

Bat Conservation Trust

# Bat Rehabilitation

How to get involved



© Peter Clome

Pipistrelle in care

Guidance on how to get involved with bat rehabilitation and the support available

Bats are the only true flying mammals, and these fascinating animals are vital to ecosystems in the UK and worldwide. In the UK, the 18 species of bat living here feed on insects, with a common pipistrelle (our smallest species) eating up to 3,000 insects in a single night! They have a seasonal life cycle; bats are at their most active during the summer when maternity colonies form and the young are born. They hibernate during the winter when temperatures are cooler and fewer insects are available. Like any animal, bats sometimes find themselves in tricky situations; including cat predation, getting lost or from lack of nutrition. With the dedication of people trained in bat rehabilitation we can help to give these bats a second chance!

## Who can care for bats?

Anyone with a passion for wildlife and animal rehabilitation can get involved! Caring for bats is a specialist area however, so please note that training, dedication and time are a necessity. Most bat care is carried out on a voluntary basis, outside of other commitments and there is little funding available. Those involved care immensely about these mammals and have the collective aim of releasing bats back into the wild.

There are a variety of ways in which you could become involved. If you're new to bat rehabilitation, you may consider starting off as an ambulance driver; collecting injured bats and transporting them to someone more experienced. Once more experience has been gained, you may then want to progress into providing short-term care, with the most experienced rehabilitators offering long-term and/or permanent care.

Before starting out, you should remember that the welfare of the bat is the most important consideration and all care decisions must be based on what is best for the bat, even if it is not always the desired outcome.

## Why care for bats?

Bats need our help! In 2015 alone, the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) National Bat Helpline received nearly 8,000 enquiries about bats in need of assistance. This figure has increased annually over the past few years and looks set to continue to do so. These enquiries have included bats that are underweight, dehydrated, trapped or caught by cats. There is also an Out of Hours Helpline\* in operation during the summer, covered by volunteers, to help with these emergency calls on evenings and weekends.

\*Please check the back cover for more details.

Bats in trouble could do with a helping hand, and that's where you could come in!

You don't need formal qualifications to be a bat rehabilitator, but plenty of hands-on experience and training. Many rehabilitators also work closely with vets who may have limited experience in treating bats, meaning that those involved really do provide a lifeline for thousands of bats every year.

© North Devon Bat Care



Baby whiskered bat

This baby bat was found in the morning, was cared for by an experienced bat carer, and successfully reunited with the mother that same evening.



© Steve Parkler

Bat in care with a hole in the wing membrane. This area healed well and the bat was released.

© North Devon Bat Care



*Male pipistrelle*

This bat was found suffering from an open forearm fracture. Unfortunately this bat had to be euthanised due to its injuries.



© Wendy Northrop

*Brown long-eared bat in care eating a mealworm*

Bat rehabilitation doesn't just directly benefit bats; it also provides a great opportunity to educate the public about these largely misunderstood animals and helps to create a more positive attitude towards them. Bat rehabilitation can therefore be pivotal for conservation in addition to animal welfare.

Being a bat rehabilitator isn't always easy; not all bats can be rehabilitated and returned to the wild. Some individuals may need to be euthanised to prevent further suffering, but despite this factor bat care is still hugely rewarding.

## Legislation

All 18 bat species and their roosts in the UK are legally protected because of decreasing numbers over the past century, due to persecution and habitat loss. It is an offence to harm or disturb bats, or to destroy or deliberately alter their roost sites without first seeking advice.

For welfare reasons it is permissible to help a bat in trouble and for the bat to be taken into care with the aim of releasing it back into the wild.

Some experienced rehabilitators do have long-term bats in their care which cannot be released back into the wild. These individuals are kept for education purposes under a licence through the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO).

## What do you need for bat care?

Any support and assistance you're able to provide is hugely appreciated! However, there are some key questions you should ask yourself before confirming your interest.

### Do you have:

- A **passion** for bats.
- Dedication** – bat rehabilitation is a serious commitment.
- Commitment** to train and gain the required experience.
- Time** to care for or transport bats.
- People skills** – to deal with a range of people and attitudes from those who find bats in need of assistance. This can include those who love bats to those who have a phobia about them.
- Understanding the need to **make tough decisions** – keeping bat welfare at the heart of every choice made to help alleviate suffering.
- Understanding the need of **recording** – records are important to keep track of a bat's medical history, outcome and possible licence implications.
- Self-funding** – bat care has little funding available, but equipment (mealworm supply, gloves and suitable enclosures to name a few) is still essential.
- Rabies vaccinations** – willingness to obtain and keep vaccinations up-to-date.



©Gail Armstrong

Basic equipment

## Why are vaccinations and gloves needed?

Some bats in Europe can carry a type of rabies virus called European Bat Lyssavirus (EBLV). This is very rare in the UK – only 14 bats have tested positive for the live virus since 1987 (as of September 2016), all from one species – the Daubenton's bat. Ongoing research continues to show that this virus is present at a very low level in our UK bat populations.

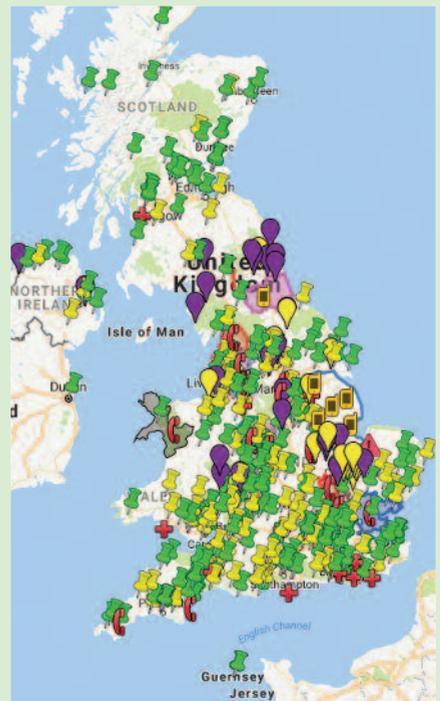
Though the risks may be low, a precautionary approach is taken and it is the recommendation of Public Health that anyone who handles bats regularly should be vaccinated against rabies. Furthermore, these vaccinations should be available free of charge for those working with bats in both a voluntary and professional capacity\*. These vaccinations can be obtained through Public Health in England and Wales, through the NHS in Scotland and Northern Ireland. BCT can provide further information as required.

*\*In Scotland and Northern Ireland the free vaccination scheme is only available for those in a voluntary capacity. For professional work the employer must cover the cost.*

It is worth remembering that bats are wild animals and, although not naturally aggressive, may become so when scared or in pain. Gloves should always be worn when handling bats – the thickness depending on the species in care and the task being carried out (e.g. handling, feeding, treating an injury etc.). A list of gloves suitable for bat care is available from BCT.

## How is bat care organised?

At BCT, we have a list of bat rehabilitators, (made up of carers, ambulance drivers and wildlife hospitals) throughout the UK known as the UK Bat Care Network. This is a Network of volunteers who can assist with injured or grounded bats that are found by the general public. Through the Network, we are able to refer those who have found bat(s) in need of



As of September 2016, the BCT Bat Care Network map of volunteer contacts.

care onto contacts who may be able to provide guidance and assistance, in order to give the bat(s) in question the best chance to be rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

As of September 2016, over 400 contacts made up the Bat Care Network with another 100 listed as trainees; gaining experience and knowledge before hopefully being activated themselves. Each contact has their own set of preferences depending on their other commitments and facilities available.

As a responsible organisation, to be listed on BCT's Bat Care Network you must be vaccinated against rabies and keep these up to date, providing evidence of this. This evidence may be a vaccination certificate or doctor's declaration. We set up vaccination reminders for when the next booster is due.

### How do I get involved?

So you've decided to get involved. Fantastic news! The first step is to get in touch with BCT to express your interest. You can e-mail [enquiries@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bats.org.uk) or phone **0345 1300 228** and ask for the Bat Care Network Co-ordinator. You will then receive an introductory email pack highlighting the steps required.

Your local bat group can also help so please do get in touch. Some bat groups have their own local care network, and they may run training sessions and provide vital support as you're leaning the basics. You can find details of your local group on BCT's website at [www.bats.org.uk/yourlocalgroup](http://www.bats.org.uk/yourlocalgroup).

You can also increase your support network by finding more contacts online. A private Facebook group for rehabilitators can be found at [www.facebook.com/groups/batcare/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/batcare/).

BCT can also provide information on fundraising approaches that can help sustain the resources needed for bat care.

### What do those already involved have to say?

**Steve Parker, South Lancashire Bat Group**

*'I started along with my wife Fiona just after we moved to our home; virtually every other programme on TV was wildlife rescue based, and we thought "we could do that," so we did!*

*I have learnt a huge amount about bat behaviour from watching them groom, interact and even seeing them give birth. Looking after injured bats has also improved my handling and processing skills, and is great for learning bat identification. Bat care can give some great anecdotes to recount at public engagement events, and is ideal for showing what bats are really like.*

*The reality of bat care can be challenging however, and that includes making difficult decisions about badly injured animals. The injuries I've seen over the years range from serious damage with multiple fractures, missing limbs, broken backs and shredded membranes, to those that have simply become weak and dehydrated or have minor holes in the wing membrane. Some individuals are very slow to feed so it can take a long time and re-training them to fly after recovery can be difficult. Their ability to heal, especially in the wing membrane never fails to astound however, and for me, every release is still just as thrilling as the very first!"*



*Pipistrelle bat in care being given water*

**Gail Armstrong, North Lancashire Bat Care**

*"I got involved with bats in my mid-30s when I went on a bat walk in Chorley. It wasn't long before I was fully immersed in the world of bats, doing lots of things but bat care is a great love of mine.*

*Being involved doesn't just help the bats either. It provides the person who seeks help for a bat a positive experience and hopefully the good word of bats and their conservation will be spread among family and friends.*

*I love having the chance to interact with bats on a close level. I love observing behaviour and noticing things that others maybe haven't. There are many good reasons for taking in grounded bats, but it does really need to be kept in perspective in terms of time and resources required.*

*It's lovely to watch a bat that you've cared for fly away for its second chance without looking back, at the end of the day that's the only really good reason to do it!"*

This bat came from a garden centre shop. He was thought to have been stuck on flypaper, managed to free himself and then fell onto some dust (left picture).

Gail Armstrong, a highly experienced bat carer on the BCT Bat Care Network, gave the bat an oil massage followed by a warm bath. The glue started to dissolve and the bat was kept in a heated propagator.



© Gail Armstrong

*Pipistrelle before and after removal of sticky substance*

**Michelle Young, Evesham Bat Care**

*"It is an utter cliché but bat care is like a rollercoaster. After releasing a bat back into its natural environment following your help you can feel on top of the world. But it can be tough when one doesn't make it or is suffering severe injuries and a hard decision has to be made.*

*Pipistrelle in care eating a meal worm*



© Evesham Bat Care

This bat was successfully rehabilitated and released about a month later.

*Whether you've cared for one for a few hours, or a few days, releases are always hugely rewarding. It may depend on a bit of luck with the weather for when you release, but contrast that with the grin on a bat finder's face when they watch 'their' bat fly around their garden and disappear after ringing you frantically about it a couple of days before. That is priceless!"*

Plenty of water was also given. For about three days, his coat was very greasy but the stickiness had all gone so it was left for him to groom himself. The right hand picture is eight days later when he was eating well and ready for release.

### **Tina Wiffen, Northumberland Bat Group**

*"Bat care is one of the most rewarding, difficult, time consuming and fulfilling things I have done.*

*I have been a bat carer for over twenty years and still get a huge amount of pleasure from returning a downed bat to the wild, especially when the finders are present and can see the bat they found being released. I truly believe that one of the real benefits of bat care is that by working with people we can be ambassadors for bats, showing them that these amazing animals are worthy of help and that someone cares enough to spend time feeding and rehabilitating individual bats. I also take in and raise baby bats, something that takes a great deal of time and patience. Rather than just caring for the pups, I feel the real benefit is working with and supporting the owners of the maternity roosts, demonstrating to them that bats are important. By developing positive relationships we can work with roost owners to safeguard roosts in the long term.*

*Bat care can seem to be focused on individual bats, but in reality it helps protect whole colonies through dedication, enthusiasm and education."*

### **Anna Devonald, Pembrokeshire Bat Care**

*"I got involved in bat care because I am an animal lover and upon research found there are many species of wildlife who have rescue centres available to them where they can undergo rehabilitation, but there was not anywhere specifically dedicated to bats in the remote locality of Pembrokeshire.*

*Caring takes a lot of time and dedication, with feeding sometimes being required at obscure hours of the day, so when the bat finally reaches the stage where it can be released, knowing that it has only been made possible because I have been committed is greatly rewarding.*

*Unfortunately, bats still seem to have a stigma attached to them and I have found that the majority of people who ring asking for a bat to be*

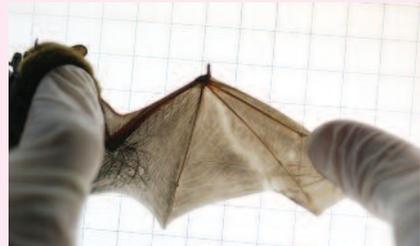
*rescued results in great positivity as by the time I reach them, they have become curious with an abundance of questions to ask about the bat. One lady even admitted that after finding out what wonderful mammals they actually are, she was now envious as her neighbours had bats roosting in their roof and she didn't!*

*Working full time at a veterinary surgery and studying towards an Animal Science Degree as well as family commitments takes up much of my day. As a volunteer, I need to organise my time effectively although the situations arising are unforeseen and often mean coming home from work just to go straight back out again to collect an injured bat! Bat care also involves making difficult decisions such as euthanasia and deciding when it is necessary can be stressful."*

*Wing tear 9th May*



*Wing tear healing 14th September*



Photographs to demonstrate the healing capabilities of a bat's wing membrane. These two photographs are of the same bat, four months apart.

## Further reading

Background information about bat care [www.bats.org.uk/batcare](http://www.bats.org.uk/batcare)

Miller, H. (ed.) (2016) Bat Care Guidelines (2nd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London

Brown, M. & Brown, B. (2010). Bat rescue manual. West Yorkshire Bat Hospital.

RSPCA. (2007). Animal Welfare Act 2006 – guidance for wildlife rehabilitators. RSPCA.

## Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations (SNCOs)

### Natural England

4th Floor, Foss House

Kings Pool

1–2 Peasholme Green

York YO1 7PX

0300 060 3900

[www.gov.uk/government](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

[/organisations/natural-](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

[england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

### Natural Resources

Wales

Tŷ Cambria,

29 Newport Road

Cardiff CF24 0TP

0300 065 3000

[www.naturalresources.](http://www.naturalresources.wales)

[wales](http://www.naturalresources.wales)

### Northern Ireland

Environment Agency

Biodiversity Unit,

Klondyke Building

Cromac Avenue

Gasworks Business Park

Lower Ormeau Road

Belfast BT7 2JA

028 90395264

[www.doeni.gov.uk](http://www.doeni.gov.uk)

### Scottish Natural

Heritage

Great Glen House

Leachkin Road

Inverness IV3 8NW

01463 725000

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

## Out of Hours Helpline

Wanting to help bats get the assistance they need, but perhaps feeling that bat rehabilitation is not an option for you (or even in addition to it)? Please also consider volunteering for BCT's Out of Hours (OOH) Helpline.

**Between May and September**, when bats are most active, BCT runs the OOH helpline, where volunteers answer emergency calls from the public in the evenings and over the weekends. The majority of these calls involve grounded or injured bats and training is provided before the season begins, as well as full support from BCT staff throughout the season.

The OOH helpline can sometimes be challenging but hugely rewarding when you've helped those who've found an injured bat hopefully get a second chance. The project has been running successfully since 2004 and in 2015, 2824 calls were taken through OOH, the highest ever on record! It would not be possible to run this service without volunteers and their help is hugely appreciated.

To register your interest, please contact BCT through the Helpline, 0345 1300 228 or by emailing [enquiries@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bats.org.uk).

## Other ways to help

Just £3 will cover the cost of a call to the National Bat Helpline, enabling us to continue to help those who find grounded/injured bats. You can simply text BATS01 £(1,2,3,4,5 or 10) to 70070 from your mobile phone to help.

Alternatively, you could become a member of BCT today and help us to ensure these amazing mammals are protected for future generations to enjoy. You can join online or contact us on the details below. Your support can certainly make a difference!

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

Compiled by  
David Jackson  
September 2016



Brown long-eared bat

© Peter Cromie, edited BCT