

PEST CONTROL ADVICE SHEET

BATS



INTRODUCTION

Bats are the only flying mammals that are distributed around the globe. In Britain there are fifteen species of bat, varying in numbers from the most common 'pipistrelle' to the almost extinct 'mouse-eared bat'.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 gives full protection to all species of bat and makes it an offence for any person to intentionally kill, injure or handle a bat (unless seriously disabled). Furthermore it is against the law to damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place or structure which a bat is using or to disturb the bat whilst it is occupying such a place.

WHY DO BATS NEED PROTECTION?

The populations of all species of bat have declined dramatically in the last century. Even the most common species have shown declines of around 50%.

There are a number of reasons for these declines, the major ones being: loss of roosts, loss of habitat and food, pollution and also poor weather.

One of the greatest threats to bats is remedial timber treatment. Many bats make their homes in loft spaces where the timbers have been treated to protect against woodworm. The chemicals used are frequently lethal to bats, even years after application.

Agricultural practices, including the destruction of hedgerows have reduced the number of insects for bats to feed on. In addition, the insects that survive the application of pesticides will tend to have traces of these chemicals in their bodies. All British bats eat large quantities of insects and can therefore accumulate these lethal chemicals in their bodies, which may result in death.

If we are to preserve bat populations in this country, protection and conservation are essential.

WHAT DAMAGE DO THEY DO?

Quite simply, none. Bats do not gnaw or cause any damage to buildings or fixtures. They do not build nests but choose to hang or cling to rafters etc. There are no significant health risks attached to having a bat colony roosting in your home. In fact, bats should be regarded as a friend, particularly to the avid gardener. A pipistrelle bat may consume up to 3,500 insects every night.

SO WHY DO BATS HAVE SUCH A BAD NAME?

People talk of bats 'flying into their hair' – they don't. Bats will swoop down low over anyone passing through their feeding territory. This is certainly not aggressive behaviour, just pure curiosity. Bats are inquisitive by nature and are trying to assess if you represent a danger to them. Frequently bats will fly close by to feed on insects unseen by humans.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF BATS ARE ROOSTING?

Many species of bat including the pipistrelle and brown long-eared bat roost in roof voids. They are not usually present throughout the year, but will continue to return annually, as long as the site remains.

The most obvious and often the only indication that bats are roosting is the presence of droppings. Droppings are normally found in lines or piles around gable ends and chimneys, and beneath ridge boards etc.

The droppings are dark brown or black, measuring between 4mm and 8mm. They can be confused with mouse droppings which are of similar size. However, mouse droppings are very hard whereas bat droppings crumble to a fine powder consisting largely of insect fragments.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND BATS

As stated earlier, bats do not damage the building fabric. In some lofts droppings can be a nuisance, the simple remedy being to spread out plastic sheeting which can be periodically emptied.

Other than this, no action should be necessary. However, precautions do need to be taken if any action is likely to disturb the bats or their roosts. This includes any renovation work, demolition, re-roofing etc and also the application of pesticides, including timber treatment.

If any such work is proposed, then you **must** contact English Nature (for address and telephone number see below) **before** any work is carried out. To proceed without the consent of English Nature would be illegal.

This leaflet should be regarded as a guide, particularly on the points of law.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, please contact the Council's Pest Control Service or English Nature directly:

Environment and Public Protection
Environment, Culture and Communities Department
Bracknell Forest Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
RG12 1JD

Tel No: 01344 352000

English Nature
Foxhold House
Thornford Road
Crookham Common
Newbury
RG15 8EL

Tel No: 01635 268811