

Bats and trees



Brown Long-eared Bat

The purpose of this leaflet is to advise you of your responsibilities under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994 if you are planning to carry out tree work. These Acts and Regulations protect ALL wild birds, their nests (whether in use or being built) and eggs and other wild animals including bats and their roosts in or adjacent to trees.

In simple terms, you should make sure that there are no wild birds nesting in or bats roosting in or adjacent to the tree(s) that you are proposing to work on. It is a criminal offence to recklessly or intentionally destroy any bird, its nest or its eggs or any bat or its roost (even if the roost is not occupied at the time). Please note that if your trees are protected (either subject to a tree preservation order or by virtue of growing in a conservation area), obtaining consent from the council will not override your responsibilities under the above wildlife acts.

With particular reference to bats, it is the tree owner's responsibility, along with the tree work contractor who will undertake the work, to observe the law and make sure that no offence is committed. If you consider that there is potential for the trees to be used by bats, we recommend that a bat survey of the trees is undertaken by a consultant. If bats or bat roosts are found to be present, a licence from Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs may be required for the work to be undertaken legally. This licence simply permits works which affect bats or their roosts which are otherwise unlawful. Natural England can provide details of suitable consultants to undertake bat surveys on 023 8028 6410.

If bats or evidence of bats are found at anytime, all works must stop immediately and Natural England contacted for further advice on 023 8028 6410.



Creating artificial bat habitats

The Bat Conservation Trust produce a helpful leaflet entitled 'Bats and Trees - a guide to the management of trees' copies of which can be obtained on 08451 300 228 or e-mail enquiries@bats.org.uk.

The Arboricultural Association also publish a useful resource 'Guidance Note 1 - Trees and Bats' (£12.50) that gives good advice, particularly on how to mitigate the impact of any trees work on potential roosts for example, by using soft felling techniques. Copies can be obtained on 01242 522152 or through the Associations web site at www.trees.org.uk

Good tree working practice

- Plan ahead
- Establish procedures that consider the possible presence of bats in trees (including in an emergency), at all times of the year, by incorporating a bat check into tree surveys.
- Consider how and when the tree work will be undertaken
- Ensure the work carried out is proportional to the risk i.e. it may be possible to make the tree safe without felling it, by reducing the crown, cutting /reducing the limbs, etc.. whilst retaining an important roost area, re-routing a footpath etc..
- Aim to limit the chances of a bat or their roost(s) being damaged or destroyed and minimise any



Bat boxes on trees

adverse impacts by carrying out tree surgery sensitively. Try wherever possible to retain any tree used by bats.

- If a bat roost is damaged it may be necessary to demonstrate to Natural England that good practice was implemented.

Carrying out tree surveys and checking for bats

Tree surveys are usually conducted during daylight hours to assess the tree properly for defects so bat activity is unlikely to be seen at this time. Trees that are very young or very small or have no substantial trunk are excluded as potential bat roosts. When surveying larger trees if they are identified for major tree works or felling, they should be assessed further with the aid of binoculars to look for features capable of supporting bat roosts from the ground.

A tree survey is a visual assessment from ground level will include looking for the following:

- Obvious holes e.g. rot holes and old woodpecker holes
- Dark staining on the tree below a hole caused by natural oils in bats fur
- Bat droppings beneath a cavity or hole
- Audible squeaking from within a cavity or rot hole, especially on hot days or at dusk



Nathusius Pipstrelle Leislers Bat

- Insects (especially flies) around a hole
- Bats emerging at dusk and returning at dawn (in summer)
- Tiny scratch marks around a hole from bats' claws
- Cavities, splits and /or loose bark from broken or fallen branches, lightning strikes
- Very dense covering of mature ivy over trunk
- Wound callus rolls
- Flaking bark
- Hollow trees, holes between buttresses, hollow snag
- Overhanging root ball over wall edge
- Upward cavities where they are dry and warm
- Split limb which has previously sheered off, hazard beams

The findings can be categorized as below:

No potential: trees that do not possess any features that may offer potential to support roosting bats.

Unknown potential: Tree cannot be fully assessed from ground due to size or view obscured by leaves or ivy but is of a size, age and form to warrant further inspection.

Low potential: Tree has no features capable of supporting bat roosts or sub-optimal features providing only a low likelihood that bats may utilize them. (No cracks or crevices, no flaking bark, low or no ivy cover)

Moderate potential: Features supported show characteristics which may be of some value to bats and hence possess a moderate likelihood that bats may utilize them. (Few small cracks or crevices, low ivy cover, deadwood in canopy or stem)

High potential: Tree has features thought to be capable of supporting bat roosts and a high likelihood that bats may utilize these features. (Woodpecker holes, cracks/ crevices, loose or flaking bark, medium to dense ivy cover, deadwood in canopy or stem, snagged branches, hollow stem or limb, hole between buttresses or hollow core)

If bat potential is a possibility then there are further options to consider which could include:

- Aerial inspection by a tree surgeon on trees of low potential
- Aerial inspection by a Licensed Bat worker on trees of moderate to high potential
- Obtain a bat survey

Some basic advice on avoiding disturbance to bats is given below.

Timing of tree works

To reduce the chance of disturbing a bat roost, it is important to avoid the summer (breeding season) and winter (hibernation) months. Works to trees with potential for bats is best done from late August to early October when young bats are mobile and on the wing, female bats are unlikely to be pregnant and the hibernation season has not yet begun. March to April is also a suitable time, though consideration should also be given for nesting birds as these are also protected by law. Crown pruning and minor tree works can also be completed over the winter months. The removal of potential roost sites during this time should be avoided, as some bat species hibernate in trees.

Best practice methods

Keep tree work to a minimum retaining all potential roosts where possible. A precautionary inspection of the tree(s) by the tree work contractor looking for signs of bats should be carried out before starting work. This should include an inspection of all holes and niches using a torch and preferably an endoscope. If bats or signs of bats are found, no work should start and English Nature should be contacted for further advice.

Where possible, avoid cross cutting in proximity to cavities or hollows. Limbs with internal fissures should be pruned carefully to maintain integrity of features as potential roost sites.

Any sections felled containing cavities should be lowered carefully and left on the ground (preferably for 24 hours) with the openings clear, allowing anything inside an opportunity to escape. Split limbs that are under tension

may need to be wedged open to prevent their closure when pressure is released, potentially trapping bats

If ivy covers areas of a tree's trunk or branches, there is roosting potential behind it. In addition, potential roosts in the tree may also be hidden behind the ivy. Dealing with ivy-covered trees depends on the amount of growth. If there is a thick mass of ivy growth, it may be practical to consider felling the tree on the basis that the thickness of the foliage will soften the fall and reduce the shock. This tree can then be inspected on the ground and if possible left for 24 hours, before section cutting. If the tree is only partially covered, pruning or sectioning may be more appropriate. If the works are not urgent, cutting the ivy at its base and completing the work when the ivy is dead, thus reducing the bat roosting potential should be considered. However, where stems of ivy create a dense mass against the trunk, there will always be roosting potential.

For additional advice on trees:

Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service Forest Research, Alice Holt Lodge, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LH, England.
Telephone 01420 23000
e-mail ddas.ah@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5UWEY6

The Arboricultural Association
The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Standish, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, GL10 3DL
Telephone 01242 522152
e-mail: admin@trees.org.uk
www.trees.org.uk/Directory-of-Tree-Surgeons

Bat Conservation Trust
5th floor, Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London, SE11 5RD
Bat helpline: 0345 1300 228
e-mail: enquiries@bats.org.uk
www.bats.org.uk

Useful contacts and references:

If you have any concerns regarding trees managed by Test Valley Borough Council - often land in public open spaces and parks - please contact Customer Services who will firstly confirm whether the land is indeed managed by the council.

Telephone 01264 368000 or 01794 527700 / Minicom 01264 368052

Test Valley Borough Council, Beech Hurst, Weyhill Road, Andover, Hampshire, SP10 3AJ www.testvalley.gov.uk

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