



# Bats in Buildings

A guide for building professionals

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## Bats in buildings – a guide for building professionals

This leaflet is for the wide range of building professionals - builders, roofers, slaters, joiners, surveyors, timber treatment specialists, insulation installers, pest controllers, plumbers, electricians and telephone engineers, who may come across bats or a bat roost in the course of their work.

Bat roosts are protected, even when the bats are absent. It is important that you can recognise a roost and know what to do and who to contact.

It is also important that you are aware of the small, but significant risk of bats carrying a rabies related virus and include this in your risk assessments. You can get information on risk assessments from the Health & Safety Executive or on their website at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) .

## Bats, you and the Law – in brief

Many species of bats are endangered or threatened, so both UK and European legislation gives them very full protection. It is illegal to intentionally kill, injure or take bats or intentionally (or recklessly in England and Wales\*) damage or destroy their roosts or disturb bats. Because bats tend to return to the same roosts each year, these sites are protected whether the bats are present or not.

In dwelling-houses where there is a bat roost, the law allows you to carry out building maintenance or remedial operations. However, you must notify (as appropriate) English Nature (EN), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) or the Environment and Heritage Service Northern Ireland (EHS-NI) in advance and allow them time to advise whether the operation should be carried out and, if so, the method and timing of the work. Such actions include renovation or any application of pesticides such as for wasps nests, cluster-fly control or remedial timber treatment. Early consultation, preferably at the survey stage, can help avoid delays and the illegal killing of bats or the unnecessary destruction of their roosts. In urgent cases advice can often be given by telephone.

Where you propose work to buildings that are not dwellings (such as churches and barns) you need to consult (as appropriate) the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), the Welsh Assembly Government or the EHS-NI about licensing implications before you proceed. You can get further information about the legal position from the relevant licensing department (see contacts page).

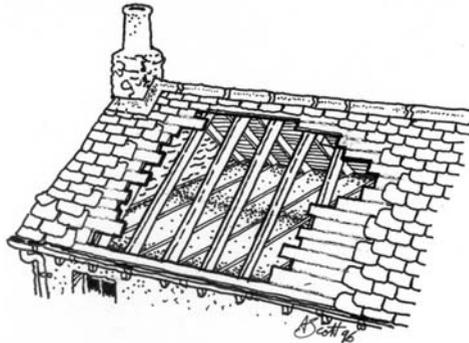
This is only a guide to the Law. If in doubt, you should read the relevant legislation.

\*The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 may introduce a similar offence in Scotland.

Legislation	Country	Country			
		Scotland	England	Northern Ireland	Wales
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)		●	●		●
Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985				●	
Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994		●	●		●
Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1995				●	
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000			●		●
<i>Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (pending)</i>		●			

## Background on Bats

All UK bats are small, eat insects and rarely damage property. They roost in a variety of places including buildings and house roofs and may form colonies or be found singly or in small groups. You may find bats in buildings at any time of the year, though they are most commonly found in summer when some species form maternity colonies.



When bats use buildings, they usually conceal themselves in crevices, behind roofing felt, in cavity walls or under ridge tiles. They are not often seen in the roof space. Of the 16 UK species only the two horseshoe bats, both rare and found only in England and Wales, sleep hanging free by their feet. The remainder may do this rarely but more commonly cling on with thumbs and feet or squeeze themselves into crevices.



## Identifying bat roosts

You can expect to find bats in all kinds of buildings and you should be aware that almost any roof or building is a potential bat roost. Bats will usually be in or about the roof but may also roost in other parts. You should therefore, as a matter of course, check for the presence of bat droppings and bats before carrying out any work. In a small roof, five minutes spent specifically on this check would find an established roost. In a larger building about the same time should be spent on each roof section. The search can then be continued at the same time as other work.

The key feature to look for is the presence of droppings. These are dark brown or black and between 4 and 8mm long - the same size or slightly larger than a grain of rice. To tell mouse and bat droppings apart, press one between your fingers - bat droppings crumble to a fine powder because they are made up of insect fragments. Mouse droppings are pasty when fresh and increasingly hard as they dry. Remember to wash your hands after trying this test! Most of the areas where you will find bat droppings are those that you will examine for signs of rot or insect attack. You may also see bat droppings on the outside walls of buildings below holes used by bats to enter and leave roosts.

The quantity of droppings you see in the roof is not a reliable guide to the number of bats roosting there. Bats may tuck themselves away in to crevices so only a small number of droppings might be visible. However, piles of droppings beneath ridge-boards, hips and around the chimneys or gable ends are typical of bats. In a well established roost, droppings may be several centimetres deep. Rats or mice rarely produce such accumulations in these places.

Although droppings are the most certain identification feature, other clues may occasionally alert you to the presence of bats. These include a characteristic odour and the presence of large numbers of moth wings which have been discarded by feeding bats. A polished or clean surface near a place where light enters may also indicate habitual usage by bats, as do a lack of cobwebs in the areas they regularly use.



**Pipistrelle**



**Long-eared**



**Rat**



**Mouse**

## Species and roost sites

The species you are most likely to find in houses are the **common and soprano pipistrelles**. These highly gregarious small bats use roofs during the summer, when females give birth and raise their young and, in general, disperse in autumn. They particularly favour roosting at gable ends, above soffits, at the top of cavity walls, near chimneys and behind bargeboards. Sometimes, they roost beneath ridge tiles, on top of the ridge-beam or even under insulation close to the eaves. In many cases you will see no signs of their presence. In the roof space you are most likely to find droppings at the gable wall and along the eaves. Depending on the building's construction they may use many other places. If you suspect a roost, check for droppings stuck to the outside walls of the house, on window ledges or on the ground - particularly beneath the gable apex.

The **brown long-eared bat** is probably the next most commonly found species in buildings and the one you are most likely to see in roof spaces. They prefer larger volume and complex roofs, and buildings close to broadleaved woodland. They tend to fly around in the open roof space and hang from the ridge during the day,



Long-eared bat

so droppings are usually found scattered over the floor or concentrated in piles beneath favoured roosting areas, typically beneath the ridge beam. You may find them clinging to timbers near the apex of the roof.

A number of other species depend on house roofs, but these are all much less common or only found in specific areas. The **serotine** is one of the largest UK bats,

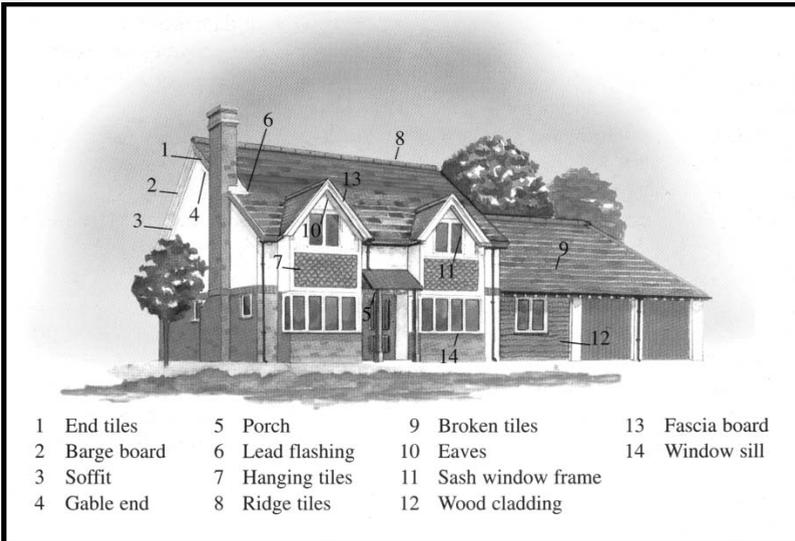
about the same weight as a large mouse. It is most common in southern England though it has been found as far north as Yorkshire. Serotines seem to be very dependent on buildings and, like all bats, are faithful to their traditional roosts.

Being relatively large bats, they can give rise to large piles of droppings. Roosting position is variable but they often live in hollow walls or brick chimney stacks. The **greater horseshoe bat** is very rare, but its close relative, the **lesser horseshoe bat** is still reasonably common in Wales and south-west England. When hibernating or asleep, horseshoe bats hang free by their feet with their wing membranes wrapped round the body and can often look like pears or plums hanging from the roof. Droppings are typically in piles beneath the ridge-beam.

**Whiskered, Brandt's, Natterer's and Daubenton's** bats are widespread in the UK and quite similar in appearance. They are found occasionally in house roofs but more often in the stonework of bridges, tunnels, castles and other buildings. They may also be found roosting in the same sorts of places as the other species.

## A suggested search technique for houses is:

1. Ask the occupier whether they are aware that they have bats or if bats have ever been found in the house.
2. Check for the presence of bats by listening for their 'chittering' noises in warm weather and by shining a light along the roof ridge beams and over stone and brick-work. Remember however that bats are rarely seen during the day.
3. Examine the loft for droppings, concentrating on the area beneath the ridge, the junction between two ridges, down hips and over bays, around chimneys and gables and all around the eaves. You can do much of this during the course of a normal survey.
4. In the summer months, check for droppings sticking to window panes and the outside walls of the building, on window ledges and on the ground beneath the gable apex.



## Other building types

If you are planning work on bridges or historic and other types of building that may be used by bats, you should contact (as appropriate) the local office of EN, SNH, CCW or EHSNI for advice.

## What to do if you find a bat roost

If you find a bat roost in a dwelling house and you propose to carry out any work that might affect it or the bats, you should contact the local office of EN, SNH, CCW or EHSNI. Dwelling houses can be taken to mean buildings which people occupy or could occupy more or less permanently in a normal fashion. Dwelling houses might therefore include houses, nursing homes and holiday homes.

If you find a bat or bat roost in any other type of building or structure (such as schools, churches, factories, commercial premises, swimming pools and leisure centres, trees, caves, mines and tunnels) and want information or advice, you can contact EN, SNH, CCW or EHSNI in the first instance but, depending on what work you propose to carry out, you may be redirected (except in NI) to contact Defra, SEERAD or WAG.

There are voluntary bat groups in most areas who can provide information and may make an initial inspection for you. For more complex projects you may require the services of a professional bat consultant. In any case where bats or a bat roost may be affected, the final statutory advice must come from the relevant countryside agency or Government department.

## Bats and human health

There is a small risk you could catch rabies from an infected bat and because the disease is almost always fatal you should treat this risk seriously. The disease is transmitted by a bite or scratch, or through contact between your mucous membranes, such as eye, nose or mouth, and an infected bat's saliva.

You can minimise this risk by avoiding direct contact with bats. If you need to move a bat, wear bite-proof gloves and use a cloth, or a box and card, to pick it up. If you are bitten or scratched by a bat, wash the affected area immediately and thoroughly with soap and water and contact your doctor. An effective post-exposure vaccine is available. If possible, and taking care not to be bitten again, try and keep the bat so that it can be examined by an expert.

There is no rabies risk from contact with bat droppings or urine but you should still wash before eating, drinking or smoking.





# Contacts and further information

## General

Bat Conservation Trust 0207 627 2629 (UK), 01786 447144 (Scotland)  
[www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk), [enquiries@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bats.org.uk)

National Bat Helpline (for bat group contacts and general information and advice) 0845 1300 228

Health & Safety Executive (for local contacts, advice, information and leaflets)  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)

## Scotland

Scottish Natural Heritage, [www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)

Aberdeen 01224 642863

Airlie, Angus 01575 530333

Aviemore 01479 810477

Ayr 01292 261392

Bowmore 01496 810711

Clydebank 0141 951 4488

Cupar 01334 654038

Dalkeith 0131 654 2466

Dingwall 01349 865333

Dumfries 01387 247010

Dundee (See Airlie)

Dunoon 01369 705377

Edinburgh (see Dalkeith)

Elgin 01343 541551

Fort William 01397 704716

Glasgow (See Clydebank)

Galashiels 01896 756652

Golspie 01408 633602

Inverness (see Dingwall)

Kinlochewe 01445 760254

Kinross 01577 864439

Kirkwall 01856 875302

Lanark 01555 665928

Lerwick 01595 693345

Lochgilphead 01546 603611

Newton Stewart 01671 401075

Oban 01631 567228

Perth 01738 444177

Portree 01478 613329

Rum 01687 462026

Stirling 01786450362

Stornoway 01851 705258

South Uist 01870 620238

Ullapool 01854 613418

Scottish Executive Environmental and Rural Affairs Department  
[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)

Rural Affairs (Countryside & Natural Heritage - licensing) 0131 556 8400

## England

English Nature, 01733 455000

[www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)

Bakewell, Derbyshire 01629 816640

Banbury, Oxfordshire 01295 257601

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk 01284 762218

Colchester, Essex 01206 796666

Devizes, Wiltshire 01380 726344

Ledbury, Herefordshire 01531 638500

Exeter, Devon 01392 889770

Grantham, Lincolnshire 01476 584800

York (N & E Yorkshire) 01904 435500

Kendal, Cumbria 01539 792800

Lewes, East Sussex 01273 476595

Leyburn, Yorkshire Dales 01969 623447

Lyndhurst, Hampshire 023 8028 6410

Norwich, Norfolk 01603 598400

Peterborough 01733 405850

London 020 7340 4870

Shrewsbury, Shropshire 01743 282000

Stocksfield, Northumberland 01661 845500

Taunton, Somerset 01823 283211

Berkshire 01635 268881

Truro, Cornwall 01872 265710

Wakefield, West Yorkshire 01924 334500

Wareham, Dorset 01929 557450

Wigan, Lancashire 01942 820342

Wye, Kent 01233 812525

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)  
Licensing Manager 0117 372 8291

## Wales

Countryside Council for Wales

0845 130 6229, [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)

Mold 01352 706600

Aberystwyth 01970 821100

Bangor 01248 672500

Cardiff 02920 772400

Llandrindod Wells 01597 827400

Welsh Assembly Government

[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

Countryside Division 029 2082 3363

## Northern Ireland

Environment and Heritage Service

[www.ehsni.gov.uk](http://www.ehsni.gov.uk)

Belfast 028 9054 6558

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