HEREFORDSHIRE Wildlife Link

Bat *Chiroptera*

Species Action Plan

All British bats are insectivores; they navigate and forage using a sophisticated sonar strategy called "echo-location". Bats use landscape features such as hedgerows as flight lines to reach prime foraging habitats and roosting sites. In recent years due to changes in agricultural practices, development and lack of environmental awareness these features have declined.

Bat roosts are found in buildings, trees and other structures such as bridges and railway tunnels. In summer, females form maternity colonies, which can vary in size from 10-1000, depending on the species present. Whilst males tend to roost singly or in small groups. In winter months, bats hibernate in features such as disused railway tunnels, caves and disused mines; they can also be found in buildings and trees.

All bat species and their roost sites are fully protected by law. Some species move between roosts frequently which poses problems for roost protection as new sites come into use and old protected sites are abandoned. Many roost sites are destroyed through restoration of buildings, tree surgery and by lack of public awareness.

15 out of the 17 UK breeding species have been recorded in Herefordshire: common, soprano & Nathusius pipistrelle, Daubenton's, whiskered, Brandt's, Natterer's, Bechstein's, barbastelle, brown long-eared, noctule, Leisler's, serotine and greater & lesser horseshoe bats. Obtaining abundance data for all bat species is difficult so their present status is unclear. Although there has been an increase in populations of some bat species, they are still vulnerable and are generally in decline.

Threats

- Isolated and fragmented populations
- Loss of, or damage to, summer and winter roost sites
- Loss or fragmentation of feeding habitats due to changes in land use
- Inappropriate riparian management
- Loss of linear landscape or flight line features
- New developments, barn conversions and building renovations
- Modern building materials, including breathable membranes and treated timber
- Unnatural predators such as domestic cats
- Human persecution
- Intensified farming methods, pesticides, watercourse pollution reducing invertebrate and habitat diversity

Current Action

- Survey and research work using static bat detectors, traps with acoustic lures, road transects, bat box schemes (HMG)
- Provision of appropriate guidance material to the building community; builders, architects, heritage planners, Diocesan architectural committee (HC, HMG)
- National Bat Monitoring Programme; survey and awareness work (BCT, HMG)
- Training new bat surveyors / licence holders for volunteer roost visits, surveys and other licensable techniques (NE, BCT, HMG)

	Objective	Action
A	Map distribution of all bat species, prime feeding habitats, hedges, tree lines etc.	3
B	Manage key landscape elements to conserve, maintain and enhance flight lines between roosts and foraging sites	4
C	Maintain and increase opportunities for bat roosts including maternity colonies, transitional and night roosts, swarming and hibernation sites	2,4,5
D	Maintain and enhance, and possibly restore, high value feeding habitats	2
E	Ensure wildlife enhancements are incorporated into new builds via the planning process, providing additional roosting sites to alleviate pressures from existing buildings	1,2
F	Provide potential roost feature training / advice to woodland managers who manage woodlands for timber extraction	1,4,5

	Actions	Target
1	Produce advice, increase awareness to members of the public and land owners, and monitor enforcement (NE, HC and Police)	Annual
2	Maintain existing populations and increase feeding areas through the planning process (HC and NE)	Annual
3	Map bat distribution, roosting areas, prime feeding areas, important landscape features, and publish in Atlas (HMG)	2020
4	Conduct training with relevant agencies concentrating on roosts, feeding and flight line requirements (HWT, HMG)	Annual
5	Locate populations through ongoing monitoring, research, surveys and collation of HMG records	Annual

Lead Partner	HMG
Key Partners	HWT, BCT, NE, HC, Police

Image: Amy Lewis