

**Brighton & Hove City Council
Arboricultural Information Note No. 3**

Bats and Trees



Bechstein's bat

Bats are colonial animals roosting naturally in trees and caves. With the reduction of their natural roosts many bats have adapted to the use of buildings where they experience new problems. The restoration of old buildings, combined with the use of chemical remedial treatments and the general intolerance of humans to their presence, continues to threaten the existence of many bats.

Some species of bats do rely exclusively on trees for roost sites, while others utilise trees for only part of each year. The availability of defects in trees, such as cavities and cracks, may have a significant influence on the number of species choosing such locations. However, all UK bat species feed on insects associated with trees. Oak, Ash, Beech and Scots Pine are particularly attractive to bats for roosting. Hedgerows and lines of trees are also used for navigation at night and the loss of such features can cause bats to abandon the current roosts.

Bats use such sheltered places for much of their life activities - including giving birth to and raising their young - and such conditions are usually associated with mature or over-mature trees - another area of conflict. With health and safety legislation in place to protect people and property, tree management practices have tended to result in the felling of trees containing cavities or the removal of large fractured or dead limbs. However, with managed pruning, backed by regular safety inspections, it is now possible to delay the felling of trees in some locations and to prolong the usefulness of the defects for the benefit of the local bat population. In woodland the opportunities for such measures are greater, especially away from public areas and rides.

Sympathetic woodland management should include: the retention of trees already used by bats and as many of the trees adjacent for reasons already mentioned; the retention of dead or dying trees where public safety is not compromised; and the specific management of 'veteran' trees to provide roosting sites. When re-planting is to be considered, include locally native tree species to encourage insect diversity and include rides, glades and open areas as sheltered feeding sites.

Bat presence should also be considered as part of woodland or arboricultural management surveys by considering the long-term management of any trees colonised by bats. Where the need for pruning works is unavoidable, select the minimum operations necessary to meet requirements and assess if it is safe to compromise on felling to allow a tree to remain for roosting purposes. Where practicable, make final cuts as far as possible above a defect that may support bats. If cracks are present these may be open due to the weight of limbs and might close if this weight is reduced by removal. Search large splits specifically for bat presence and if necessary use a wooden wedge to retain the crack in an open position. Any ivy-clad trees felled should be left for 24 hours before removing limbs or ivy growth.

The actual importance of trees to bat survival is variable and linked to species, foraging behaviour and even season. For Noctule, Barbastelle and Bechstein's bats, the availability of a suitable range of roost sites in trees is crucial to their survival. Daubenton's and Natterer's bats are more reliant on trees in summer, while Long-eared and Pipistrelle bats have their major dependency in winter.

Bats may show little or no obvious signs of their presence and detailed examination of any tree prior to works being started is important to protect both the bats from harm and the person carrying out works from falling foul of the law.

All bats are currently protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and Schedule 2 of the Conservation Regulations 1994. The Act and Regulations include provisions that make it illegal to:

- ◆ intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture bats;
- ◆ deliberately disturb bats, whether in a roost or not;
- ◆ damage, destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts.

The legislation interprets a bat roost as 'any structure or place which is used for shelter or protection' and applies at all times whether bats are present or not. Any proposed works considered likely to destroy or disturb bats or their roosts must be advised to the appropriate Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) and a reasonable period allowed for their decision on whether works can proceed and what methods should be adopted, prior to works proceeding.

The United Kingdom is also party to The Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe and is obliged to identify and protect from disturbance or damage all sites important to bats, including feeding areas.

In all cases where bats are found, please inform The Bat Conservation Trust or local bat group.

Useful addresses:

The Bat Conservation Trust
15 Cloisters House
8 Battersea Park Road
London
SW8 4BG

Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations
English Nature
Northminster House
Peterborough
PE1 1UA

Sheila Wright
Secretary
The Sussex Bat Group
5 Penlands Vale
Steyning
West Sussex
BN44 3PL