



# LIVING WITH... BATS



*Bechstein's bat*

**There are eighteen species of bat living in the UK (nearly a quarter of native mammal species) and all of them hibernate over the colder, winter months.**

Bats are the second largest group of mammals in the world, after rodents, and can be found throughout the world. Uniquely, the arms (forelimbs) and fingers of all bats are webbed to form wings which, unlike gliding animals (like flying squirrels) make bats the only mammals capable of true flight.

All British bats are insectivorous, meaning they only eat insects. Different species have their own preferences and ways of hunting, but many will feed on moths, mosquitoes, midges, beetles etc. Bats are unique in the way they catch these tiny insects, using a sound-based system called echolocation. By emitting very high frequency calls, bats are able to listen to echoes of those calls as they bounce back and use them to create an image of their surroundings.

Hibernation is often misunderstood. This energy-saving technique is crucial to the survival of bat species which live in temperate regions like the UK. Bats use hibernation to reduce their energy consumption during difficult, colder periods, when insect prey is limited.

Generally, British bats will enter hibernation around early October; emerging anytime from March to late April and into May. Timings are dependent on the species, weather, location and food supply and so will vary year on year. Bats do sometimes wake up during the hibernation season, especially when the temperature is warmer.

Following their emergence from hibernation, bats will start moving into temporary summer roosts (often trees and buildings), usually moving between several to find more food.

By May most bats are fully active and can be seen out foraging for food every night, although they may skip a night or two if there is heavy rain. Females will be busy establishing large nursery roosts, often of 100 - 200 individuals. A colony will sometimes have several different roosts in an area and will move from one to another

depending on conditions. The females commonly give birth during late June or July to just a single pup; not surprising when you consider the average bat pup can weigh a third of their mother's weight when born!

The last century has seen the numbers of many bat species drop significantly due to habitat loss, the removal of bat 'commuting routes' (often due to the building of new roads) and the destruction or disturbance of roosts due to building developments. Other factors include persecution, cat attacks, wind turbines, artificial lighting (particularly on streets) and the use of potentially harmful chemical treatments on building materials. Bats need to be helped; because they reproduce at such a slow rate, population recovery will be a long and difficult process.

## Are bats legally protected?

Yes, in England and Wales all bats are extensively protected, making it an offence (except under licence from Natural England or Natural Resources Wales) to:

- deliberately kill, injure, catch or disturb a bat
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat (even if the roost was unoccupied at the time)
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or obstruct access to any structure or place which a bat uses for shelter or protection
- possess, transport, advertise, sell, buy or exchange a bat (dead or alive), any part of a bat or anything derived from a bat

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## How do I encourage bats in my garden?

Bats can be encouraged in almost any garden, regardless of the size. There are a number of things you can do, but the most important is attracting food for bats, in the form of insects.

- **Insect-friendly flowers and plants:** As bats are nocturnal, night-scented flowers are a good idea, as are pale-petalled flowers which are more easily seen in the dark. Different types of plants attract different species of insect so selecting a range of flowers that vary in colour, scent and shape is ideal; particularly those with insect-friendly features (those with short florets which act like landing pads for insects).
- **Trees and shrubs:** Trees serve multiple functions as they provide both shelter and food for insects (particularly larvae and leaf-eating species), as well as potential roosting opportunities for bats. The creation of linear features, using hedges and treelines will also help bats to navigate.
- **Ponds/wet areas:** Ponds or marshy areas are havens for invertebrates, particularly insects like midges which are a main prey item for bats. These areas can also be lined with insect-attracting plants and will even provide a source of drinking water for bats.
- **Compost, leaf or log piles:** These are an ideal habitat for attracting insects like beetles, particularly when placed in a damp, shaded area.
- **Wild areas:** Leave wild, insect-friendly areas in your garden to encourage invertebrates.
- **Bat boxes:** These specially designed boxes provide bats with artificial roosts and come in many different forms. Whilst these can help bats in areas with few natural roosts, they require patience (it may be months or even years before they are used) and need to be put in the right place.

As well as actively encouraging bats, there are also a number of things to avoid when setting up your garden. Artificial light should be removed where possible, or otherwise reduced, and never point lighting at a box or known roost. Pesticides and potentially hazardous treatments should be avoided, as well as flypaper, which regularly traps and often kills bats. Garden netting put up to protect ponds and fruit should also be replaced with solid mesh, ensuring that wild animals do not become entangled.

## If I need to, how do I contain a bat?

**Never try to catch a flying bat with a towel, net or your hands - wait for it to land.**

It is important that you handle the bat as little as possible and **make sure you wear protective gloves**; bats can scratch or bite in self defence and a very small number of bats in the UK have been found to carry bat rabies. Remember, don't put yourself at risk.

Using a box (shoe box/ice cream box sized) with a secure lid and very small air holes:

- Place the box over the bat and carefully slide a piece of cardboard gently under box to make a floor.
- If this isn't possible, use protective gloves (or a cloth or tea-towel) to carefully pick up the bat and place in a box.
- Put an old cloth (e.g. tea-towel) in a corner of the box, loosely crumpled so the bat can crawl into it and hide. Put a very shallow container (e.g. plastic milk top) of water in another corner so the bat can drink.



*Pipistrelle bat - remember to always wear protective gloves if you need to handle a bat*

# LIVING WITH... BATS

Noctule bat



Whiskered bat - grounded

## What if I find a grounded bat, or a bat inside the living areas of my house?

If you find a bat in the inside the living areas of your house, it will either be **grounded** or **flying about**.

Once a bat is grounded it cannot take off again unless it climbs up a vertical structure - bats can't take off from the ground.

During the winter (November - March) **do not release the bat**, contain it using the advice on the previous page, and call one of the numbers at the end of this fact sheet.

Between April and October, if the bat **appears healthy** and **has been seen flying** before it became grounded:

- If found at **night**, you can attempt a release (see below). If the bat is flying around indoors; the first thing to do is keep activity in the room or building to a minimum to prevent it becoming more distressed. Open all windows wide, close any internal doors (to contain the bat) and remove any obstructions (inside and out). Finally, dim the lights; the bat will eventually navigate its way out of the room. Remember to check that the bat has left and isn't hiding in folds of curtains, behind radiators, furniture etc.
- During the **daytime** – contain it (see previous page) and wait for dusk to release (see below). Try to keep the bat at room temperature in a dark, quiet place. Remember to check on the bat every few hours and top up water if needed.

If the bat **appears hurt or injured**, **wasn't seen flying**, was **caught by a cat**, or if you're unable to help it into a container and/or release it; contain it (see previous page) and call one of the numbers at the end of this fact sheet.

## How do I release a bat?

At dusk, go outside and place the box on a safe, vertical open surface (i.e. a fence post or a rough wall) about 2 metres off the ground. Remove any water inside as well as the lid, before tilting the box on its side. Once done, move a short distance away and observe for 15-20 minutes. If after this time the bat has not attempted to fly off, or it has tried but has fallen on the ground, **treat it as sick or injured** and follow the guidance at the end of this fact sheet.

### Do not release a bat if:

- It is sick, injured or has not been seen flying
- It is a newborn or young juvenile bat (see next page)
- It was caught by a cat
- It could have come in from abroad (e.g. in a box or crate)
- It has bitten someone
- It was found during building works
- It is snowing, raining or very windy (or temperature at night is below 5°C)
- The date is between 1st November - 31st March

### What if someone is bitten or scratched by a bat?

Wash the affected area thoroughly but gently with soap and water before immediately contacting their GP for advice on treatment. Additionally, the local Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) Field Office will also need to be contacted.



# LIVING WITH... BATS

## I think bats are roosting in my house, what should I do?

Unless work needs to be done that may damage or disturb the roost, the best thing to do is leave the bats alone; unlike rodents, they aren't 'chewers' and won't gnaw cables and wires. Also, they don't bring anything with them like prey or bedding and do not build nests. Although bats will leave their droppings, they are dry, crumbly and easy to clean away, unlike mouse/rat droppings which are similar in appearance, but not dry or crumbly and more like putty.

**If you need to have work done** on a property with a bat roost, or you have a rodent or insect problem at the bat roost, you will need to make sure you are proceeding lawfully. You should therefore contact the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) [and](#) Natural England or Natural Resources Wales (as appropriate) for advice and guidance well in advance of the work starting.



*Hibernating Daubenton's bat*

## How can I tell if a bat is dead or just hibernating?

Hibernating bats in torpor are often mistaken for dead and this is likely to be the case if the bat is found between November and March.

If you find a bat you think might be either hibernating or dead, or it has been ringed; report it immediately to the BCT or RSPCA (see below).

## I think I have found a baby bat, what should I do?

If you have found a bat which is pink/hairless, no larger than a 50p coin and has its eyes closed, you have found a bat pup. Juveniles will have open eyes, be a little larger and have short, velvety-grey fur. It is very important that bat pups and young juveniles receive specialist care as soon as possible, so please contact either the BCT or the RSPCA (see below) as quickly as possible for assistance.



*'Baby' Pipistrelle bat*

**To report an injured,  
sick or orphaned bat,  
contact the BCT  
National Bat Helpline  
on  
**0345 1300 228****

*You can find details of the BCT helpline's  
opening hours on their website:*

<https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/national-bat-helpline>

**If outside the Bat Helpline open  
hours, please ring the  
RSPCA's cruelty  
and advice line on  
**0300 1234 999****