



Background to the BCT-Bat Group Relationship Approach

The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) was formed in 1990 to promote the conservation and study of bats, and to act as an umbrella organisation for the rapidly growing network of bat groups, providing support, resources, training and advice.

As BCT has evolved and developed, so too have local bat groups and bat conservation in general. Consequently, the relationship between the national and local organisations has changed, but this has not always been recognised. At times, this has resulted in a breakdown in communications and, in some instances, frayed working relationships.

In 2007, after seeking opinion from the bat world, BCT commissioned an independent review of its communications and relationships with bat volunteers and BCT members. This review was led by Action Planning (www.actionplanning.co.uk) and, to ensure the review was independent and representative, a steering group, made up of local volunteers and BCT staff, was set up to oversee Action Planning's work.

The consultation process ran through much of 2008, comprising one-on-one interviews, questionnaires, focus groups and a one-day workshop. During this process, it became clear that individuals and groups had different interpretations of the BCT-Bat Group relationship and what this meant in practice. There was also confusion regarding the term 'Affiliation'; some viewed term as symbolic of a close working relationship, whilst others aligned Affiliation more closely with insurance cover.

These differences demonstrated the need for a more clearly defined relationship between BCT and bat groups, with greater transparency regarding expectations. In response, the following new relationship categories were developed:

- Partner Group – in which BCT and the bat group sign a memorandum of understanding, known as a Partner Agreement, that defines expectations on both sides with regards to communication, joint-working and support; inherent to this category is a shared belief that, by working cooperatively, both parties can achieve more for bat conservation.
- Network Group – in which BCT and the bat group sign a memorandum of understanding, known as a Network Agreement, that focuses on communication through general information bulletins and good working practices, rather than expectations regarding support and close working relations.
- No Relationship Group – in which both BCT and the bat group agree to continue working independently with no agreed expectations.

The reason for discarding the term Affiliation was to move away from past confusions regarding the meaning of the term. This approach also permitted a middle tier for groups that would like to stay in contact with BCT and the national picture, but do not feel ready or able to commit to a closer Partner Agreement.

In addition to the new relationship categories, other outcomes of the review have included:

- New Regional Bat Conferences in England (see www.bats.org.uk/pages/events.html)
- A new format for the Bat Group Forum, renamed the Bat Worker Forum, to reflect the broadening of this event to a wider audience in recent years (see www.bats.org.uk/pages/events.html for the new terms of reference)
- Clarification of the different ways in which all bat volunteers and BCT members can have their views represented in BCT (see Representation in BCT at www.bats.org.uk/pages/resources_for_bat_groups.html.)

For further information about the BCT Review process and the outcomes mentioned above, please contact the Bat Group Officer, Laura Dunne at BCT, 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG. Or email ldunne@bats.org.uk.