

Bat myths

Perhaps because they fly at night, a time when humans feel uncomfortable, there are many myths surrounding bats. For instance, bats are not blind, they can actually see quite well. When flying at night, however, they use another sense, called echolocation, to get a detailed view of the world around them. They shout, very loudly, and use the echoes to find their way, and their insect food, effortlessly, even in absolute darkness, a feat we would be hard pressed to match. Most of these shouts are so high pitched humans cannot hear them, but they allow the bat to pick a midge out of the air, so the idea they can get stuck in your hair is an old wives' tale, although they may well feast on the cloud of insects circling above your head!



Bats are not seen as bad news everywhere, in some parts of the world bats are linked with health and happiness and are seen as good luck omens, which is rather apt, as they are actually extremely important predators of night flying insects, many of whom are serious agricultural pests.



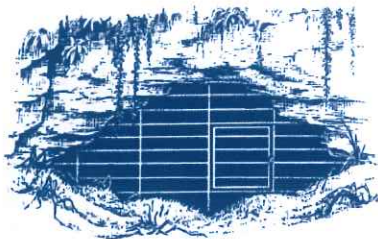
The Dorset Bat Group

The Dorset Bat Group works to conserve bats in Dorset and carries out much of the practical work involved in monitoring bats and their habitat throughout the county. As

well as visiting roosts on behalf of Natural England, the group runs several bat box projects, participates in many surveys as part of the National Bat Monitoring Programme and plays a key role in the rescue and rehabilitation of sick and injured bats. We also have an extensive promotional and educational programme. If you would like to know more about the group please contact us at www.dorsetbatgroup.org.uk or via the Dorset Wildlife Trust, whose details are overleaf.



Bat conservation



Over the last 25 years, many species of bat have suffered serious population declines, both in the UK and across Europe, and a major factor in these declines has

been the loss of places to feed and places to breed. A reduction in suitable places to spend the winter may well have also played a part. A major part of bat conservation, therefore, is the protection and, where possible, the enhancement of such places. This might include changing the way a particular habitat is managed, to improve it for bats, or protecting places where they are most vulnerable, such as hibernating sites, preventing disturbance by preventing human access.

A number of pieces of legislation have been passed giving protection to bats and bat roosts, making it illegal to disturb or harm a bat, or to damage the places it uses to roost, even if those places are in someone's home. However, there may well be times when someone wishes to develop a property, or work is needed to renovate or repair a building that is used by bats. In these circumstances, although some form of planning permission may be needed from a local authority, it is essential that Natural England is also contacted and given time to provide appropriate advice. Failure to do so can lead to heavy fines if the work results in bats being injured or killed and their roosts obstructed.



Another major cause of bat mortality, contributing to significant declines in a number of species, has, in the past, been the chemicals used in roof spaces to treat timbers for pests such as woodworm and death watch beetle. Many thousands of bats were killed each year when they came into contact with chemicals, some of which were very long lasting. Although chemical treatments which are less damaging to bats are now available, advice should still be sought from Natural England before any such treatments goes ahead.



The Bats of Dorset

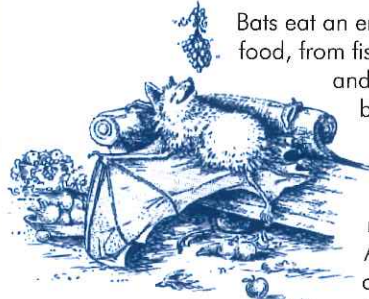
There are over 1,000 species of bats in the world, this leaflet gives you insight to the bats native in Dorset.



The world of bats

There are over 1,000 species of bats in the world and they live almost everywhere, there are even some that spend the summer north of the Arctic Circle.

They are the only mammal in the world capable of true flight (although a few species can glide) and range in size from the tropical fruit bats, which can weigh as much as a bag of sugar, and have a wing span of six feet, to the tiny Hog-nosed bat, which weighs about the same as a Bumble Bee and is probably the smallest mammal in the world.

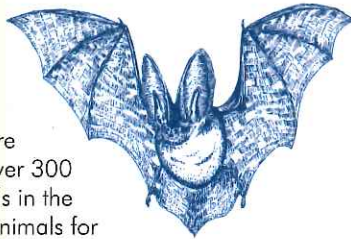


Bats eat an enormous range of food, from fish and frogs to fruit and nectar, even other bats. There are even three species, the vampires, that drink blood, but they are restricted to South America. Most species of bats, including all

those found in the UK, feed on insects and the Pipistrelle, which is around the size of the top of your thumb, will eat up to 3,000 insects a night.

Bats in the UK

In the UK, there are 64 different species of mammal, 16 of which are bats. Given there are over 300 million individual animals in the UK, which is around 5 animals for each and every one of us, you might then be forgiven for thinking that there must be huge numbers of bats. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

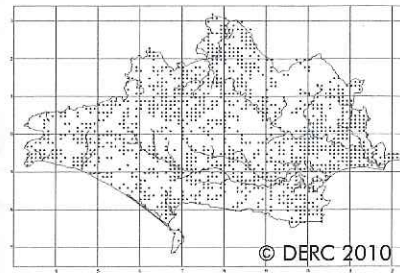


There are actually only around 2.5 million individual bats in the UK, less than 1% of the total number of animals, so they really are rare. With two species of bat, the pipistrelles, accounting for nearly 2 million of those, that makes the rest of them even rarer.

Despite their scarcity, the pipistrelles remain some of the easiest British mammals to see. Take an evening walk along a hedgerow in summer, almost anywhere in this country, and you will see the skittering, dancing flight of this tiny bat.

Bats in Dorset

We are very lucky in Dorset as 16 of the 17 species of UK bat are found in the county. Indeed, for some species, such as the Bechstein's bat, which is a very rare bat in the UK, the county is the UK stronghold.



Across the whole of Dorset over 3,000 bat roosts have been identified, although there are still many areas where we know very little about bat populations and the gaps on the county map reflect this.

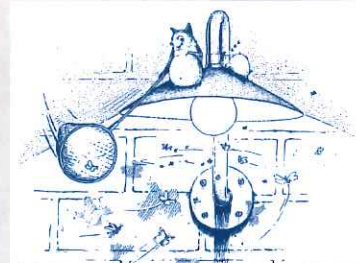
Many of these areas are prime 'bat habitat' and these gaps do not mean there are no bats there, they simply have not been recorded. If you know of a site you believe to be used by bats the Dorset Bat Group would be pleased to hear from you.

Where do bats live?

At different times of year bats need different places to live. In winter they need moist, cool places to hibernate, with caves, damp cellars and mines being prime locations.



In summer they need warm and dry places in which to raise their young and it is then that they are most often found in buildings.



All of the UK's bats eat insects and so, as well as a warm dry, draught free place to roost, they also need insect rich places in which to feed. Woodlands, pasture, lakes and rivers are favourite sites, but many bats are just as at home around our towns, villages and city streets. The Pipistrelle, for instance, seems to prefer to roost in modern houses.

Bats in your house

Bats are often very quiet, so it is quite common for people not to be aware they have bats in their house at all. One of the most common signs that you have bats are droppings, which typically will be inside the loft space or beneath the entrance to the roost.



They resemble mouse droppings but when rubbed between the finger and thumb, they crumble to dust. Bat droppings are harmless, being made up of the hard parts of insects.

You may also find clusters of bats in your roof space, around chimney breasts or spaced out along the ridge. Bats do not gnaw wires, cables or other material, neither do they bring any nesting material into the house.

Bats and the law

Bats are very vulnerable to disturbance and, in the UK, many species are close to extinction. There have also been significant population declines in many species over the last 100 years.



In order to protect the remaining populations, bats and their roosts are specially protected under a number of pieces of legislation.

This legislation makes it illegal to disturb, injure or kill a bat. It is also illegal to damage those places they use to roost, whether they are present or not, or to prevent them from gaining access to those places.

If, however, you do find a bat in the living area of your house you may remove it, releasing it outside after dark, although it might be best to consult with one of the bodies listed overleaf before proceeding. Please note that gloves should be worn at all times when handling bats.

If you are thinking of carrying out any work on a place used by bats you must first contact Natural England for advice on how to proceed.