



Bats and trees in England

Specialist Support Series

Some bat species rely exclusively on trees for roost sites, while others use them for part of the year. This leaflet outlines the legislation which must be taken into account when working on trees.

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Obligations relating to bats

Foresters and tree surgeons must be aware of the following regulations as they apply to works undertaken on trees.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981

The Act applies in England, Scotland and Wales, and provides protection for all bats and their roosts. It requires consultation with the appropriate Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) before carrying out activities which might harm or disturb bats or their roost – regardless of whether the bat is in the roost at the time. Similar legislation applies in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

The CROW Act applies only to England and Wales, and importantly adds the word "reckless" to the offence of damaging or destroying a place a bat uses for shelter or rest, or disturbing a bat while using a roost. This has implications for all those involved in the management of trees, because now that bats and roosts are protected from reckless (as well as intentional) destruction/disturbance, inspection of trees is necessary to ensure they are not/have not been used by bats.

Following the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992 there are now many Biodiversity Action Plans and Species Action Plans in place. These give guidance for wildlife and habitat management at a local level, and should be consulted before work is undertaken to ensure that work done is in line with what is trying to be achieved through the Action Plans.

EC Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, 1992

This sets down requirements for wildlife conservation in EU countries. All bats are found in Annex IV, which includes animal and plant species of Community interest in need of strict protection. Some bat species are also found in Annex II, which includes animal and plant species of Community interest whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation. The Directive is implemented in the UK through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994. Under the Directive, it is an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat, or to deliberately capture, kill or disturb a bat. In the UK, therefore, structural work that would disturb bats or their roosts need to be granted a Habitats Regulations Licence if they would contravene the Habitats Regulations.

Where bats are likely to be affected by works to trees, an application for a Licence should be made to the appropriate government department (Natural England, Welsh Assembly, Scottish Executive, Environment & Heritage Service N. Ireland). This application should be made well before the works are due to be undertaken to allow time for any necessary survey work.

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)

Within this global convention the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe (1991) establishes a mechanism for international collaboration to conserve bats and their habitats, including foraging habitats. The UK is one of the parties to the Agreement. The Agreement has its own reporting procedures to identify activities carried out to meet its agreed plan.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 (PPG 9) Nature Conservation

PPG 9 gives direction to local planning authorities and others in their decision-making with respect to land use and development. In PPG9, paragraph 47 states "the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a local planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat . . ." All bat species in the UK are protected.

Obligations relating to trees

Foresters and tree surgeons must be aware of bats when carrying out any work to trees.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997

This provides for the conservation of "important" hedgerows, including constituent trees, as defined in the Regulations. The presence of a protected species (bats) is relevant and included when assessing whether a hedgerow is important. Application to remove a hedge must be made to the local planning authority under the Hedgerow Regulations. A decision on whether the hedgerow is deemed "important" will be based on consultations by the local authority.

Forestry Commission Felling Permissions

Permission is normally required from the Forestry Commission (via a Felling Licence or approval under a Dedication Scheme) to fell growing trees (but not lopping/topping) except in the following cases:

- If less than 5 cubic metres of timber is felled in a calendar quarter on your property, and not more than 2 cubic metres are sold
- If the felling is part of a Plan approved by the Forestry Commission
- Felling of fruit trees or trees growing in a garden, orchard, churchyard or designated public space (e.g. under the Commons Act 1899)
- Felling of trees which, when measured at a height of 1.3m, have a diameter of 8cm or less, if thinnings have a diameter of 10cm or less, or if coppice or underwood have a diameter of 15cm or less
- Trees needing to be felled to implement development authorized by the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, or to enable work to be carried out by statutory undertakers
- If trees are dead or dangerous
- If trees have to be felled because of an Act of Parliament.

(If the wrong trees are felled and there is no valid FC permission, anyone involved can be prosecuted.) The FC does not make reference to bats in its permissions, so the forestry workers involved should be aware that bats/roosts may be present and make the necessary inspections, even if the FC has given its permission to fell trees.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

The law relating to TPOs is in Part VIII of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (amended by Section 23 of the Planning & Compensation Act 1991) and in the Town & Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999. For details see *Tree Preservation Orders, a guide to the law and good practice* (DETR, March 2000); chapter 6, paragraph 6.3 makes specific reference to bats.

A TPO is an order made by a local planning authority which in general makes it an offence to cut down, top, lop, uproot, wilfully damage or destroy a tree without the planning authority's permission. Anyone who has good reason to think that a tree should be preserved has a right to apply to their local authority for such an order – even if the tree is not on their property. However, the presence of a bat roost on its own is not a reason for a TPO to be placed on a tree though wildlife habitat may be taken into account, nor can a TPO be used to thwart the reasonable use or development of land.

The purpose of a TPO is to preserve trees for reasons of amenity and to enhance the appearance of the environment. However, these trees are often old and may have cracks, crevices and hollows that are used by bats, so inspection of trees for the presence of bats should always be undertaken by the tree surgeon and if necessary a bat expert prior to the works. There are some cases where the planning authority's permission is not needed to work on a protected tree – see DETR's *Protected Trees, a guide to tree preservation procedures* – although the planning authority should still be notified of any works. Trees within well-managed woodlands are unlikely to be granted TPOs.

Highways, Rights of Way and Public Services

Local and national authorities have to cut back branches or fell trees which obscure public rights of way, street lights or sight lines along highways. Trees can be removed or cut back by railway and airport authorities, land drainage authorities, and electricity, telephone and pipeline managers.

Conflicts of Interest

Protected species legislation can conflict with human health and safety legislation. Compromises are sometimes achievable, and there have been cases where branches have been propped up and tall stumps harbouring bat roosts guyed. If a roost has to be disturbed, your SNCO should be informed and its advice followed. If a tree/branch has to be cut, sometimes the section containing the bat roost can be strapped to a sound tree nearby; bat roosting boxes on nearby trees may also help – your SNCO will advise.

Land Development and Planning

In all cases, it is better to consider bat conservation as part of the planning process, rather than to try and save roosts when work has already been approved. Talking at an early stage to those involved can often save a bat roost, or at least minimize the damaging effect by influencing the management plans for woodlands and open space, planning policies in development plans, and early planning permissions of individual developments. Successful protection can often be achieved by education and reasoned argument, particularly in the early stages of any proposed change. Recourse to the courts to try to resolve problems is an expensive and often frustrating process, and should be used as a last resort.

Trees and Boundaries

House owners should also be aware of the legislation relating to bats and trees in their garden. Branches overhanging a neighbouring property can be legally cut by the neighbour, but s/he must also have regard to the protected species legislation above and take care not to injure the tree. (The cut tree parts should legally be returned to the tree's owner, but in practice it is best to discuss the need to cut neighbouring trees with the owner first.)

References

Bats and Trees, a guide to the management of trees

The Bat Conservation Trust

Tree Felling, getting permission

Forestry Commission 2000

Protected Trees, a guide to tree preservation procedures

DETR 1999 (from your LPA)

Tree Preservation Orders, a guide to the law and good practice

DETR 2000

PPG 9: Nature Conservation

DOE 1994 (details of cost from HMSO)

Trees and Bats, Guidance Notes 1

Arboriculture Association 1998 (details of cost from AA)

Contacts

Natural England

Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA

Tel: 0845 600 3078, www.naturalengland.org.uk

Forestry Commission (England)

Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge CB1 2DU

Tel: 01223 314 546, www.forestry.gov.uk

Arboricultural Association

Ampfield House, Ampfield, Romsey, SO51 9PA

Tel: 01794 368717 www.trees.org.uk

Tree Advice Trust

Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, GU10 4LH

Tel: 01420 22022, www.treehelp.info

Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Customer Contact Unit, Eastbury House, 30-34 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TL

Tel: 08459 33 55 77, www.defra.gov.uk

The Bat Conservation Trust

15 Cloisters House

8 Battersea Park Road

London SW8 4BG

Bat Helpline 0845 1300 228

www.bats.org.uk

email.enquiries@bats.org.uk

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

BCT runs training courses for arborists, please contact Kit Stoner for more details.

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