

Leading members of the public around after dusk looking for bats has proven to be an increasingly popular event and a great way to get communities involved in their local green spaces. Bat walk leaders need to have a level of experience and knowledge of bats. We recommend that if no-one in your group has this experience then you contact your local bat group, or another organisation that leads walks, to see if they could help. Alternatively, BCT runs training courses on organising and leading bat walks.

Things to remember...

1. Planning

Location, appropriate date, access requirements, sunset times and assistants should all be considered when planning a bat walk. Areas with a range of habitats including woodland and water will provide a greater opportunity for finding bats. Bats are most active from April–September with peak activity at sunset. Remember, peak activity may be late in June and July.

Will you need special access? Is it safe at night? Make the route you follow as accessible as possible – look at path surface, inclines, transport links, parking. Bat walks can, and should, be accessible to all members of your community.

Consider how many people might turn up. Have at least one other person available to help on the walk. Two of you will generally be ok for a group of 15 people.

2. Promoting and publicity

What is a bat walk? Where and when does it take place? Describe what is involved in the promotional material and clearly include the location, day, date and time (including the likely finishing time). Tell people to wear suitable clothing and footwear for the weather conditions. State some details of the route e.g. good surfaced path with some steps and/or gentle slope.

Advertise as widely as possible. Posters and flyers prior to the date can raise interest. Walks can be promoted on the Green City Bats website.



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3. Prior to the walk

Check your route and the weather! Ensure you have all the appropriate equipment including bat detectors, a torch and leaflets. This can also be a good opportunity to promote other activities and the work of the Friends group.

It would help to plan in advance an introductory talk. Include: who you are, a brief introduction to bats and their conservation, where you will be going and what you hope to see. Discuss doing a risk assessment with the local ranger and cover any health and safety issues in your talk.

4. On the walk

Ensure everyone gets to use a bat detector and understands what they are hearing. As you walk, describe the bats that you see/hear, habitat types, roosting, conservation status etc... Try to make sure everyone can hear you and walk at a suitable pace. Share questions that may be asked.

Overleaf are some examples of FAQ. Don't worry if you get ones you can't answer; there is a lot we don't know about bats. Offer to get back to them with an answer after the event or refer them to the BCT website. Make a record of the bats you see, this will allow you to put together a picture of bat activity in your area over time. You should also upload details of any bats you see onto the Big Bat Map to provide more information on the area. Visit www.bats.org.uk/bigbatmap to log your sightings.

5. After the walk

Check that everyone is accounted for. If possible, take contact details (email is often easiest) to provide people with more information on bats, future walks, and the work of the Friends group.



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What kinds of animals are bats? Are they furry? Do they lay eggs? Are they flying mice? How long do they live?

Bats are mammals. Like all other mammals, bats have hair or fur on their bodies, they don't lay eggs, they are warm-blooded and their babies feed on their mother's milk for at least a few weeks after birth. Bats are more closely related to humans than to mice. Bats are the only mammals that can truly fly. Bats can live for up to 30 years.

Do they fly like birds?

No. A bat's wing is shaped completely differently. A bat's wing has very similar bones to the arm and hand of a human, with skin stretched between the very long finger bones and the body to form the wing membrane.

What do bats eat? Do they suck your blood?

All baby bats start life feeding on their mother's milk. Once they are weaned the type of food they eat depends on the species of bat. Different bat species eat different food. However, all adult British bats eat only insects. There are over 1,000 species of bat in the world and only three of these drink the blood of other animals, such as cattle –there are no vampires in Transylvania!

All bats have very big appetites, because flying uses up a lot of energy. One pipistrelle can eat over 3000 insects in a night.



Brown long-eared bat in tree hole

© Hugh Clark



Pipistrelle in flight

Are bats blind? How do they catch their prey in the dark? Do bats get tangled in your hair?

Bats are not blind, but at night their ears are more important than their eyes. As they fly they make shouting sounds. The returning echoes give information about anything that is ahead of them, including the size and shape of an insect and which way it is going. This system of finding their prey is called **echolocation**. Most of these sounds are too high-pitched for humans to hear, but they can be heard on a special instrument called a **bat detector**. They also have good steering – they won't get caught in your hair!

What do bat detectors do?

Bat detectors turn sound we can't hear into sound we can hear. Most people can hear sounds up to 20kHz in frequency/pitch. Bats echolocate at frequencies higher than this so their calls are usually beyond our hearing. Bat detectors help us listen into sounds we aren't normally aware of. This lets us know bats are flying about even when we can't see them.

Bat sounds

Roost noises	Chatters and chirruping sound between mothers and young in the roost. Audible to our 'naked' ears
Ultra sounds	Sounds above 20kHz, i.e. beyond our hearing
Echolocation	The use of sound to navigate and find food (dolphins do this too)
Feeding buzz	The delightfully rude 'raspberry' sound heard as bats home-in on an insect
Social calls	Very short rasping sounds, often heard when there seem to be lots of bats but few insects around