



Bats



Aims of the Bat Action Plan

- To help arrest and reverse the current population decline in London's bats.
- To raise awareness in Lambeth of the legally protected status of bats and their habitats, and consider the needs of bats in any management works or developments.
- To redress misconceptions and secure their status as culturally valued species.

A) What are bats?

Bats are the only group of mammals that have evolved powered flight; indeed, their Latin group name is Chiroptera, which is Greek for 'hand-wing'. Often thought of as 'flying mice', bats are more closely related to humans than to rodents. British bats are exclusively 'nocturnal' (active at night), so that most people often only ever see them at dusk and only then for the briefest moments.

British bats are insectivores (they only eat insects), and are often regarded as "natural insecticides", consuming huge numbers of insects and a wide variety of insect prey. A single pipistrelle bat can eat as many as 3000 midges in a night, so helping keep nuisance insects like this under check.

With the loss of natural roost sites in trees and woodlands, many bats have adapted to living in buildings. London residents are often surprised to discover bats living in their homes for a short period during the summer, when female bats need somewhere warm to raise their young. The increasing reliance of bats on buildings for roosting has focused conservation efforts on people's tolerance and goodwill towards bats in homes.

Bats are a superb indicator of the quality of London's environment because their complex ecological requirements make them highly sensitive to environmental change. The decline of bat species across the UK, as well as changes in diversity and populations, is now a major concern, as it indicates a major issue in the health of the human environment as well.

The nocturnal habits of bats have resulted in many popular misconceptions, even misplaced fears of them. Modern horror stories, films and media have not helped improve this image. Recent scare stories about 'rabies' brought into the UK by bats, and thought to have resulted in the death of at least one bat worker, have also created a sense of suspicion about bats.

B) Are there any bats in Lambeth?

Yes, we have bats in Lambeth - at least eight species are known to breed in London. Pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) are the most abundant, occurring in all London Boroughs, and are known to be the commonest species in Lambeth. Noctule and Daubenton's bats are regularly recorded and known to be widespread, probably also in Lambeth.

Little is known about the current status of bat species in Lambeth, although available evidence suggests an overall decline in London populations. Both species of pipistrelle are thought to have declined by 70% between 1978 and 1993. A recent repeat survey in London found a statistically significant decline in the bat population of London since the mid-1980s.

C) Why do we need an Action Plan for bats?

The loss of roost sites in buildings and trees often results from a lack of public awareness and understanding of bats, as well as ignorance of the legislation protecting them; the major concern is disturbance to or damage of maternity roosting sites.

Changes in land use can result in the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats such as wetlands, woodlands and grasslands.

Bats are very sensitive to the effects of many types of chemical pesticide, especially those used in the treatment of timbers in buildings to control woodworm or fungal rot. Many traditional timber treatment agents are highly persistent and cumulative, and may build up to sub-lethal or lethal doses in roosting, breeding and hibernating bats. Inappropriate applications can have devastating impacts.

Disturbance to bat commuting routes to and from feeding areas and roosts, through loss of flight line features like green corridors, or introduction of features like artificial lighting is a major concern. There is also still controversy over whether modern artificial lighting in streets or around buildings, has



Natterer's bat (Mysotis nattereri) in flight.
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any significant effect on bats' ability to locate prey or navigate. Although bats find food by echolocation and should be unaffected by lighting type, poorly designed or sited lighting may be a distraction, either to the bat itself or prey items that move away from normal feeding zones.

Bats still have a poor public image, due to historical associations with vampires, disease and fallacies that they get tangled up in people's hair! Although in some parts of the world bats can spread diseases like rabies and some bats are definite blood suckers, no British bats take blood and the incidence of bat-borne or spread diseases in Britain are almost infinitesimal.

What is the legal status of bats?

All species of British bat are protected in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000), and on Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations, 1994. The latter implements European legislation protecting bats.

Bats are protected from ill treatment by the Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996. The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe which came into force in 1994, through the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals 1979. While not strictly a legal instrument, as a signatory the UK is obliged to abide by it.

What will the Bat Action Plan do?

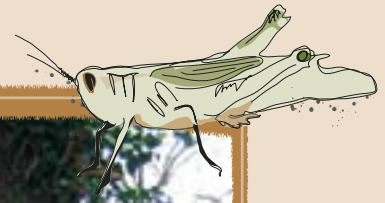
Objective 1. We will raise awareness of bats, the law, their ecology and conservation among key audiences in Lambeth, specifically planners, land managers and tree contractors. Best practice advice regarding protecting bats will be disseminated to key audiences by 2008.

Objective 2. We will increase our knowledge of bat distribution and population changes in Lambeth, so as to benefit improving knowledge of bat distribution and abundance for London as a whole. A Borough bat survey and monitoring programme will be implemented by 2006, with all available data collated by 2008.

Objective 3. We will work to increase public awareness of and involvement in practical bat survey and conservation activities. In addition, we aim to recruit 10 volunteers to be trained in bat surveys, in bat walks/talks, and to support them in working towards obtaining a Bat Worker Licence by 2009.



Unigate Wood SW16: mature tree showing dead wood and ivy cover to trunk – an important bat habitat. Lambeth Council 2005



F) Who is involved in the Bat Action Plan?

1. Partnerships

The Lead Partner for the Lambeth Bat Action Plan is Lambeth Council's Parks and Greenspaces Business Unit (Lambeth Parks). Other Council Co-Partners would be Lambeth Planning and Lambeth Regulatory Services, along with its tree and grounds contractors.

The Community Partner is the London Bat Group of the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT).

Other Partners include the London Wildlife Trust, the Greater London Authority, London Natural History Society and the London Tree Officers Association.

2. Contact for information

For more information on the Lambeth Bat Action Plan, including copies of this plan in paper or electronic format, please contact:

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3. Further information and advice

Further advice on British bats, their ecology and conservation, and the management of buildings and other habitats to protect and support bats, can be found on the following websites.

- London Bat Group (<http://www.londonbats.org.uk/>)
- DEFRA (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/bats.htm>)
- Bat Conservation Trust (<http://www.bats.org.uk/>)
- London Bat Group (<http://www.londonbats.org.uk/>)
- Mammal Society (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/>)
- London Wildlife Trust (<http://www.wildlondon.org.uk/>)
- Greater London Authority (<http://www.london.gov.uk/>)
- Police Wildlife Crime Unit (http://www.met.police.uk/wildlife/new_site_docs/docs/)
- English Nature (<http://www.english-nature.org.uk/default.asp>)
- Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) (<http://www.ptes.org/>)

