Parks and Bats

Bat Conservation Trust

Parks and other green spaces are a wonderful place for people and wildlife to come together. Many have ideal habitats for bats to feed and roost in. The presence of open space, trees, and often ponds or a stream is beneficial for bats. There are many things that can be done to improve habitats for bats and turn your green space into a diverse wildlife haven.

Bats and plants both need insects

All of Britain's bats eat insects. Flight and echolocation use a lot of energy and so bats will eat vast numbers. The common pipistrelle can eat over 3,000 insects in one night. The insect diet depends on the size of the bat and includes midges, mosquitoes, flies, beetles, moths and crane flies. In turn, plants rely on insects for pollination. The colour, scent and nectar of flowers act as a form of advertising to insects, allowing pollen to be transferred from plant to plant. Different plants attract different types of insects. The key to successfully attracting wildlife, including bats, is to provide a plentiful and diverse range of plants that will ensure a good supply of insects.

Planting days

A good way to increase the chances of bats feeding in your park, and getting local people involved, is to hold a planting day. This does depend on current management practices and should be undertaken in consultation with the council. However, most will be glad to have volunteers help improve existing areas for wildlife. When thinking about bats, try to include plants of the following types:

- Flowers that vary not only in colour and scent but also in shape
- Pale flowers that are more easily seen in poor light and thus attract insects at dusk
- Native wild flowers will attract far more species of insect that exotics
- Flowers that bloom throughout the year

Buttercup

Oxeye daisy

Trees, shrubs and hedgerows

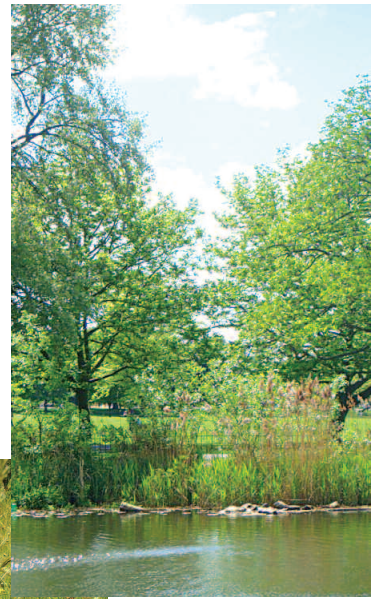
These are particularly important in providing food for larvae and adult insects as well as providing roosting opportunities for bats. Hedges around parks rather than fences are not only more attractive but create a buffer zone for the wildlife within and 'commuter belts' for bats. The following are very likely to attract bats:

- Old trees
- Old woodpecker holes and rot holes
- Dead wood, dying wood and loose bark (dead trees provide many roosting opportunities)
- Ivy and other dense climbers such as honeysuckle
- Oak and beech: most species of trees can house bat roosts but these appear most suitable

Tree management in parks is important for both nature and public health and safety. However, these do not have to be in conflict. Encourage the council to retain dead trees where appropriate and ensure that they check for potential bat roosts if removal is necessary. If bats are roosting in a tree, then this roost is legally protected. Dead trees that have been cut down can be turned into log piles, providing homes for many insects and retaining the nutrients in the decaying wood within the soil.

Wild thyme

Meadow flowers



Ponds, lakes and streams

Water provides a wealth of insects and many bat species feed over water for precisely this reason. Species like Daubenton's bats and soprano pipistrelles are frequently associated with water. Native marginal plants on pond edges and streams will encourage insects. Even a small marshy area will increase the biodiversity of a park. Why not see about creating a bog garden?

Bat boxes

Bat boxes are artificial roosts, usually made of wood or woodcrete (a mixture of wood chips and concrete). They are designed to encourage bats into areas where there are few natural roosting sites, such as woodpecker holes in trees. Bat boxes have a useful place in bat conservation, but it should be remembered that bats take to boxes less readily than birds.

Various designs of bat boxes are available commercially but with a few materials and tools you can make your own. Bat box building days raise awareness of bats, get people involved, and save money! Boxes can be cubic, wedge or crevice shaped with narrow entrances at the bottom. They can be attached to trees or buildings using nails or wire. Ensure that nails used on trees are appropriate to allow tree growth and reduce damage to saws or machinery that may be used in the future.

When making bat boxes, it is important to remember that bats do not like draughts. Well-sealed joints are important whilst removable lids should be avoided. All timber used should be rough-sawn to allow bats to climb and should be untreated as bats are very sensitive to chemicals. A special licence is required under law to inspect bat boxes and disturbance without this is illegal. Some designs can be monitored without the need to be opened i.e. the Kent Bat Box, these are more suitable for people who do not have a licence. Contact your local bat group and talk to your Parks Officer about monitoring your bat boxes.

Bat boxes are most likely to be used if they are located in places where bats are known to feed. Ideally, two or three boxes should be placed facing in different directions to allow a range of roosting temperatures throughout the year. However, even a single box has a chance of being used. The important thing is to ensure that there is a clear flight-line to any boxes and that a reasonable amount of sun reaches the box.

More information on suitable plants and about bat boxes can be found at **www.bats.org.uk/encouragingbats**