

Bat Conservation Trust



2012 South East Bat Conference 24th November, University of Greenwich, Kent

Priorities in the South East

This session was chaired by Julia Hanmer, BCT's Chief Executive.

Julia introduced this session as an opportunity to:

- Share views on the current priorities for bat conservation in the South East
- Feedback ideas and thoughts on what BCT should be focusing its resources on
- Raise any issues or concerns

Julia highlighted this was not intended as a Q&A session. However, several BCT staff were on hand to respond, where appropriate (unless otherwise stated below the BCT response was made by Julia).

Discussion points included:

- Woodland Management
- Serotines
- Planning regulations
- Permitted development
- Local authority planners

Discussion notes

Woodland Management

Discussion points: There is an increased tendency for Wildlife Trusts to over-manage woodland and their aims are not always compatible with the needs of woodland bats, something which Stephanie Murphy's Research touched on. BCT need to do more to get the message out to woodland managers.

Many woodland managers, not just Wildlife Trusts, feel they have to do a lot to manage their woodlands, coppicing in particular and this was highlighted in the Bechstein's study when it was hard to find 'unmanaged' woodlands to survey.

BCT Response: Message from the Bats and Woodland Project is that mature woodland is important for a range of species, as well as opening up rides. BCT is part of a South West woodland initiative that is developing guidance for woodland owners and managers for a range of species including bats.

Additional comments from BCT's Woodland Officer Dan Merret: We are aware that there has been a growing focus on opening woods up for the benefit of biodiversity, often without the consideration of certain bat species or other taxa that may benefit from minimum intervention. Through its Bats and Woodland project however BCT now has a stronger voice in woodland policy than it has ever

had and is working with broad partnerships to develop overarching guidance for woodland owners and managers for a range of species including bats. We recognise the value of coppicing for certain taxa and that there will often be conflicts in woodland management priorities between different groups, but believe that ensuring bat interests are embedded in this multi-taxa approach will help to bring about more informed and balanced management which recognises minimum intervention as an appropriate approach. The Bechstein's bat study has helped to reinforce our stance on this as we have recent research papers.

Serotine

Discussion points: More work should be done looking at serotines. After the first regional conference there was an initiative but it failed to take off, is this something BCT would be interested in taking on? This is not just a South East issue, it should be a priority all over the country.

Response: Tony Hutson said that he took away the action but a clear action plan was never produced, however, he will work on one this winter.

Planning regulations

Discussion points: New planning regulations say all developments should be increasing biodiversity, therefore we should push all developments to include bat boxes.

English Nature [Natural England] once said consultants had more power to enforce and encourage roost enhancement than they do. However, although one delegate had recommended mitigation where a licence was not required in about 80 cases it had only been used in four.

The point was made that many architects, planners and developers don't know bats are protected, or don't know what the protection entails and how it relates to their work. Everyone agreed.

There was once a mitigation conference and it would be good to have this focus again looking at what works and what doesn't. Could the event be repeated?

BCT response: Roost enhancement is definitely one of BCT's priorities. [Note: BCT's Roost website at roost.bats.org.uk shares best practice in mitigation and a revised edition of the biodiversity and development publication is due out in 2013.]

Permitted development

Discussion points: An increasing number of developments don't require planning permission, how will roosts in these buildings be protected?

BCT response: Liat Wicks (BCT's Head of Biodiversity) said at the moment permitted development only applies to single storey extensions under a certain size on homes so there should not be too much impact at present and the roosts are still protected under the current legislation. BCT have responded to the recent permitted development consultation to ensure that bats are considered within permitted development, and will be keeping an eye out for the proposed permitted development changes to change of use for agricultural buildings as this could impact on bats more.

Local authority planners

Discussion points: Since there is a drive to try and increase urban biodiversity BCT, consultants and volunteers could use it as an opportunity to work with planners and architects to improve education.

Also an issue with lack of local authority ecologists and in cases where mitigation is included, is it relevant etc.?

BCT response: Liat said BCT are continuing to work on educating not just building professionals but the general public and trying to get the message across that bats need to be considered in any kind of development. She also pointed out that changes to permitted development are still in review and BCT are lobbying to have bat surveys included.

Post-conference discussion points (we ran out of time for continued discussion on the day so these points were raised afterwards):

Concerns regarding the lack of local authority ecologists and that LPA planners are often unaware of BCT's (and other) guidelines. It would be good if BCT could somehow reach out to the planners (not just through ALGE) to promote bat conservation. It is hard for us as consultants to make recommendations for adequate survey and mitigation to protect bats when planners don't see the relevance.

Educate Council Planners and make them undertake their obligations under the law. Architects don't send information in at the planning stage, knowingly!

BCT response: There are already tools and training materials on bat conservation available to planners and we continue to seek new ways to engage with them. There is the interactive bat protocol within the Biodiversity Planning Toolkit. This is available to planners, local authority ecologists and others at: <http://www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com/> and sets out the correct decision making process for LPAs when they are determining planning applications that involve bats.

We have a course aimed at planners that we run jointly with the Mammal Society (see: http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/planning_for_protected_species.html). We have also developed a new training course on bats in the planning process, targeted specifically at local authorities and planners. We are delivering a pilot course to Hackney Council in January. This course is also envisaged to be rolled out as a webinar to make it more accessible to local authorities and would enable larger numbers of people to participate in training more easily and at a lower cost.

Additionally, as part of our on-going GIS mapping work, BCT will be engaging with planners within local authorities to develop a planning alert layer with associated guidance.