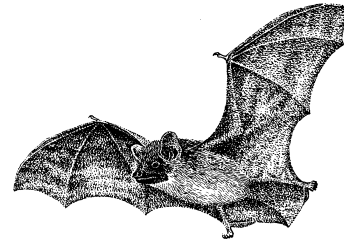


CHURCHYARDS AND BATS

Churches and churchyards play an important role in helping to protect our native bats. Of the 17 native species of bats, eight species are known to use churches for roosting including some of the less common species such as greater and lesser horseshoe bats, Natterer's bat, and the serotine bat. Some of the other 9 species may be found roosting in mature trees in the churchyard. The great age of many churches and churchyards means that there is a long association with bats, which becomes of increasing importance in the rapidly changing landscape surrounding them.



Bats have been found to fly quite large distances from their roosts to favourite foraging areas, and even if there are no roosts in the church, bats may still visit a churchyard to feed.

What Attracts Bats To Churchyards?

Roost sites ...

Church buildings provide good roost sites for bats, but not in the belfry!! They prefer clean, draught free, quiet crevices where the temperature is constant and are found in a variety of areas especially around the eaves, corners of naves and aisles, in the porch, under roof tiles, in old timber joints, in voids in ceilings behind hangings or commemorative plaques, in the tower staircase. Roosts may be present in trees around a churchyard. They would favour holes in rotten tree trunks, cracks under bark and crevices in smaller dead branches. They may also be found behind dense ivy clusters on tree trunks.

It is possible that bats would also use crevices in larger stone structures such as chest tombs or mausoleums as a roost site, as well as other churchyard structures including lych gates and sheds.

Their presence may be given away by a pile or scattering of small droppings which on first appearance look like mouse droppings, but, as they are made up of insect remains, turn to dust when crumbled. The size and shape of droppings can give an experienced bat worker a clue as to which species is present! Urine stains may also be seen near favourite roost sites. However, there may be no visible evidence at all of the presence of an important bat roost.

....and food!

Churchyards tend to be relatively free of chemicals and many are not tidied as intensively as gardens, and so support large populations of insects. Few people frequent churchyards after dark and therefore they are undisturbed and usually unlit.

After a good meal bats will hang up to digest their food in porches, in the church or in trees – a night roost site.

How To Improve A Churchyard For Bats

Provide and protect roosting sites

All bats and bat roost roosts, even if a bat is not present, are protected by the Conservation (Natural Habitats Regulations) under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended 2007. In summary it is an offence to deliberately kill, injure, disturb or capture a bat, or damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used by bats for shelter or protection. (See contacts for full details)

- Protect bat roosts in the church buildings and seek advice before planning any repair or restoration including lighting work on the church or other structures in the churchyard.
- Protect bat roosts in trees. It may be necessary to carry out tree surgery work on churchyard trees, especially ones with dead areas or branches. These must be assessed for the presence of bats and roosts by an experienced person before any work is carried out.
- Create new bat roosts: Although bats do not take readily to bat boxes they can be used if there is a shortage of other crevices in the area.
- Wooden boxes can be used, but specially designed woodcrete boxes (Schwegler) seem to be preferred by bats.

Attract more night flying insects

Trees and Shrubs: Mature broadleaved trees such as oak are good for insects and if there is room, can be planted around the boundary to create future veteran trees. Honeysuckle growing up a tree attracts moths and a variety of lower shrubs provide shelter for the churchyard and insect food.

Hedges: mixed native species hedges which are either left unmanaged or trimmed to at least 2 m, in rotation

every 2-3 years are preferred as natural flowering and fruiting will attract insects, (and provide good bird habitat).

Wildflowers and grassland: an area of meadow in a churchyard, where the grass is left to grow longer for part of the year, and wildflowers can set seed is important for butterflies, moths and other insects which provide food for bats.

If the grassland is managed by livestock grazing, the dung insects will add to the attraction.

If this is not possible, leaving a strip of longer grassland around the boundary of the churchyard, adjacent to a hedge or wall, or around a shrubbery will be beneficial for insects.

How To Watch Bats

Bat watching is a very sociable activity, and it is useful to invite the local bat group to come along and help, as they will bring their bat detectors, which convert the bat calls into audible sound, and will be able to identify many of the species from their calls.

A bat watch starts at sunset from May until September, with maximum activity in the months of June and July. For watchers and bats alike, the weather should be dry, warm (over 10°C) and still. Watchers are positioned comfortably around the church, and then sit with their eyes on the building or trees watching for bats to emerge from their roosts and begin to feed. A record should be kept of where they emerge from and the time of emergence.

For insomniacs another good time to find out exactly where bats roost is to arrive at the churchyard at around an hour before sunrise. Bats will fly around their roost entrances a few times before disappearing.

All records should be sent in to the Local Biological Records Centre.

What To Do If You Find A Bat

It is against the law to catch bats unless licensed to do so, or to prevent immediate harm to them. Baby or injured bats are sometimes found on the ground. Always wear gloves or put a soft cloth over them before picking them up, and put them in a shoe box size ventilated box with crumpled cloth and a very shallow container (jam jar lid) of water in one corner, and keep the bat in a quiet, dark, cool place until dusk.

Call Batline for advice; a local bat rehabilitator may be able to come and help. If not, at dusk put the box on its side for the bat to crawl out, near where it was found, but raised at least five feet from the ground away from predators and leave open to see if the bat

flies away on its own. If it does not leave or if you think the bat is injured, contact the local bat group or Batline for advice.

Further Information:

Batline 0845 1300 228
Bat Conservation Trust 15 Cloisters House, 8
Battersea Park Road,
London SW8 4BG 02076272629
enquiries@bats.org.uk www.bats.org.uk
Main UK source of information about bats.

Natural England 0845 6003078 Information Notes:
Bats European Protected Species SIN 010
Bats in Churches: a management guide TIN043
Downloadable free from
www.naturalengland.communisis.com/NaturalEnglan
dShop

Countryside Council for Wales 0845 1306 229
www.ccw.gov.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage 01463 725000
enquiries@snh.gov.uk
www.snh.org.uk

Environment @ Heritage Service (Northern Ireland)
0845 302 0008 www.ehsi.gov.uk

