



BATS!

Many 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 any bat or to recklessly damage, destroy or block up their roosts or disturb them. 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 that are used by bats, the legislation allows building maintenance or remedial operations to be carried out. However, English Nature must have been notified in advance and allowed time to advise on whether the operation should be carried out and, if so, the method and timing of the work.

Where structural, demolition or conservation work is proposed to buildings that are not dwellings (e.g. churches or barns) it is necessary to consult the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) about licensing implications before any work can proceed.

This explanation should be regarded only as a guide to the law, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) or the Conservation (Natural Habitat &c.) Regulations 1994 should be consulted if in doubt.

Many species of bat are dependant on buildings for roosting, though they may not be present throughout the year. When they are present, bats are usually concealed in crevices, behind roofing felt, in cavity walls or under ridge tiles and are not often seen in the roof space. Of the 16 British species only the two horseshoe bats, both rare, sleep hanging free by their feet. The remainder rarely do this, but cling on with thumbs and feet or squeeze themselves into crevices.

Species and Roost Sites

The most commonly occurring species in houses are pipistrelles. These highly gregarious small bats use roofs for breeding during the summer and, in general, the bats disperse during the autumn.

Particularly favoured roosting sites are at gable ends, above soffits, at the top of cavity walls near chimneys or behind bargeboards, and in many cases, there is no sign of their presence. The most likely places to find droppings in the roof void are at the gable end wall and along the eaves. In some cases, the bats may roost beneath ridge tiles, on top of the ridge beam or even under insulation close to the eaves and, of course, many other sites may be used.

If a roost is suspected, check for the presence of droppings on the outside of the house; they are most commonly found on window ledges or stuck to walls, particularly beneath the gable apex. Pipistrelles are also widespread in churches. It is usually easy to spot droppings stuck to interior walls.

The brown long-eared bat is probably the next most common species in Britain and is the one most likely to be encountered in roof voids and may occasionally be seen clinging on to timbers near the apex of the roof. Like pipistrelles, highest numbers may be seen on hot days between June and September, when breeding colonies may be present.

During the autumn and in cool weather, bats remain concealed in crevices and walls but may appear on mild days or if disturbed. Brown long-eared bats tend to fly around in the open roof void and hang from the ridge during the night, so droppings are usually found scattered over the floor or concentrated in piles beneath favoured roosting areas, typically beneath the ridge beam. In hipped roofs, piles of droppings may also be found beneath the junction between the two hips.

A number of other species are dependant on house roofs, but these are all much less common or confined to one area of the country.

A suggested search technique for houses is:

- Ask the occupier whether they are aware that they have bats or if bats have ever been found in the house.
- Check for the presence of bats by listening for their “chittering” noises in warm weather and by shining a light along the ridge beams and over brickwork. However, it must be stressed that bats are rarely seen during the day.
- Examine the floor 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.

Remember – bat roosts are protected even if the bats are absent

The potential fine for any bat related offence is £5,000 and if more than one bat is involved, the fine is £5,000 per bat!

In England and Wales an offender can also be imprisoned for six months.

References:

Bats in roof guide English Nature

Useful addresses and contacts:

DEFRA Licensing manager: Telephone: 0117 372 8291

The Bat Conservation Trust – www.bats.org.uk