

Bats in houses: guidance for householders

There are 17 different species of bats that breed in England and Wales, some very rare, others still quite widespread. These fascinating mammals are heavily dependent on buildings as they often use them as roosts at different times of the year. Bats rarely cause any problems when they roost in houses, but if you are worried about their presence or you want to do something that would affect them or their roosts you should contact Natural England for advice. Many householders have lived happily with their bats for many years. More information about bats and their conservation is given in our free booklet *Focus on Bats* or you can contact Natural England or the Bat Conservation Trust for advice.

Bats and the law

Because populations of most species have declined in past decades, all British bats have been protected by law since 1982¹. The legal protection they receive has recently been strengthened by changes to the law arising from European Union obligations.

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 or deliberately disturb a group of bats;
- Damage or destroy the breeding or resting place (roost) 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 may be found at <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-pets/protecting-wildlife/legislation-licenses-protect-wildlife/>

Working within the law

There are two main ways in which householders who have bats roosting somewhere within their property can work within the law.

1 Avoid committing offences

It is always preferable to avoid disturbing bats or damaging their roosts if at all possible. That way no offence is likely to be committed and you help with the conservation of these threatened species.

Repairs, maintenance or refurbishment

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 consider how you can 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 recommended to contact your local Natural England office for free advice before you begin work. For minor works or maintenance, we will usually suggest that a local volunteer or member of staff visits you in order to inspect the situation and

¹ Bats are also protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which came into force in 1982

advise on how best to proceed without breaking the law. We will then confirm this advice in writing. If the work cannot be carried out without affecting the bats or their roost, you are likely to need a licence, as described below. There is, however, no guarantee that a licence will be granted.

Concerns about bats

If you find bats roosting in your property and are concerned about them, please contact your local Natural England office or the Bat Conservation Trust for free advice. We will usually suggest that a local volunteer or member of staff visits you in order to assess the situation and advise on how any problems can be resolved. If necessary, our representative will 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.

2 Work under a licence

In some circumstances, Natural England can issue licences under the Habitats Regulations to permit what would otherwise be illegal actions. However, the reasons for which we can issue a licence are limited in law and, furthermore, we can only issue one if you can show there is no alternative way of carrying out the work and that the work will not adversely affect the local bat population. It is generally far better to try to avoid affecting the bats or their roost wherever possible, as described above. If you believe, or have been informed, that a licence² will be needed, further information about the application process is available on our website² or from our local office.

One situation in which a licence is likely to be needed is where repairs, refurbishment or development within or adjacent to your property, such as a loft conversion or extension, will unavoidably damage or destroy bat roosts. In these circumstances, you should still seek advice from Natural England, but we are likely to recommend that you employ a professional ecological consultant to assist you with the licensing process.

Contacts and further advice

Wildlife Licensing Unit
Natural England
First Floor
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol, BS1 6EB
Tel: 0845 601 4523 (local rate)
e-mail: wildlife@naturalengland.org.uk
web: <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/default.aspx>

Natural England
1 East Parade
Sheffield, S1 2ET
Enquiry Service: 0845 600 3078
enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Bat Conservation Trust
15 Cloisters House
8 Battersea Park Road
London, SW8 4BG
National Bat Helpline: 0845 1300 228
enquiries@bats.org.uk
www.bats.org.uk

² <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/default.aspx>