

3. Bats in the Belfry



This sheet gives information about bats and guidelines on how to manage a burial site to benefit bats.

Bats have been found in churchyards and burial grounds for a very long time, often roosting in churches and other buildings. A bat roost may be nearly as old as the building with around 60% of pre-16th century churches containing bat roosts. There are seventeen species of bat native to the UK; eight of these use churches or chapels for roosting, including some of the less common species such as the Natterer's bat and the serotine bat. Some of the remaining nine species roost in large trees such as yew.

WHAT ATTRACTS BATS TO BURIAL SITES?

Roost sites

Bats do not roost in the belfry ... too much noise!

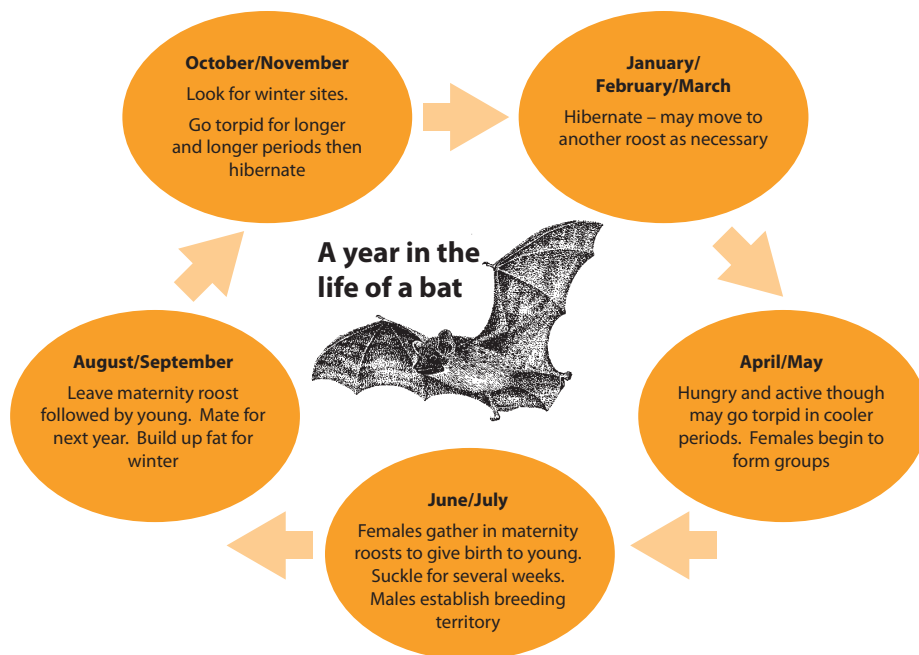
Bats usually use different roosts through the seasons.

Bats need nursery roosts for the young, winter roosts to hibernate and also temporary roosts to digest their food and to sleep in during the daytime. Bats roost in clean, draught free, quiet crevices where the temperature is constant. Within churches or chapels bats are found in the eaves, porch, under roof tiles, in old timber joints, behind ceilings, hangings and commemorative plaques. They also roost within chest tombs, in holes or cracks within a wall, behind ivy or in lychgates. When roosting in trees they use holes, crevices, flaking bark and gaps behind ivy. Old and veteran trees are full of possible bat roosting places.

Their presence may be given away by a pile or scattering of small, dry droppings, which are made up of insect remains and crumble to dust. The size and shape of the droppings can give a clue as to which species is present. Urine stains may be seen near favourite roost sites.

Food

Burial grounds tend to have a mixture of large trees, grassland, flowers, areas of long or tussocky grass, compost heaps, log piles and stonework. They are generally relatively free of chemicals, tend to be less



tidy than gardens and may have been there a long time. All of this leads to a good population of insects. Flying uses up a lot of energy so a site rich in insects is crucial for bats.

Bats can fly long distances to forage for food so, even if you don't have roosting bats in your burial ground, they may well be visiting.

Staying within the law

All bats and bat roosts are protected by law:

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.

Protect bat roosts in buildings and seek advice before planning repairs, restoration or changes to the outside lighting in a burial ground.

As bats use different roosts during the year timing of work is important.

Protect bat roosts in trees. Before carrying out surgery on large trees, ask a qualified bat worker to assess for the presence of bats or roosts.

You need to ask for help and advice from the statutory conservation agencies or your local council before carrying out any building or tree management work where there are likely to be bats roosting.

3. Bats in the Belfry

What to do if you find a bat

If you disturb a bat when hibernating or find a young bat on the ground then call the [Bat Conservation Trust](#) for advice. If the bat cannot be left (a young bat on the ground for example) then pick it up wearing thick gloves or other protection and put it in a box with ventilation holes (shoe-box sized is good). Put a crumpled cloth for sheltering in and a very shallow container (jam-jar lid) of water in one corner. Leave in a quiet, dark cool place until dusk. At dusk put the box on its side in a place which is about 1.5m off the ground and near to where you found it, so that the bat can crawl out. Bats can bite so be careful.

Creating roosts and encouraging insects

- Put up bat boxes. Make your own wooden ones or buy specially designed woodcrete ones (made by Schwegler).
- Hedges of mixed native species which are at least 2m high are good for bats, particularly if they are not trimmed every year.
- Wildflowers and grassland managed as long or tussocky grass is important for butterflies, moths and other insects, which bats feed on.



How to watch bats

You can see bats by visiting a site at dusk or an hour before dawn and sitting quietly.

Bat watching can become a special event. Invite the local bat group to help; they may bring bat detectors, which convert the bat calls into audible sound. The species of bat can then be identified by its call.

A bat watch starts at sunset from May until September and for watchers and bats alike the weather should be dry, warm and still. Bats will start to emerge from their roosts in the dusk, continuing to do so once it is dark. Try to work out where the bats are emerging from and, if you get a clear sight of them emerging, how many.

Useful contacts

Bat Conservation Trust, www.bats.org.uk

Church of England, ChurchCare, www.churchcare.co.uk

Church in Wales, www.churchinwales.org.uk/heritage

Statutory government agencies:

Cadw, www.cadw.wales.gov.uk

Historic England, www.historicengland.org.uk

Historic Scotland, www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Natural England, www.naturalengland.org.uk

Natural Resources Wales, www.naturalresources.wales

Northern Ireland Environment Agency, www.doeni.gov.uk

Scottish Natural Heritage, www.snh.gov.uk

Useful reading

Bats in Churches: A Management Guide – Natural England publication

Bats in Churches and how you can help them – www.bats.org.uk

