



# Bats and Buildings

Specialist Support Series

**Bats use buildings increasingly for roosting, as natural roosting places in tree holes and caves become more scarce or disturbed. All buildings, in particular the walls, eaves and roofs, are potential roost sites. Anyone working regularly in these areas, such as surveyors, architects, plumbers, roofers, pest technicians, double glazing installators and insulators, should be aware of signs to look for.**

The information provided here is believed to be correct. However, no responsibility can be accepted by the Bat Conservation Trust or any of its partners or officers for any consequence of errors or omissions, nor any responsibility for loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of this information and no claims for compensation for damage or negligence will be accepted.

## Bats and the law

All bats and their roosts are protected in the UK by law. Recent changes to legislation and devolution mean that there are differences between countries and it is difficult to summarise the legislation succinctly for the UK. Protection for bats and their roosts relies mostly on the conservation (Natural Habitats, Etc.) Regulations 1994 as amended (better known as the Habitats Regulations) in each country.

You should refer to your country's relevant legislation for the precise wording, however in summary **it is an offence to\***:

- **Deliberately (or recklessly in Scotland) capture, injure or kill a bat.**
- **Deliberately (or recklessly in Scotland) disturb a bat in a way that would (significantly in England Wales and Scotland) affect their local distribution or abundance, or affect their ability to survive, breed or rear young.**
- **Damage or destroy a roost (this is an absolute offence)**

In addition, In Northern Ireland it is an offence to:

- Deliberately disturb a bat at a roost
- Deliberately obstruct access to a roost

In Scotland it is an offence to:

- Deliberately or recklessly harass a bat, or disturb a bat at a roost
- Deliberately or recklessly obstruct access to a roost

In England and Wales it is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to:

- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat at a roost
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a roost

Under the law, a roost is any structure or place used by bats for shelter or protection. Because bats tend to re-use the same roosts year after year, **the roost is protected whether or not bats are present.** In this context 'damage' could include

such operations as treatment with chemicals found in wood preservatives.

A person who needs to carry out actions that would result in an offence being committed should apply for a derogation licence from the relevant government department (Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Government, or Northern Ireland Environment Agency). They have powers to grant Habitats Regulations derogation licences in certain circumstances, for certain reasons and with certain terms and conditions attached, so that the licence holder remains within the law.

A derogation licence would be required for work which will affect bats and/or roosts such as building or maintenance works in a house or other building or structure e.g bridges, any demolition, barn conversions, works to churches etc. Licence applications should be made in plenty of time, and the use of a suitable qualified bat consultant to complete timely surveys and to provide assistance with the licence application can help to avoid further delays.

\* Other offences exist relating to possessing, control, transport, selling and exchange but are not listed here.

## Where do bats roost in buildings?

Different species of bat prefer different places; some creep into tiny spaces, cracks and crevices. Only occasionally do they hang free or are easily visible.

Outside they may roost:

- under weather boarding or hanging tiles
- above soffits and behind fascia and barge boarding
- between window frame and wall brickwork
- in gaps behind cladding tiles or wood
- between underfelt and boards or tiles
- inside cavity walls

Inside roof spaces they may roost:

- along the ridge beam
- around the gable end
- around the chimney breast

## Looking for the evidence

**Bats do not make nests or cause structural damage.**

**The most obvious sign of their presence is droppings.**

- Bat droppings consist largely of insect remains and crumble easily between your fingers to a powder of semi-shiny fragments.
- Rodent droppings are smooth and plastic, quickly becoming hard. They cannot be crumbled.
- Bat droppings do not present any known health hazards.
- Droppings may not always be readily visible in a loft.
- Large accumulations may reflect use over a number of years rather than large numbers of bats at any one time.

**Bat droppings are frequently mistaken for mouse droppings, so do the 'crumble test'.**

## When do bats use buildings?

Bats use buildings at any time, but are most often found in houses between April and September.

- Mother bats have only one baby a year, suckling it for several weeks. The mothers gather in maternity roosts to have their babies in summer, and this is the time they are most likely to be seen using buildings.
- The bats move away when the young can fly and feed themselves, and have usually left by September.
- Immature individuals, adult males and non-breeding females will occupy a variety of roosts, individually or in small groups, at any time of year.
- Disturbance or the use of chemicals at maternity roosts in houses can have a major impact on bat populations gathered from a wide area.
- Bats do roost in houses in winter, usually individually, but are difficult to see.

## Which bats use buildings?

All our UK species have been recorded in houses, but some very rarely. Pipistrelles and long-eared bats are the species most usually found.



### Pipistrelle bats

There are three different species of pipistrelle: the common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and the rarer Nathusius' pipistrelle. They sometimes use houses as maternity roosts, choosing confined spaces. These are usually on the outside

of buildings, such as under soffits or behind barge boards or hanging tiles, where the bats can rarely be seen.



### Brown long-eared bat

This species mostly prefers older houses with large roof spaces. Small clusters may be seen at junctions of roof timbers or under the ridge. It is the bat most frequently seen inside lofts, and small numbers may stay longer than other species.

## Pest control in a bat roost

The control of pests such as wasps, bees, hornets, cluster flies and rodents may unintentionally affect bats or their roosts, so care should be taken when controlling pests in an area where bats are, or are known to have been, present.

- Rodenticides should not be placed in an open tray below roosting bats.
- Insecticides recommended as safer for use near mammals are based on boron, permethrin or cypermethrin. Obtain details from SNCOs.
- Ask for advice too on the range of fungicides which may be used in sites used by bats.
- Sticky traps should not be used in bat roosts.

**Advice should be sought from your SNCO before any action is taken in order to keep within the law.**

## SNCOs (Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations)

### Natural England (formerly English Nature)

Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA

Telephone 01733 455000

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

### Countryside Council for Wales

Maes Y Fynnon, Penrhosgarnedd, Bagnor, Gwynedd LL57 2ND

Telephone 01248 385500

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

### Scottish Natural Heritage

Great Glen House, Leachkin Road, Inverness, IV3 8NW

Telephone 01463 725000

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

### Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)

Klondyke Building, Cromac Avenue, Gasworks Business Park, Belfast BT7 2JA

Telephone 02890 569 605

[www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)

**When a Habitats Regulations licence is required, you need to contact your relevant authority. Your SNCO will be able to advise you of its address.**

## The Bat Conservation Trust

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The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) is the only national organisation solely devoted to the conservation of bats and their habitats in the UK.

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