

Bats

Introduction

Bats are declining and all species are now protected by law. A minimum of eight bat species can be found in churchyards including common pipistrelle, brown long-eared, and natterer's bats. They have long used church buildings to roost, with the same roost sometimes being used for generations by bats. Old trees and caves also provide suitable roosting spaces for bats. However, these natural roost sites have been lost and bats have had to adapt to the built environment to find places to roost. The serotine bat for example rarely roosts anywhere else but in church buildings.



Pipistrelle bat by Tom Marshall

The importance of churchyards for bats

The church buildings themselves provide quiet, sheltered places for bats to live. They will take shelter under roof tiles, in porches and eaves for roosting and rearing their young. The churchyard's large old trees and old tombs provide places for them to live. Churchyards tend to be chemical free, meaning they can be a good place for bats to feed on insects. Around eight species are known to use churches for roosting, including the natterer's bat. Fortunately, bats usually coexist in harmony with clergy and congregation. A survey carried out by the Bat Conservation Trust found that 75 percent welcome bats, with only 12 percent expressing concerns about their presence. Problems can arise when a church requires building works such as roof repairs; specialist advice on bats should always be obtained in advance from Natural England (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england.)



Horstead churchyard by Emily Nobbs



Did you know?

The common pipistrelle bat is small enough to fit inside a matchbox when its wings are folded.

The expression "blind as a bat" is actually a little unfair. Their vision is pretty good and is sensitive to low levels of light.

Even today, bats are sometimes regarded with fear and suspicion. But they are in fact harmless (so long as they aren't handled) and are both charming and fascinating to watch, if you are lucky enough to see them.

How to help

Appropriate and sympathetic management can help to encourage bats into your churchyard. Wildflower and longer grass areas are beneficial for bats as they provide hunting grounds for catching insects. Plants that give off scent at night time such as honeysuckle attract insects, which will provide additional food for bats. Hedgerows are also beneficial for bats, helping them to navigate their surroundings and providing sheltered feeding grounds. Putting up bat boxes can provide additional shelter, particularly as roosting sites are at a premium.

Wild honeysuckle by David North



Monitoring bat boxes by Amy Lewis



Bat services

Natural England provide a bat advice service. Part of this service is delivered by Bat Conservation Trust who offer a free roost visit service to churches where bats are causing significant problems inside the church, where renovation or small scale building work is planned and for grounded bats. The Bat Helpline **0345 1300 228** can be contacted with other bat-related questions. For more information visit the Bat Conservation Trust website: www.bats.org.uk.

How to detect bats

Bats can be seen at dusk and dawn. Warm, dry summer evenings are particularly good for recording the presence of bats. One of the best ways to tell the difference between bat species is by using a bat detector. Bats use high frequency calls typically beyond the range of human hearing to build up a picture of their surroundings. This echolocation call system enables them to wing their way through the dark hunting the tiniest of insects. A bat detector translates their echolocation calls into something audible by humans. Different bat species hunt different prey and are different sizes so their calls are different which helps to identify them. See 'Bat Detectors' on Bat Conservation Trust's website for more information. If you are interested in bat monitoring contact Norfolk's local records centre, Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS) or the Norfolk Bat Survey.



Bat detecting by A Clifton



Pipistrelle bat by Derek Smith

For further information please visit the NWT website or contact:

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