

# Bat Conservation Trust



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## **Rare bat to be mapped for the first time**

One of the UK's rarest mammals – the Bechstein's bat - will be surveyed and monitored under a new three-year project designed to improve our knowledge of the species and help protect them.

The Bat Conservation Trust is launching the Bechstein's Bat Project on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> February.

The Bechstein's bat is a rare tree-dwelling bat, mostly found in old growth woodlands. The bat is difficult to detect using standard methods due to its elusive feeding, roosting and echolocation behaviour, so little is known about its distribution in the UK, which can hamper conservation efforts. Until 1990, just 140 records of the bat existed in the UK.

Under the new project, BCT is aiming to undertake the first survey for Bechstein's bats across their entire UK range in England and Wales.

The survey is based on an exciting new method which uses an ultrasound synthesizer, called an 'Autobat' (developed at the University of Sussex) which simulates social calls to lure the secretive bats into a harmless harp trap, so that they can be identified before release. The method was developed by leading bat experts Dr David Hill and Frank Greenaway and uses a model to predict the occurrence of female breeding roosts based on characteristic landscape features and habitats that correlate with the bats' presence.

The surveys will be undertaken by volunteers from local bat groups who will be trained in using these new methods.

Helen Miller, Bechstein's Bat Project Officer at BCT, said: *"The project will give us detailed data for the Bechstein's bat for the first time, which will make an enormous difference by informing our conservation work for this species. It will also leave a legacy of trained, enthusiastic volunteers who can help keep track of the Bechstein's bat in the long term to help ensure their survival."*

A third of the UK's mammal species are bats, however, populations of all 17 of our native species have declined dramatically since 1900. Development, modern agriculture, pesticides and public misconceptions have all contributed to their decline. Seven species of bats, including the Bechstein's bat, have been identified by the Government as priority species under its Biodiversity Action Plans scheme, which aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

Amy Coyte, chief executive of the Bat Conservation Trust, said *"This project will directly inform the government's UK Biodiversity Action Plans for the Bechstein's bat, substantially improving knowledge of the bat's habitat requirements and allow landowners to manage woodlands for this rare species."*

*"The more knowledge we have about Bechstein's bats, the better we will be able to conserve them and ensure they are around for future generations to enjoy."*

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### Notes to editors

- Photos are available upon request.
- The Bechstein's Bat Project is being launch on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> February at the Knapp Gallery, Regent's College Conference entre, London at 6.30pm. There will be photo opportunities, and a chance to see a variety of bats up close.
- BCT is the only national organisation solely devoted to the conservation of bats and their habitats in the UK. BCT is looking for more volunteers to take part in the bat surveys. There is a wide range of surveys suited to all levels of experience and knowledge, including the Sunset-Sunrise Survey in July for absolute bat beginners. For more information about taking part, contact the Bat Helpline on 0845 1300 228 or visit [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk).
- The project will run for 3 years and is being generously funded by BBC Wildlife Fund, Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission UK, Forestry Commission Wales, People's Trust for Endangered Species/Mammals, The Scottish Forestry Trust, Thames Valley Record Centre, and Landfill Communities Fund of Waste Recycling Group (WRG), administered and distributed by Waste Recycling Environmental (WREN)
- It is hoped the survey will take place across many of the counties in the historic range of the Bechstein's bat, which includes the following areas in England and Wales: Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Surrey, Sussex, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Swansea & Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire, Brecon Beacons National Park, and Pembrokeshire.
- BCT has been keeping track of UK bat populations for more than 10 years through its National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). The NBMP was established in 1996 and aims to develop effective monitoring methods that will provide governmental and non-governmental organisations with accurate monitoring data on which to base advice relevant to the conservation needs of the UK's bats. In the long term, through the deployment of standard monitoring techniques and verification of existing methods, the programme aims to identify bat population changes and to suggest likely causes. More information is available at [www.bats.org.uk/nbmp/index.asp](http://www.bats.org.uk/nbmp/index.asp).
- The latest results and population trends from the NBMP can be found in the 2006 Annual report at [www.bats.org.uk/nbmp/documents/NBMPAnnualReport2006.pdf](http://www.bats.org.uk/nbmp/documents/NBMPAnnualReport2006.pdf)
- BCT is a member of the Tracking Mammals Partnership, a collaborative initiative involving 25 organisations with a variety of interests in UK mammals, which aims to improve the quality, quantity and dissemination of information on the status of UK mammal species. [www.trackingmammals.org](http://www.trackingmammals.org).
- The Bechstein's bat project is based on a pilot study undertaken by Dr David Hill and Frank Greenaway in 2004-2006 which was funded by Mammals Trust UK. The Autobat was developed at the University of Sussex and tested through the pilot work.

### **Bechstein's bat facts**

The Bechstein's bat is a rare tree-dwelling bat, mostly associated with old growth broadleaved woodland. A few individuals are found in underground sites during hibernation, but it is likely that most individuals roost in trees all year.

The most recent population estimates are of around 1500 individuals with overall population trends unknown in the UK.

It feeds on invertebrates including spiders and resting day-flying insects which are picked from branches and leaves.

Head and Body length: 4.3cm-5.3cm

Wing span: 25cm-30cm

Found in Southern England and possibly parts of South Wales