

Bat Conservation Trust

# Bats in Churches

Practical advice to help your church and bats



The relationship between bats and churches goes back a long way. As Britain was gradually deforested over thousands of years to make way for settlements, roads and crops, bats adapted to use buildings as roosts in addition to trees and caves. Parish Churches, which are important for both the community and worship, are also stable features of the landscape and some have provided valuable roosting sites for many generations of bats, particularly in areas where alternative roosts are scarce. Around 60% of pre-16th Century churches contain bat roosts. Therefore, churches play an important role in helping to protect our native bats.

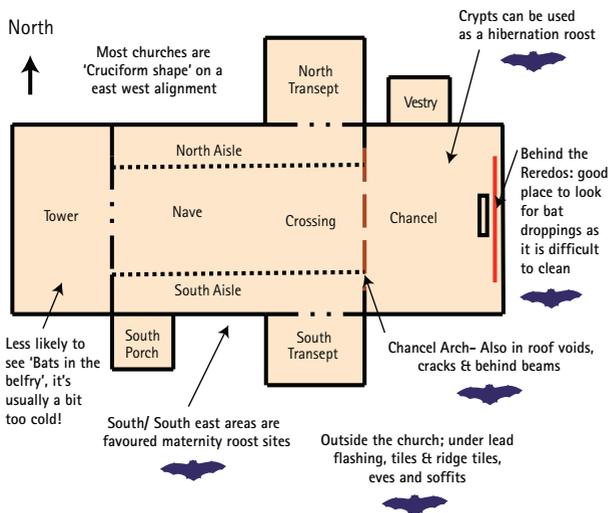
# Bats in Churches

At least eight species of bat use churches for roosting including common and soprano pipistrelles, brown long-eared bats, Natterer's bats and serotines. Bats may use crevice type locations such as under roof coverings, in gaps within timbers, above ceiling panels, behind hanging tiles or shingles, under flashing and gaps within masonry or in rubble filled walls. Bats may also roost in roof voids or crypts.



Bats are small and docile creatures. Bats usually return each year to squeeze into the same favoured crevice where they feel safe; a roost of 30 bats could fit in the area the size of a letterbox, and access through a hole the width of your thumb. Bats are mainly active between spring and autumn, but may also spend the winter hibernating in unheated parts of a church. Bats may perceive the spacious interior of a church to be somewhat like the canopy of a woodland. They may fly around inside before emerging to feed or on returning. Some bats will use porches or other areas as shelters between bouts of feeding, even if they roost elsewhere. Churchyards can be a good source of nearby food, essential when young bats are first learning to fly or when the weather is unfavourable.

## Where do we usually find bats in churches?



Church renovation work can unwittingly disturb and endanger bat colonies. In mid-summer the young are at particular risk of being abandoned by their mothers if the roost is disturbed. In any season, the bats can be entombed or excluded from their roosting site unintentionally. It is also important to avoid placing lights where they will shine directly onto the roost entrance as this can delay emergence so that the bats miss the peak insect time when feeding. Such events can be avoided by consulting bat experts for advice well in advance of undertaking work.



## Bat facts

- All 18 of the bat species known to occur in the UK feed on insects. A tiny pipistrelle can consume up to 3000 midges and other small insects each night, so in active months bats are a natural control on insect numbers.
- When insects are scarce during winter, bats hibernate, lowering their body temperature to conserve energy and waking only periodically.
- In summer, females form maternity colonies where each gives birth to a single young. Local populations take a long time to recover if damaged.
- All bats and their roosts are protected, whether the bats are present or not.
- Bats are not blind but their eyesight is aided by their sophisticated echolocation system which enables them to catch insects and find their way in the dark.
- Bats are not rodents and will not generally cause structural damage. They do not gnaw wood or cables and they do not build nests, instead they roost in existing spaces such as crevices in stone walls, gaps behind beams or under roof tiles.
- Bat droppings consist mainly of insect remains and are usually very dry and crumbly. They present no significant health hazard in the UK.
- Bats may live up to thirty years and return faithfully to the same roosting site every year.

## Why are bats protected?

All UK bat populations are protected by law because of the severe declines they suffered during the last century. The loss of habitats, use of insecticides and agricultural intensification have reduced the numbers and variety of insects available on which they depend for food. Bats have also suffered from the loss of old trees and buildings used for roosting, the use of toxic chemicals during timber treatment, and deliberate killing. Many churches provide reliable roosts giving much needed security and opportunities for feeding close to home in churchyards.



## Grounded bats

Bats may occasionally be found on the ground during daylight hours, in which case they are likely to be sick or injured. If you see a bat on the ground follow the advice on the BCT website ([www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)) on how to contain the bat and call the National Bat Helpline. Bats are gentle creatures and seldom show any aggression but being wild animals may be frightened or in pain. A type of rabies has been found in a very small number of British bats which can be transmitted through a bite or scratch, so if needing to handle a bat when rescuing it you should use thick protective gloves.

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Images: Hugh Clark, Brown Long-eared bat  
Simon Mickleburgh, St Andrew's Church, Marlesford, Suffolk

- There are 18 species of bat in the UK, some of which are extremely rare. Many churches have provided refuges for bats for hundreds of years.
- By welcoming or tolerating bats in your church, you can make an important contribution to their survival.
- For more information about bats in churches see the reverse of this booklet; your local bat groups may be able to help further, please see [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)
- A partnership made up of Natural England, Church of England, Historic England, Bat Conservation Trust and Churches Conservation Trust are working together to use the latest research to provide innovative solutions that support churches with bats. See [www.batsandchurches.org.uk](http://www.batsandchurches.org.uk)



## Bat Conservation Trust



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

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### Help and advice for your church

Bats and their roosts are protected from destruction and disturbance. In the same way as you would seek expert building advice for preserving or protecting the important historic fabric of a church, works such as remedial timber treatment, the installation of floodlighting, structural repairs and roof renovations may impact on bats. Your church may be eligible for free advice on how to stay within the law and minimise any impacts. However, some types of work may need the help of an ecological consultant and require a European Protected Species licence. To avoid any delays, please seek advice from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO), see back of leaflet, as early as possible when planning work to the church.



The number of bats in a church is often small and so colonies may even go unnoticed. For many churches, simple low-cost techniques can be employed to manage the bats' presence. Occasionally, a larger colony may be present and during the months in which the bats are most active, the droppings may cause problems for those cleaning the church. Please contact the National Bat Helpline for advice on the management of bats in churches. If droppings or urine are observed to damage the historic fabric of the church building or its contents, it would be advisable to consult a specialist conservator or denominational historic buildings adviser. A range of short and long term approaches may be recommended. Some may be quite simple, such as temporarily relocating artefacts further from the bats' roost or flight path, others more complicated. The approaches taken to mitigate issues relating to bat urine and droppings are constantly being updated and improved, please see [www.batsandchurches.org.uk](http://www.batsandchurches.org.uk).



*Bat droppings*

The many clergy and congregations who welcome or tolerate bats in their churches make an important contribution to the conservation of bats and the care of the natural world. However, if your church needs extra support about a specific issue, the SNCO should be contacted through the BCT National Bat Helpline for advice. Due to the large size and complex construction of churches, excluding bats entirely is rarely possible, but every effort will be made to find a solution.



## What else can you do to help bats?

- Spread the word that bats are vulnerable and need your church's help. Display the poster in the centre of this leaflet on your church or parish noticeboard for all to see.
- Go batty in Sunday school. There are plenty of ideas for children's activities available on our website.
- Organise a church bat walk or event. Contact your local bat group who may be able to help lead a walk or run a workshop/event. they may be able to identify the species at your church. For details of your nearest bat group see [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk).
- Churchyards rich in native flowers and trees that attract insects will benefit bats and other wildlife; minimise the use of pesticides and create corners for wildflowers.
- Join the Bat Conservation Trust or the Young Batworker's Club. Individual, family and teacher/youth leader memberships are available. To become a member contact BCT or visit our website to join online.
- Monitor the bats in your church. Take part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme by counting your colony twice each summer. For more information and to sign up contact BCT or visit our website.
- Subscribe to the Bats in Churches Partnership Project newsletter for updates on ways to engage your community with bats. [Batsandchurches.org.uk](http://Batsandchurches.org.uk)



With the help of church communities, we hope to ensure that bats are around for future generations to enjoy.

### The future for bats

BCT's vision is a world rich in wildlife where bats and people thrive together. At many churches there is already a protective attitude towards the bats sheltered within the building. A sympathetic approach and tolerance are invaluable for the conservation of these vulnerable animals.



### Useful contacts

#### **National Bat Helpline**

Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London, SE11 5RD.

Call the National Bat Helpline today on **0345 1300 228**

or visit **[www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)**

Email **[enquiries@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bats.org.uk)**

#### **How to contact your SNCO**

**England:** Natural England (via BCT)

0345 1300 228

**Northern Ireland:** Northern Ireland Environment Agency

028 9039 5264

**Scotland:** Scottish Natural Heritage

01463 725 165 / [batsinhouses@snh.gov.uk](mailto:batsinhouses@snh.gov.uk)

**Wales:** Natural Resources Wales

0300 065 3000 (ask for the species team)

Photographs courtesy of: Hugh Clark, Simon Mickleburgh, Rosie Corner, Anne Youngman, Jules Agate, Diana Hagues and Nick Tomlinson.