

GUIDANCE FOR HOUSEHOLDERS

BATS IN HOUSES



Bat roosts

Bats traditionally roost in trees, caves, old buildings, cellars and bridges. Increasingly, due to a shortage of these habitats, bats are also using houses where walls, eaves and roofs provide potential roosting sites.

They prefer clean and draught-free buildings, without dust or cobwebs. When bats are in buildings, they usually conceal themselves in crevices, behind roofing felt, in wall cavities or under ridge tiles. Only one Irish bat species sleeps hanging free by its feet, the lesser horseshoe bat. All other species will squeeze themselves into crevices.

How do I know if I have bats?

Bat droppings will accumulate under areas regularly used by bats. These can be easily distinguished from mouse droppings. Bat droppings are dark brown or black, 4-8 mm long and, as they are made up of insect fragments, will crumble to powder when pressed. Mouse droppings are greasy and hard and do not crumble. The presence of little piles of beetle and moth wings is another tell-tale sign that you have bats.



Common pipistrelle

You've discovered you have bats in your home, what do you do?

Firstly don't worry. These mammals pose no threat to you or your home. In fact, bats and people have been sharing buildings for centuries.

- Bats do not spread disease
- Bats do not chew cables or wood
- Bats are not blind
- Bats do not get caught in your hair
- Bats do not bring nesting material into houses
- Bats are more closely related to humans than to mice

Contacts

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Further reading

Kelleher, C. & Marnell, F. (2006) Bat mitigation guidelines for Ireland. *Irish Wildlife Manuals* No. 25. National Parks & Wildlife Service, DoEHLG.
<http://www.npws.ie/en/PublicationsLiterature/IrishWildlifeManuals/2006-2007/>

Marnell, F. & Presetnik, P. (2009) Protection of overground roosts for bats. *EUROBATS Publication Series* No. 4.
http://www.eurobats.org/publications/publication_series.htm

Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & A.P. McLeish (Eds.) (2004). *Bat Workers' Manual*, 3rd Edition. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Useful websites:

www.npws.ie
www.batconservationireland.org
www.corkcountybatgroup.ie

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When do bats use buildings?

Bats use houses seasonally, rather like swallows, arriving in April or May and leaving in September.

- Pregnant females gather in maternity roosts to have their babies in summer, and this is the time they are most likely to be seen using buildings. Mother bats have only one baby a year, suckling it for several weeks.
- Females from a wide catchment area come together and give birth in these roosts. Disturbance, or the use of chemicals at such roosts, can have a knock on impact on bat populations for miles around.



Brown long-eared bat

- The bats disperse from the summer roost as the young begin to fly and feed themselves; all the bats will usually have departed by the end of September.
- Bats do occasionally roost in houses in winter, but as they hibernate and are normally in small numbers, they are difficult to see.

The first year of a bat's life is fraught with danger. It has to learn to fly, learn where all the best feeding areas and roosting sites are, learn to avoid predators like owls and cats and it has to put on enough fat to see it through its first winter's hibernation. Most don't make it. The average lifespan in the wild is four years. However, individuals can live up to 40!

The species most usually found in houses in Ireland are the common and soprano pipistrelles. These particularly favour roosting at the gable ends, above soffits, at the top of cavity walls, near chimneys and behind bargeboards. They also roost under ridge tiles and under roofing felt. The brown long-eared bat is the next most commonly found species in buildings. It prefers large roof spaces. This species can sometimes be seen in the roof hanging from the ridge beam.

Bats in houses

There are 9 different species of bats in Ireland, some very rare, others still quite widespread. These fascinating mammals depend on buildings for roosts at different times of the year. Bats rarely cause any problems when they roost in houses and many householders all over Ireland have lived happily with their bats for many years.

Benefits of having bats

Irish bats are very beneficial to us as they eat midges, mosquitoes and other pest species in huge numbers. Even our smallest bats, the pipistrelles, which will fit on the end of your thumb, can easily consume 3,000 insects in one night. Other bat species will feed on moths, beetles and spiders.

Living with bats

Here are some ideas for ensuring happy co-habitation with your bats:

- Ensure that your water tank is covered.
- Place a polythene sheet on the attic floor where bat droppings regularly accumulate and gather up at the end of the season. Bat droppings are dry and easily swept up. They make great compost !
- Ensure that the attic door is not left open to prevent bats flying into the living space of the building.

Bats will only enter your living space accidentally. Common reasons are that bats mistake an open window for a roost entrance, or follow an insect through an open window. In some instances young bats exploring their roost will squeeze down through cracks around piping from an attic.

If you find a bat in your living area this is what to do:

- Never chase or try to catch a bat while it is flying.
- Close the door of the room in which the bat is seen and open any windows, draw aside any curtains and turn off the light. This may allow the bat to escape itself.

- Should the bat continue to fly, wait until it comes to rest (often in the pleats of curtains) or becomes grounded (some species find it difficult to take-off again from the floor).
- To avoid being nipped use gloves, a towel or cloth to remove the bat and carry it outside. Place it high, at arms reach, on a wall or tree. This should allow the bat to regain flight.
- However, some bats take their time so keep a watch on the animal for 10-15 minutes and if it fails to fly then recapture it, place it in a cardboard box with air-holes and contact your local **NPWS** office or **Bat Group** for further advice.

An online video showing how to safely catch and release a bat from your home can be watched here: <http://www.corkcountybatgroup.ie/page/injured-batsinjured-bats>



Soprano pipistrelle

Repairs, maintenance or refurbishment - avoid committing offences

All bat roosts are protected even when the bats are not present. However, building or repair work can usually be planned to avoid disturbing bats or damaging their roosts. That way no offence is likely to be committed and you help with the conservation of these threatened species.

If you want to carry out repairs, maintenance or refurbishment of your dwelling-house and believe this might affect the bats or their roost you are advised to modify the way you carry out the work so as to avoid committing an offence. This may involve carrying out the work at a particular time of year, or using particular materials or methods of working. You will need to take care that the access points used by the bats are not blocked and that their roosting areas are not damaged as this would be an offence even if it was not intentional. You are strongly advised to contact your local NPWS office for free advice before you begin the work. For minor works or maintenance, we may suggest that



the local Conservation Ranger visits you in order to inspect the situation and advise on how best to proceed without breaking the law. If the work cannot be carried out without affecting the bats or their roost, you are likely to need a derogation licence. There is, however, no guarantee that a licence will be granted.

Common situations and solutions include:



A serious smell coming from the bat roost (usually in warm weather):

Remove build-up of droppings and place polythene sheet under roost to facilitate future clean up.



Accumulated bat droppings on the outside of the property (e.g. window sill):

Install deflector board to catch/re-direct droppings.



Bats are found in the living area of the house:

Locate and block the internal point(s) of entry of the bats from their roost area to the living area of the house. In some cases, perhaps because of the age or construction of the building, it may be more effective to limit the roosting areas of the bats. This could involve creating an internal bat house or blocking off parts of the attic/cellar space. NPWS should be contacted for advice in these cases.



Remedial timber treatment required for maintenance, repair or refurbishment purposes:

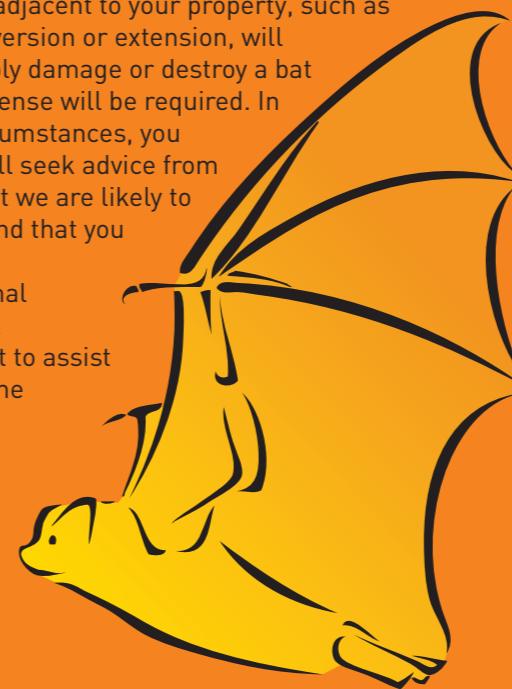
Carry out the work at a time of year when bats are least likely to be present. Use a product that is not known to be harmful to bats.



Insulation/re-roofing/repairs to gutters, soffits etc. required:

Carry out the work at a time of year when bats are least likely to be present. Ensure that roost entrances are not blocked or altered.

Where repairs, refurbishment or development within or adjacent to your property, such as a loft conversion or extension, will unavoidably damage or destroy a bat roost a license will be required. In these circumstances, you should still seek advice from NPWS, but we are likely to recommend that you employ a professional ecological consultant to assist you with the licensing process.



Lesser horseshoe bat

Concerns about bats

If you find bats roosting in your property and are concerned about them, please contact the NPWS. If necessary, local staff will call to your house to explain what remedies are available and assist you in deciding on a suitable course of action. We strongly recommend that you do not take any action until you have received advice, as this could result in an offence being committed.

Bats and the law

Because populations of most species have declined in past decades, all bats have been protected by Irish law since 1976. They are also protected by European law.

In summary, you may commit a criminal offence if you:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place of a bat
- Possess a bat (alive or dead), or any part of a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.

This is only a brief summary of the main points of the law, not a complete statement. Further details of the Wildlife Acts and the Habitats Directive under which all Irish bats are protected may be found on www.npws.ie. More information about bats and their conservation is given in our free booklet *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*.