check every couple of hours to replenish water if necessary. Once the bat is contained, contact the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** for advice.

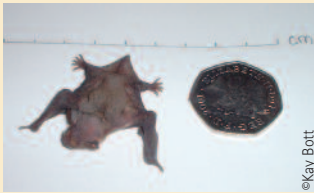
## Baby bats

All British bats are small, and you may be surprised at how tiny they are. Baby bats are sometimes found on the ground in June, July or early August. At all other times of the year, they will be fully-grown and independent. Baby bats have little or no fur and are no bigger than a 50p coin. If you suspect the bat is a baby, you

# flying in my house?

Bat Helpline: 0345 1300 228

must seek help immediately via the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228**. It may be possible for a bat expert to reunite the baby with its mother.



## Releasing a bat

Only bats that have been seen flying strongly inside should be released. Once it is dark outside (and the weather is good), place the box on its side on a wall or shed, at least five feet off the ground – don't forget to take the lid off! The bat can then crawl out of the box and fly away when it is ready. If the bat does not fly away within fifteen minutes, take it back inside and contact the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** for more advice.



## Bats and rabies

Some bats in Europe can carry a rabies type virus called European Bat Lyssavirus (EBLV). This is very rare in the UK – only ten bats have tested positive for the live virus since 1987 (as of August 2013), all of one species – the Daubenton's bat. Ongoing research continues to show that this virus is present at a very low level in our UK populations.

Rabies is passed on via a bite or scratch from an infected animal, or from its saliva coming in contact with your mucous membranes (for example your eyes, mouth or nose). It has never been found in bat droppings or urine in the UK.

You do not need to worry about bats and rabies if you don't handle bats. If you need to handle a grounded or injured bat, see the opposite page for advice on how to pick it up and contain it. Wearing gloves is safest for both you and the bat, but if you are bitten or scratched by a bat or if a bite/scratch is suspected, you should do the following as a precaution:

- Wash the wound immediately with soap and running water for at least five minutes. Cleanse the wound with an alcohol base or other disinfectant.
- Seek prompt advice from your doctor about post-exposure rabies treatment.
- If possible, keep the bat in a suitable box and get expert help for it – call the **Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228** for details of your nearest bat worker.

# Making your bats count

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) is working towards a future where everyone, everywhere can enjoy seeing and hearing bats as a natural part of their environment.

Many of our bat species have declined dramatically over the last century. The Bat Conservation Trust organises a number of national, annual surveys to monitor the status of many bat species across a range of habitats. The surveys are carried out by a network of volunteers and form the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP).

If you would like to help us with this important work to track changes in populations, you can do so by counting your bats as they emerge from their roost on two separate evenings during the summer. For more information and a survey form, please visit [www.bats.org.uk/nbmp](http://www.bats.org.uk/nbmp).

With your help, we can make sure bats are around for future generations to enjoy. Become a member of the Bat Conservation Trust today and help to protect these amazing mammals. You can join online at [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) or contact us on the details below. The Bat Conservation Trust can also provide details of your nearest local bat group.

## Useful contacts

### Bat Conservation Trust (BCT)

5th Floor, Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5RD  
Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228  
[www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)  
[enquiries@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bats.org.uk)

Contact us for more information on living with and looking after bats, taking part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme scheme, and for details of your local bat group or bat carers.

### Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations (SNCOs)

Natural England  
Telephone 0300 060 6000  
[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

Scottish Natural Heritage  
[www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk)

Natural Resources Wales  
Telephone 0300 065 3000  
[www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk](http://www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Telephone 028 9054 0540  
[www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)

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