



The identification of Bats and their habitat in the UK.

Introduction.

A recent survey of bridges in Yorkshire found that 25% were being used by bats (source - The Bat Conservation Trust). Other reports showing similar findings suggest that large numbers of tunnels and bridges, as well as old and derelict buildings are occupied by bats. Care needs to be taken when working in these areas as bats are easily disturbed and heavily protected by legislation.



Pipistrelle bat.

Bats in the UK

There are 16 species of bat in the UK of those 6 are endangered or rare and 6 others are vulnerable. The mouse-eared bat was declared extinct from Britain in 1991.

The most common bat in the UK today is the Pipistrelle. It is only 4 cm long and weighs about 5 grams - less than a 2p coin. The Brown Long Eared bat is probably the second most common species.

When Britain was largely tree-covered, bats roosted in holes in old trees and caves. Today, both these species are likely to be found in roofs and crevices of buildings, bridges and tunnels. Other species live in similar places but are regionally specific..

Bats may have different roosts for Summer and Winter, but they are creatures of habit and are likely to return to the same roosts year after year.



Brown long-eared bat.



Factors causing loss or decline.



Generally:

Insects are bats main prey and their abundance has declined due to high intensity farming practice and inappropriate riparian (river bank) management. The loss of wetlands and hedgerows means the loss of suitable bat habitats and flyways.

Related to the construction industry:

The loss of winter and some summer roosting sites occurs with the removal of buildings or trees. The disturbance and destruction of maternity roosts due to the use of toxic timber treatment chemicals.



Barbastelle bat.

Legislation.

Bats and their roosts are protected in Britain by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and The Conservation Regulations 1994. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 protects all bats and their roosts. This means it is illegal to:

"intentionally kill, injure or handle any bat. Intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, or disturb a bat while it is occupying a place."

The legislation is written so that an offender does not need to be aware of the roost to be committing an offence.

The Act does allow building maintenance or remedial operations to be carried out in places used by bats but the appropriate body (see contacts) **MUST** be notified & given time to advise on whether the operations should be carried out. It is advisable to contact your site environmental co-ordinator if bats are suspected to be on site.

Contacts

Site Environmental Co-ordinator or Environment Advisor.

Bat Conservation Trust (UK organisation devoted to the conservation of bats and their habitat), 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG (Tel 020 7627 2629) www.bats.org.uk email enquiries@bats.org.uk

English Nature - Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA (Tel - 01733455000)

Countryside Council for Wales, Plas Penrhos, Fford Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 5LQ (Tel - 01248 370444)

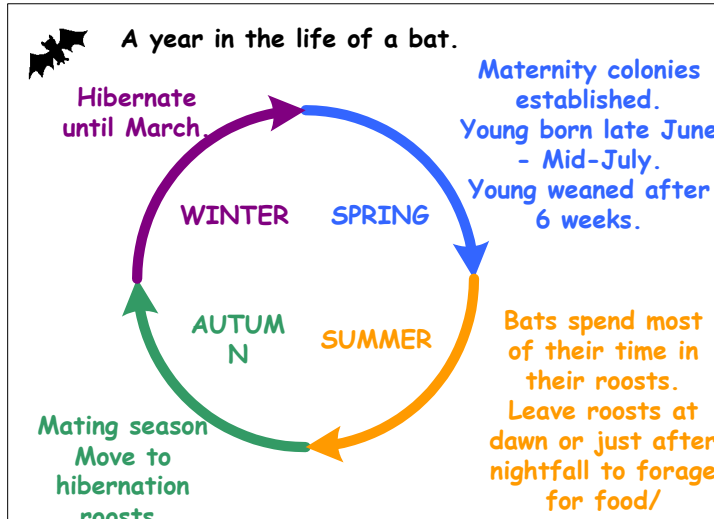
Scottish National Heritage, 12 Hope Terrace, Edinburgh, EH9 2AS (Tel - 0131 47774784)

Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), Environment Service, Commonwealth House, 35 Castle Street, Belfast, BT1 1GH.

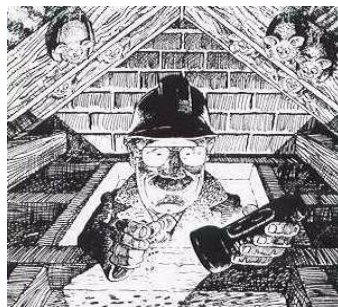




The identification of Bats and their habitat in the UK.

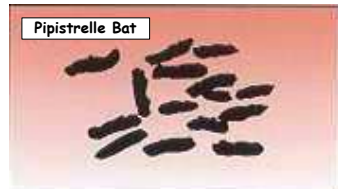


- #### Suggested search technique for bats
- 🦇 Ask the current or previous occupier whether they are aware that they have bats or if bats have ever been found in the building.
 - 🦇 Check for the presence of bats by listening for their 'chittering' noises in warm weather and by shining a light along the ridge beams and over brickwork. However it must be stressed that bats are rarely seen during the day - so even though you don't spot them they may still be there!
 - 🦇 Examine the floor for droppings, concentrating on the area beneath the ridge, the junction between two ridges, down hips and over bays, around chimneys and gables and all around the eaves.
 - 🦇 Churches and other large buildings will have the same principles but not necessarily just in the roof, bats will hide in any crevice. A good tip is to ask cleaners if they have noticed any droppings.



What do you look for?

Without the expertise of professionals droppings will be the main identification tool. Bat droppings are dark brown or black and vary between 4 and 8mm in length. They consist largely of fragments of insects so they will crumble easily to fine powder. Unlike rat or mouse droppings, which are pasty when fresh and become increasingly hard as they dry, and bird droppings which usually have white uric acid associated with them.



Pipistrelle Bat.

Remember
Prosecution will result in heavy fines if the legislation is not complied with, it is **YOUR RESPONSIBILITY** to find out if bats are present.

Early identification is crucial. This needs to be quickly followed by contacting the correct official body via your site Environmental Co-ordinator or Advisor.

Do not handle the bats, although they do not pose a health hazard to you, you may pose one to them as they are very delicate.



Brown Long Eared Bat