

BATS AND BUILDERS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW



Bat droppings

Roofing contractors and builders often carry out work to buildings that can affect bats. The aim of this leaflet is to help you understand:

- How your work can affect bats
- Signs that may indicate a bat roost
- Legal implications of disturbing bats
- What to do if you find or suspect bats may use a building you are working on

Introduction

Most species of bats in the UK will use buildings at some time. Although people tend to think bats are only found in old buildings such as churches, or in the countryside, the most common types of bat are usually found in modern buildings (post 1960).



Bat droppings on window sill below a roost

Buildings are important to bats as many of their natural habitats have been lost. Bats may be found in different parts of buildings and at different times of year. Bats may use buildings to rest in, to breed in or to hibernate in. Any place which is used by bats is called a roost. All bats are legally protected and all bat roosts are legally protected, whether bats are present or not.

How Work Can Affect Bats

Work such as re-roofing, loft conversions, extensions, demolition, timber treatments and cavity-wall insulation can affect bats by disturbing them, killing them or blocking their access to a roost.

Signs that Bats May Be Present

Bats will often use the same roost each year, sometimes for only a few weeks or days. Many householders are not aware that bats use their building to roost. Bats do not cause any structural damage or build nests. They are often found on the outside of buildings (e.g. under hanging tiles/cladding or beneath ridge tiles, soffits or flashing). Some bats are found inside buildings, usually in lofts or in wall cavities. Roosts may be used by a single bat or by large numbers of bats; either way they are completely harmless.



Modern house with bat roost in eaves



Older house with bat roost behind barge boards

If the householder is aware they have a roost in their house they will probably know that they need to contact Natural England (or Countryside Council for Wales) if they plan to have any work carried out. However, many householders will not be aware that bats roost in their house.

The following signs may indicate the presence of a roost:

- Regular sightings of bats around the house – bats are often seen as they fly out of the roost around sunset
- A high pitched ‘chattering’ or squeaking sound from a roof/loft on warm summer days/evenings
- Bat droppings collecting on the ground or window sills or beneath ridge beams in a loft, or stuck on the wall, or on burglar alarms etc. (bat droppings look a bit like mouse droppings in size and shape but they are dry and crumbly and usually don’t smell).

Legal Implications of Disturbing Bats

In the UK all bats and their roosts are fully protected by law. This means it is illegal to:

- Kill, injure, or capture any bat
- Disturb any bat
- Damage, disturb or obstruct access to any place that bats use to shelter or breed (all roosts)
- Possess a bat or any parts of a bat
- Sell or advertise a bat or any part of a bat

Offences can carry a fine of up to £5000 per bat and/or six months imprisonment. Apart from a criminal record and a hefty fine, bad publicity from a prosecution is likely to be bad for business.

It is therefore important that you do not carry out any work if you know, or suspect that bats may use the building you are working on. The presence of a bat roost does not mean that you cannot do any work, but it does mean that you need to stop and contact the authorities (Natural England). They will usually issue a licence to allow works as long as they are carried out in a way that will not harm bats or their roost. This may include:

- Carrying out the work at a time of year when bats are not present
- Maintaining access points so bats can continue to use the roost (e.g. leaving small gaps in mortar)
- Using approved timber treatment chemicals
- Providing a suitable replacement roost if an existing roost has to be lost

By informing the householder and the authorities that bats are/may be present you will be protecting yourself and the householder from the risk of prosecution and helping to protect these endangered animals.

What to do if You Find Bats or Suspect Bats May Use a Building You Are Working On

Stop work immediately. Explain to the householder that you think there may be a bat roost in their house. Ask the householder to telephone one of the following numbers, or ring yourself:

Bat Conservation Trust Bat Line: 0845 1300228

South Lancashire Bat Group: 0161 764 8850

Tell them that you have found or suspect a bat roost. They will provide free advice and will usually arrange for someone to come and check for you. If there is a roost they will advise on the best way to carry out the work without breaking the law or harming the bats.

Thank you for reading this leaflet.

If you have any questions please contact South Lancashire Bat Group on: 0161 764 8850