

Bat Conservation Trust

# Amazing Bats

An introduction to the bats of Britain & Ireland



Bats are unique mysterious creatures glimpsed at dusk darting through the night sky as they hunt for insects.




Find out the truth behind the myths




Bats are hibernating to conserve energy in the colder months when insects are hard to find.

Bats start emerging as the weather gets warmer.



Bats are hungry and active, feeding most nights.



Female bats are forming maternity roosts.

January – February

March

April

May

## What are bats?

Bats are mammals. Like all other mammals, including ourselves and many of our pets, they have hair or fur on their bodies and are warm-blooded. A baby bat feeds on its mother's milk for at least a few weeks after it is born.

Bats are the only mammals that can fly. A bat's wing has very similar bones to the hand and arm of a human, with skin stretched between the very long finger bones and the body to form the wing membrane.

## How many different sorts of bats are there in Britain?

There are 18 species of bats living in the UK (17 of which are known to breed here). Some of our bat species are very rare, it is thought there is just one greater mouse-eared left in England (pictured left). An individual male is recorded regularly, but there have not been any others recorded for some time.



In 2010 a new bat species was discovered living in the UK, *Alcthoes* was so similar to other bats it had been undetected until it was identified as a separate species by analysing its DNA.

Our smallest bat is the pipistrelle weighing between 4-7g, with a wing span of 18-25cm and our largest bat is the noctule which can weigh up to 40g with a wingspan of between 33-45cm.

Mothers give birth to a single young, which will start flying at 3 weeks old.

Mating occurs in autumn and bats can be seen swarming outside roosts.

Bats become torpid (sluggish and cold) as they drop their body temperature and begin hibernation.



June – July

August – September – October November – December

## What do bats eat?

Worldwide some bats eat insects, fruit or nectar. Three species found in Central and South America even feed on blood but all UK bats eat insects. Each species has its favourites including midges, moths and beetles, hunting them in their own special way. Most prey are caught and eaten in mid-air, though sometimes bats hang up to eat larger insects or spiders.

All bats have very big appetites, because flying uses up lots of energy. A common pipistrelle can eat over 3,000 tiny insects in a single night! You can help to provide food for bats by planting a wildlife-friendly garden – call the Bat Helpline for a free copy of our 'Encouraging bats' booklet, which gives advice and information on attracting bats to your garden.

## Where do bats live?

Bats do not make nests, but choose various places throughout the year to roost often with other bats. Some prefer hollow trees, others caves, some use both at different times. Many shelter in buildings, behind hanging tiles and boarding, or in roof spaces. Bats are clean and sociable animals and spend many hours grooming themselves.

Bats are often found roosting in houses, both modern and old. You may realise that you have bats roosting in your house during the summer months, when they are most likely to be active. If you do think you have bats, call the Bat Helpline and ask for a copy of our free 'Living with bats' booklet, which gives advice and information for roost owners.

## How do bats catch their prey in the dark?

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 – locating things by their echoes. Most of these calls are too high-pitched for humans to hear, but they can be heard with a special instrument called a bat detector.



## Why do bats need our help?

Sadly our UK bat populations have declined dramatically during the past century. Many of the roosting sites and feeding grounds that they need have been destroyed to make way for buildings and roads, or other changes in land use. Pesticides have not only killed many of their insect prey, but also some of the bats themselves.

Now all British bats and their roosts are protected by law. It is illegal to harm or disturb bats, or deliberately alter their roost sites without first seeking advice – call our **Bat Helpline (0845 1300 228)** for more information. Bats need everyone's help and protection.

## How you can help bats

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) wants a future where everyone, everywhere can enjoy seeing and hearing bats as part of their natural environment.

Your help can make a difference! 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. We can also provide details of your nearest local bat group.

**Bat Conservation Trust**



**15 Cloisters House,  
8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG**

**Bat Helpline: 0845 1300 228**

**Email: [members@bats.org.uk](mailto:members@bats.org.uk) [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)**

Produced with the support of



Photos courtesy of Hugh Clark, Hazel Ryan, Surrey Bat Group, Daniel Hargreaves, Gareth Jones and Roger Jones. The Bat Conservation Trust is a registered charity, number England and Wales 1012361, Scotland SC040116. Company limited by guarantee number 2712823.