

Protected Species - Bats



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

Why are bats important in the Yorkshire Dales National Park?

In the Yorkshire Dales National Park eight bat species are regularly recorded. Bats are nocturnal and spend the day at roost sites which, in the Dales, are primarily in buildings or in old trees. A number of river bridges, particularly where there are numerous small gaps and cracks between the stonework, are also important roost sites for a number of species. The soprano and common pipistrelle bats are the most likely species to be encountered in the Dales. These species may be found roosting and feeding in a wide range of habitats particularly where there is some woodland cover.

Whilst the Yorkshire Dales might not support a wide range of bat species, the diverse habitats within the National Park do support a large number of bats. In 2010 research by the University of Leeds showed that many of the cave systems in the National Park are nationally important for swarming and hibernating bats. In late summer, many species of bats will leave the smaller maternity colonies and summer roosts across the Dales and move to a much smaller number of swarming sites. At these sites, bats from a wide geographical area will congregate in order to mate, before going deeper into the cave systems later in the year to hibernate. Although dispersal distances vary between species, some bats in the Dales have been known to travel over 30km from summer roosts sites to swarming and hibernation sites.

What legislation applies?

Bats have legal protection in the UK because evidence exists that bat populations have declined significantly in the last century. This decline has primarily been due to loss of habitat. In addition bats are vulnerable to extinction as they are slow to reproduce, and only produce one young a year. The reasons for the decline includes: the loss of suitable roost sites, loss of feeding habitat, reduced availability of insects through pesticide use and mortality resulting from the use of timber treatment chemicals in house roosts.

Natural England advise that 'All bats are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010'. In simple terms, all bats are protected from deliberate killing, injuring and taking. They are also protected from intentional, deliberate or reckless disturbance whilst occupying a structure or place which they use for shelter or protection. It is also an offence to intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to such places. It is also an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of bats. Roosts are protected at all times, not just when bats are using them. Fines up to £5000 and a 6 month prison sentence can be imposed for each offence.

The Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006 requires that all public bodies such as local authorities including National Parks in England & Wales have a duty in exercising their functions 'to have due regard, as far as is consistent

with the proper exercise of those functions, for the purpose of conserving biodiversity'. It advises that 'conserving biodiversity includes restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'. Surveys relating to protected species are therefore required to be submitted with a planning application in order that the Local Planning Authority can fully consider conservation when making a decision.

Planning Policy

Local Planning Authorities are required by the Government to take account of the conservation of protected species when determining planning applications. In assessing planning applications, the local planning authority must take into account that the presence of a protected species is a 'material planning consideration'. This stems from Planning Policy Statement 9, Biodiversity & Geological Conservation, paragraph 99 (2005). Which stipulates that it is essential that the presence or otherwise of a protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development is established **before** planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision. Therefore bat surveys should be carried out in advance of any planning application being determined.

The Yorkshire Dales Local Plan of 2006 has a number of saved policies that are also relevant to bats that are used for determining planning applications within the National Park. These are -

- GP1 (National Park Purposes)
- NE7 (Protection of Species)

Developers should also give consideration to –

- NE8 Preventing habitat fragmentation and species isolation
- NE9 Trees, woodlands & hedgerows
- NE11 new or improved habitats

Will bats prevent my development from taking place?

Bats do not cause structural damage, are seldom a risk to animals or humans, do not make nests and primarily feed on insects. If bats are found in most cases mitigation measures can be identified that will enable the development to go ahead. The bat survey may make recommendations such as mitigation measures. These measures can be dealt with as a planning condition or in some cases through a legal agreement.

Key facts

- Bats are not rodents
- They do not chew wood, wires or insulation
- They do not build nests
- They feed primarily on insects
- They do not bring insects into the roost
- Have one baby a year

- Seasonal visitors in houses
- Certain types of bat can catch up to 600 insects in 1 hour
- Bats are not blind
- Seldom transmit disease to humans or animals
- Only bite in self defence

Building design

Conversion and major repairs to buildings often leads to the loss of suitable nesting or roosting sites for birds and bats. There are usually measures that can be taken to retain the wildlife interest while enabling repairs to be carried out. It is usually a lack of awareness of this and the mistaken belief that wildlife is always damaging to property. Expert advice is available to owners of buildings through Natural England and volunteer groups.

Recent changes in Building Regulations, the Code for Sustainable Homes and the National standard 'Building for Life' does mean that the design of new development is changing. A consequence of these changes is that our buildings are becoming 'airtight'. This is one of the main ways to lower carbon emissions. However, these can have an impact on birds such as swifts, swallows and bats. This is because potential nesting and roosting places are being designed out. By considering biodiversity early on in the design process and incorporating measures that add little extra expense into buildings it is possible to conserve important species of conservation importance within the National Park.

Why is timing important?

Developers are advised to undertake bat surveys between April-August. This is because outside these periods it may be difficult to accurately determine the presence of bats.

We would urge applicants to consider whether a bat survey is required at the earliest opportunity as an accurate survey, carried out at the right time of year will avoid delays in determining a planning application.

In some cases, a bat scoping report carried out by a licensed bat worker outside the summer months may be acceptable. However, if the scoping report concludes that there is evidence of, or it is likely that bats are present then a full survey at the appropriate time of year will be required.

Building works should be undertaken in the summer as this avoids the times of year when bats are particularly vulnerable to disturbance.

What can I expect from a bat survey?

The bat survey should be undertaken by a suitably qualified consultant and include details of the inspection survey. This should relate to the external and internal parts of the building/structure. The survey should include the following:

- a plan of the building showing roosts, droppings, access points, flight paths
- the species of bat using the building and the purpose ie breeding, hibernation etc

- if known, the population size of each species
- the times and dates of surveys
- the environmental conditions at the time of survey
- the equipment used
- qualifications and experience of the personnel undertaking survey work

What does a scoping report include?

A scoping report is used to initially assess a site. This just gives an indication if the area is suitable for bats. If the site is considered suitable a further survey may be required.

- site visit for evidence of bats including crevices, cavities & suitability of surrounding habitat
- can be done in daytime and in winter
- can overlook roost or small numbers of bats, especially in traditional barns

What does a full survey include?

A full survey should provide sufficient detail to be able to be undertaken during the summer months.

- a desk top study and scoping survey
- a number of site visits
- bat activity
- use of specialist equipment - bat detectors, night vision equipment, infra-red cameras, etc.
- report may incorporate recommendation for mitigation measures

How much does a bat survey cost?

This is very much dependent on the characteristics of the site. On average a bat scoping survey could cost from £200. A full bat survey may cost between £200 and £1000. It is probably worth getting a number of quotes from different companies.

What type of works could harm bats?

Bats are found in all kinds of buildings, including houses. They are likely to be found in old buildings as well as new houses. In houses they usually live in the roof space. This can be behind weatherboardings, fascias, barge boards, slates, flashing and pointing. Basically anywhere where there is a small crevice. The following list includes various works that could harm bats, please refer to the checklist requirements outlined in the planning application form.

- Replacement or removal of barge boards, fascias and external cladding
- Re-pointing where pointing is missing, or work to walls where no pointing is present
- Disturbance to a roof or roof structure – including re-roofing, repairs to roofs, repairs or replacement of chimneys including flashing and pointing, installing new chimneys/flues
- Closing gaps under eaves, flashings, ridge tiles, soffits and barge boards
- Works to cellars and closing off cellar access points
- Works to bridges, aqueducts, viaducts, mines, tunnels and other underground structures

- Conversion of attics, lofts and roof spaces
- Timber treatment and pest control in roof spaces
- Felling trees above 10 metres in height
- Demolition or removal of buildings
- Installation of wind turbines
- New lighting

What is the purpose of a bat license?

A license is required by anyone who wishes to carry out an activity prohibited under wildlife legislation. Examples include: licences to kill or take certain protected species to prevent problems; licences to carry out surveys or conservation work; licences to disturb or damage the habitat of certain strictly protected species; licences to possess or keep certain wildlife. The results of a bat survey will allow the need for a licence to be determined and will assist the licensing authority to determine whether a licence should be granted. Natural England are the first point of contact regarding such licences.

Ways to conserve bats & their habitat

The built environment of the Dales consists mainly of small traditional towns and villages, isolated farms and barns, dry stone walls, minor connecting roads and railway lines. It is often assumed that the built environment has no wildlife interest and is unimportant for biodiversity conservation. In the Yorkshire Dales this is not the case. A number of species are inextricably linked with the built environment. Many bird species such as house martins, swallows, owls and other more common species rely on the built environment for places to nest and feed. Bats make extensive use of the built environment for roosting and hibernating particularly since many of their natural roost sites have gone.

By incorporating and installing bat bricks or boxes which have been specially designed to provide roosting spaces you can enhance the habitat for bats. In addition to this there needs to be plenty of foraging habitat in the vicinity. Bats hunt around native hedges, allotments, woodland, mature gardens, watercourses such as ponds/streams/rivers and anywhere that will support small insects. All of these areas will attract insects which is the main food for bats.

The following:

- Incorporate bat bricks/boxes/tiles within development
- Provide & retain roost spaces
- Leave access points in buildings ie gaps in mortar
- Retain foraging areas such as vegetation which is insect rich habitat
- Avoid lighting & noise near to bat roosts
- Retain water courses/features
- Create a wildlife corridor by considering native planting along the river or stream to
- Retain woodland
- Consider planting native species of trees and shrubs to retain a linear connection
- Include native wild flower seed mix within grass mixes that will attract insects