

Bat Workers Forum Tuesday 3rd October 2023

19.00 – 21:15 Via Zoom

ACTION POINTS

1. Abby Packham to pass on question regarding PSS to Natural England for response.
2. BCT to take on board feedback regarding this event and possible other events that were raised under Item 7.3.

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The meeting was chaired by Steve Roe. Seven members of BCT staff were in attendance. Steve introduced the Forum.

Attendees present at meeting

Name	Organisation
Abby Packham	BCT
Alan Roe	Derbyshire Bat Group
Aline Denton	North Ceredigion
Amanda Brookman	Kent Bat Group
Amanda Fegan	Natural England
Amelia Reddish	
Ana Pino-Blanco	
Anastasia Reeves	
Andrew Dumbleton	Natural England
Angus Andrew	Shropshire & Montgomeryshire
Anna Campbell	Dorset bat group
Benjamin Christie	Norwich & Norfolk
Caleb Fry	Sussex Bat Group / Lizard Ecology
Cara Doyle	Natural England
Carolyn Drane	
Catherine Moore	
Christine Hipperson-Jervis	
Clare Ward	Nottinghamshire
Claudia Gebhardt	Bat Conservation Trust
Corinna Goeckeritz	National Trust for Scotland
Danica Jones	South Lancashire Bat Group
Emma Dwan	Natural England
Emma Pollard	Dorset/Consultant
Gail Armstrong	North Lancashire Bat Group
Graham Hart	Essex Bat Group
Hannah Van Hesteren	BCT
Iain Boulton	London Bat Group
Jake Heath	Norfolk and Norwich Bat group
James Porter	Brumbats
James Bellingham	Staffs Bat Group
Jane Harris	Norfolk and Norwich Bat Group
Jean Oudney	Tayside Bat Group
Jenny Singh	

Joanne	Hamilton	Northern Ireland Bat group
Joe	Nunez-Mino	Bat Conservation Trust
John	Craig	South Lancashire Bat Group
Julie	Harwood	Natural England
Karen	Adams	Natural England
Kat	MacKinnon	NatureScot
Katarina	Andersson	
Kate	Taylor	
Kate	Wickens	Aberystwyth Uni
Kayleigh	Davies	Arbtech Consulting
Kaylie	Edwards	
Kelly	Brown	North Ceredigion Bat Group
Kevin	Giles	NatureScot
Kit	Stoner	Bat Conservation Trust
Laura	Gravestock	Essex, Dorset
Laura	Holmes	Cheshire bat group
Lauren	Gibson	Durham Bat Group / Cleveland Bat Group
Leah	Williams	Clwyd Bat Group
Leo	Plevin	Cheshire Bat Group
Lil	McDermaid	BCT
Lily	Mastrodimos	
Lina	Wirén	
Linda	Pryke	Surrey BG
Lisa	Worledge	Bat Conservation Trust
Liz	Walsh	Somerset
Louise	Sherwell	Warwickshire Bat Group
Lucy	Fay	Herefordshire Mammal Group
Lynn	Whitfield	Surrey BG
M	Jackson	
Matt	Taylor	
Michelle	Walding-Kelly	Freelance
Natalie	Todman	Lothians Bat Group
Nick	Gray	Sussex Bat Group
Nick	Tomlinson	Dorset Bat Group
Odette	Robson	Suffolk Bat Group
Paul	Wadley	La Societe Guerneslaise Bat group
Peter	Proudlove	Leicestershire and Rutland BG
Rhianna	Dix	
Robert	Sookhan	London Bat Group
Ross	Baker	Surrey BG
Sam	Dyer	Natural Resources Wales
Sarah	Ross	Penny Anderson Associates Ltd
Sarah	Jarrett	Suffolk
Shirley	Thompson	Kent Bat Group
Skye	Shield	
Sophia	Davies	
Stephanie	Murphy	Sussex Bat Group
Steven	Roe	Derbyshire/BCT Trustee
Steven	Parker	South Lancashire Bat Group
Susan	Forster	Hampshire Bat Group / 4Woods Ecology Ltd

Susan	Traer	
Teresa	Sullivan	TS Consultants
Thomas	J Guerrero	
Tom	Redman	
Tracey	Jolliffe	Fife & Kinross and Clyde
Tricia	Scott	Warwickshire Bat Group

Apologies sent

Name	Organisation
Kat Walsh	Natural England
Phil Bowater	Natural England
Jan Collins	BCT
Allyson Walsh	BCT
Andy Charles	

2. Minutes and actions from last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted with no corrections. The minutes can be found on the BCT website: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/conferences-symposia/bat-workers-forum>. There were no actions taken from the BWF 2022 to provide outcomes on, as all points raised during that Forum were addressed in the priority response document included in the 2022 minutes.

3. News from Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations

- 3.1.** Katherine Walsh (Senior Mammal Specialist) provided a written update for Natural England (NE), read out by Steve Roe.

See [Appendix A](#) for the update from the Natural England species team.

A question was sent to Abby Packham via the zoom chat to seek a response from NE after the Forum, regarding their engagement with the pre-submission screening service (PSS). Please see [Appendix G](#).

- 3.1.2.** This year there was also an update from the licensing team at Natural England, provided by Phil Bowater and read out by Steve Roe.

See [Appendix B](#) for the update from Natural England licensing team.

Licensing processes have been an area of concern in previous BWFs and have been raised again this year. Two items were brought to the attention of BCT's Board of Trustees, one of which follows on from an item raised last year, concerning class licence return date and use of return data.

Phil was unable to be here at the Forum, but Amanda Fegan, also from Natural England's licensing team, gave a response. Steve thanked Amanda for joining at short notice.

To read these priorities and their responses, please see [Appendix G](#).

There were additional comments during the Forum on this item. Nick Tomlinson asked about changes to the returns process. Having to format and manually enter 100 lines of data to then be prompted to input the next 20 via a spreadsheet. Showing the capabilities are in the system to accept a spreadsheet, so why not for the first 100 lines? Amanda Fegan initially misunderstood the question, Nick clarified, and Amanda said it was really helpful to hear that and that she will feed it back to the team, acknowledging the frustration Nick had shared.

Nick suggested that NE should involve bat workers in the conversation around revising their systems, what they do and how they give feedback. This would help develop a better and closer relationship between bat workers and NE, which at the end of the day can only benefit bat conservation. Amanda agreed and said that was really useful feedback to hear, she'll pass it on to the team.

Other comments from the chat on this item can be seen in [Appendix H](#).

3.1.3. Julie Harwood (Volunteering Support Team Lead) presented an update from Natural England's Volunteering Support Team.

See [Appendix C](#) for the update from the Natural England VBRV support team.

There were two items raised prior to the Forum for the attention of the VBRV team, focusing on VBRV retention, recruitment and engagement.

To read these priorities and their responses, please see [Appendix G](#).

Steve Parker added a comment to the chat during Julie's response to the item raised by South Lancashire Bat Group (SLBG) to say the SLBG issue related to licence returns was before the new system (which Julie refers to in her response).

There were additional comments during the Forum on this item. Ross Baker and Lynn Whitfield asked if NE plans to pay for titre tests. Julie confirmed that is correct, as part of the vaccination booster process.

Steve Parker asked about reasons to handle bats: You mentioned 2 reasons to handle bats - welfare and ID, but it can be very helpful to show the owner one of their bats. Will this still be acceptable?

Julie responded: Under the class licence, VBRVs are not permitted to remove for educational purposes. However, we do acknowledge that if handling for one of those two permitted reasons, that using that opportunity to give reassurance is acceptable.

Gail Armstrong commented that showing to the householder used to be the main purpose of learning how to use a handheld net. Steve highlighted that the licence includes taking bats and use static handheld nets. Julie confirmed this, but added it says not for education. There would be opportunities under the realms of what is licensed, but it is not expected that they are handled specifically for education or reassurance purpose.

More comments from the chat on this item can be seen in [Appendix H](#).

On leaving the meeting, Julie posted in the chat to invite anyone present who would like to contribute ideas, feedback and/or suggestions for the VBRV recruitment project to contact the team. Hannah Van Hesteren shared the contact email for the Volunteer Support Team in the chat: batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk.

- 3.2.** Sam Dyer presented an update for Natural Resources Wales. Sam can be contacted on sam.dyer@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.

See [Appendix D](#) for the written update from Natural Resources Wales.

- 3.3.** Kevin Giles provided an update for NatureScot. Kevin can be reached for any questions on Kevin.Giles@nature.scot.

See [Appendix E](#) for the written update from NatureScot.

- 3.4.** Steve Roe explained we don't have an update from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to share, but invited questions or comments from the attendees as BCT would continue to try to establish contact. No items were raised. To see a comment shared by a Northern Ireland Bat Group member, see [Appendix H](#).

4. News from BCT

Kit Stoner (BCT CEO) greeted the attendees and encouraged her colleagues to be succinct as the meeting was running behind schedule. Various BCT staff then gave updates on BCT work areas, the table below showing the sections of the BCT update and the BCT staff member that presented them.

Engaging with UK Parliaments	Lil McDermaid
Biodiversity: Wildlife Crime, Built Environment and Woodlands	Lisa Worledge
Science & Monitoring Projects	Kit Stoner
Conservation projects	Lisa Worledge
Conferences and Training	Kit Stoner
Helpline	Hannah van Hesteren
Bats and Health	Lisa Worledge
Membership, Communications and Education	Joe Nunez-Mino

See [Appendix F](#) for full written update from BCT including links.

In the zoom chat, Jane Harris sought clarification on the process of testing rehabilitated bats for COVID prior to release. Lisa Worledge responded: "APHA send out sampling kits. Droppings are collected over a number of days, then submitted to APHA, where they are tested promptly. I'm in touch with APHA and hoping to have more details about this that we can share via our website".

Steve Roe thanked the BCT staff for the update and turned to address some of the priorities that had been raised since the last Forum which had been addressed by BCT staff. With timing in

mind, not all priorities and their responses were presented during the Forum. Attendees were assured that all items can be found in the minutes, please see [Appendix G](#).

Relating to a priority raised that there are not enough bat carers, Steve Parker and Gail Armstrong offered their group's assistance in providing training. Please see [Appendix H](#) for these comments.

Other comments from the chat can be seen in [Appendix H](#).

5. Matters arising regionally/locally

Steve Roe presented more queries that were raised prior to the Forum with a more region-specific focus. Including items on grey long-eared bat conservation, LPAs in Devon and lack of data in Argyll & Bute, and Dunbartonshire.

To read these priorities and their responses, please see [Appendix G](#).

No other matters were raised during this item.

6. Pete Guest Award 2023 result

Joe Nunez-Mino presented this item.

This award is given in memory of Pete Guest who was an inspirational figure in the bat conservation movement for more than 20 years. Each year, the bat world is invited to nominate individuals who have made an outstanding practical contribution to bat conservation. The criteria for the award include: dedication, innovation, enthusiasm and inspiration in making a difference, both to bats and to people, helping make BCT's vision become a reality.

The winner for 2023 was initially announced at the National Conference in September 2023. This was shared again at this free-to-attend event. There were three nominees that received over 170 votes between them. The winner was Steve Roe of the Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group. Joe said: "Huge congratulations, Steve. You so deserve it. Thank you so much for all the tireless work that you do." Joe also congratulated the other nominees, Maggie Brown and Martyn Phillis. Additional comments were made in the zoom chat, see these in [Appendix H](#).

Steve Roe gave an acceptance speech, starting by congratulating Maggie and Martyn, and paying tribute to their work. Steve's speech touched on what he had achieved over the years, thanking bat workers for being so welcoming and supportive, and finished with the trailer for BatChat season 5 – the podcast he produces and presents.

Abby Packham gave the opportunity to give feedback on how the award is administered, reminding attendees that BCT runs the award but its criteria and processes are decided by them.

7. Any other business

The following additional items were raised:

- 7.1.** Lisa Worledge: “In investigating issues raised with an item on Spring Watch earlier this year, I found out that the guidance for bat box checking was rather out of date (1993). I didn't know just how old 'current' guidance that is referenced from licences was. Basically, NE refer to the Bat Workers Manual, but for bat box checking that in turn refers out to guidance from 1991 (although that guidance was updated in 1993). It was only in looking into the issues with the footage that I realised that the BWM didn't give specific guidance.

The problem we've had in the past in trying to produce revised bat box guidance at BCT is about capacity and funding, alongside other more urgent priorities (this is the first methods issue in relation to bat box checks I've been made aware of in some years). I can make no promises in terms of what we can achieve but I am interested in whether people feel this is something BCT should be looking at?”

Nick Tomlinson: “Yes, I think it is. We all saw that [the tv show] and there was quite a lot of reaction about it. Some things that I see on social media about bat boxes scare me slightly. Considering how many people are involved with bat boxes, and for some it's the way they first engage with bats, some more up to date guidance on how bat box checks might be undertaken would be really useful.”

- 7.2.** Lisa Worledge (taking off her BCT hat and swapping to her British Islands Bats hat). Tina Wiffen and I are in the final stages of stitching together the 16 articles that make up British Islands Bats Volume Four. Look out for publication next week! Note that although BCT generously host the publication on their website, this publication is independent of BCT with Tina and I editing in our spare time (as most of the contributors do with their writing as well). Do email britishislandsbats@gmail.com if you want to be notified when it's published or keep an eye out on social media. And please do get in touch if you'd like to contribute something to Volume Five in 2024 (which will hopefully be published earlier in the year!)

- 7.3.** Gail Armstrong raised an item about opportunities to chat throughout the year. Gail said that whilst it was ok for her that the event overran, it's clear that once a year isn't enough, can we do it more often? Abby Packham liked the idea, but was unsure if updates from SNCOs would be able to be secured more frequently. Gail said it's also the chance to chat about things that are bothering us, and share experiences that is valuable. She feels quite isolated now as a roost visitor, as there are no longer meetings.

Abby asked whether online is a suitable medium for that, or whether it was in-person conversations that were most missed. Gail said that as a roost visitor, there used to be meet ups a couple of times a year at the regional office, which kept them motivated. Nick Tomlinson responded to echo Gail comments and to highlight the advantages of online meetings. A more frequent get-together of bat workers from around the country, with or without the SNCOs, would be fantastic.

Steve Parker commented that the bat care mingles have worked quite well for non-specific chat. Abby agreed, saying there are a number of formats BCT use for various events that we can look into using to create more opportunity for discussion.

Steve Roe and Abby Packham thanked everyone for attending, particularly as it was a later finish than expected. Attendees used the Zoom chat function to say thank you for the meeting and goodbye.

Appendices

Provided on the following pages are the updates from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations and BCT given during the meeting; appendices A – F.

During booking for the Bat Workers Forum, there was an opportunity to raise any priorities or concerns for consideration. These, along with priorities raised via conferences in the last year, were collated and responses gathered from relevant BCT staff and external organisations where appropriate. A document detailing the priorities and responses can be found in Appendix G.

The Bat Workers Forum was held on zoom, and attendees made use of the chat function. Comments/discussions from the chat can be seen in Appendix H.

Please use the interactive contents list below to navigate to a particular appendix.

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APPENDIX A. Update from Natural England Species Team

1. PhD's

NE is a collaborative partner, with Exeter University and the BCT on a PhD which started in autumn 2021 on 'Valuing ecosystem services provided by UK bats under climate change'.

NE is part funding a PhD with the UWE, Bristol on 'Developing a strategic model for bat conservation legislation and planning – applications of ecological modelling, mapping and spatial ecology for horseshoe bats in Somerset, England.

2. Other research

NE is funding the BCT who are working with QMU to investigate the feasibility of using airborne DNA to indicate the presence of bat species in a woodland context.

NE is part funding a project working with BCT and the University of Exeter which is using genomic DNA extracted from bat droppings to ascertain the degree of historic decline which may have occurred in the Barbastelle bat and Common pipistrelle populations.

3. Other Projects

NE is supporting the BCT project, 'Connecting landscapes and people in climate change', to increase landowner knowledge about regenerative farming concepts and techniques.

4. Publications

NE is working with a range of partners to produce Favourable Conservation Status definitions for a number of bat species.

NE has worked with the BCT and a range of partner organisations/stakeholders to update the Bat Survey Good Practice Guidelines for Professional Ecologists.

NE has worked with CIEEM and a range of partner organisations/stakeholders to update the Bat Mitigation Guidelines.

NE is working with the BCT and other partners to provide advice for roofing and re-roofing bat roosts. This advice covers specific issues which relate to Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membranes. Please refer to BCT's website for the latest updates and NE's licensing pages.

APPENDIX B. Update from Natural England Licensing Team

In a typical year, Natural England issues about 15,000 licences for around 175 different species. It has been another busy year and, to date, we have received approximately 700 full 'EPS-MIT' bat mitigation licence applications, 500 BMCL Site Registrations and 75 science and conservation 'Sci-Con' project licence applications. There have also been approximately 300 Bat Earned Recognition Site Registrations.

We recognise there have been some delays and issues associated with the processing and assessment of Bat Sci-Con 'project' licence applications/renewals in particular. As a result, we have been reviewing our assessment processes and increasing staff training in this area. Alongside these day-to-day improvements, we are also planning to comprehensively review this area of licensing, including class survey licences, in 2024/25.

We remain committed to improving the service that we provide and, whilst improvements take time to bear fruit, we are investing heavily in training our staff, updating systems and developing new approaches. We hope that licence users are starting to see some of the benefits of these measures and want to thank them for their continued patience and any constructive feedback they have provided.

APPENDIX C. Update from Natural England Volunteering Support Team

We'd like to start by saying thank you to all the VBRVs for your continued commitment to the activities that you carry out on behalf of Natural England under the Advice Service Contract. The volunteering support team are always blown away by your dedication and Natural England recognises and appreciates the time and effort that you make on a voluntary basis.

Changes to the Volunteer Support Team. We have a new support advisor called Adeline Robinson, an introduction can be found in the Spring Batline. Martin O'Loughlin who has been our Health and Safety Lead within the team, has recently been promoted to Lead Advisor. We are currently recruiting a replacement for Martin's role.

Rabies vaccinations. VBRVs will have received an email regarding this. The requirement for the rabies vaccination has been withdrawn from this role by Natural England. Some may be aware, through previous communications in BatLine, that the Volunteering Support Team have been working with our Natural England Health and Safety advisors in challenging this requirement.

Natural England acknowledges that VBRVs may need to handle bats in certain circumstances, for example, bat identification and welfare. Withdrawal of the requirement is based on the agreement that handling bats as part of the VBRV activity does not constitute 'regular handling', and therefore doesn't meet the definitions set out in the [UKHSA's guidance for when the vaccination is required](#).

We acknowledge that some volunteers may wish to continue to protect themselves while active in the VBRV role by getting newly vaccinated or continuing to maintain their rabies booster vaccinations. Natural England will support this by reimbursing any cost to them via VBRV expenses. We will not be able to reimburse VBRVs who are working with bats in a professional capacity (e.g. employed/self-employed ecological consultants).

The Volunteering Support Team will start work making volunteers currently inactive due to an outdated rabies vaccination active soon and will inform BCT's Helpline of any changes to your active status. Please bear with us and the Helpline whilst we update our documentation, policies and all relevant VBRV information. If you have any questions or comments, or would like to check your volunteer status, please contact the Volunteering Support Team: batvolunteers@bats.org.uk.

Feedback. We do want to receive your feedback, and do use it to develop and improve our ways of working, the support that we provide to VBRVs and the BCT. For example we will now start to send out requests for feedback following the resignation or no responses from a VBRV following a concern raised for discussion at the Bat Workers Forum by the South Lancashire Bat Group.

APPENDIX D. Natural Resources Wales Update

For all follow up queries please email: sam.dyer@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

- Natur am Byth; NRW is the lead partner in this project, which is similar to the 'Back from the Brink' project in England and 'Species on the Edge' in Scotland. BCT and VWT are key project partners and projects include focus on barbastelle and lesser horseshoe. The partnership has budgeted total project costs at £8m. The Project has now secured delivery phase funding, with jobs currently being recruited for by VWT and BCT, and so we look forward to some exiting working kicking off in the near future.
- Section 7 lists of priority species in Wales are being reviewed by Welsh Government and are expected to be published in the near future.
- Article 17 reporting under the Habitats Directive, will be replaced by what is likely to be known as the Habitats Regulations 9a report. Work is due to commence shortly, and part of that process may involve a data call to a number of organisations. This statutory report will be produced every six years. On behalf of Welsh Government, it is due for publication 31st January 2026. Many thanks to all of you who take part in NBMP surveys and submit your records to LERCS as this data forms some of the main resources when compiling such reports.
- NBMP and LERC data will also be used as part of the 30x30 project where we will be reviewing all SSSIs and drawing up lists of existing sites which need to be amended, and new qualifying candidate sites to be designated.
- This year a new SSSI has been designated in Pembrokeshire for hibernating greater horseshoes: Scoveston Fort.
- The Agriculture (Wales) Bill amends the Forestry Act 1967, giving NRW the power to add environmental conditions to tree felling licences, and enabling NRW to amend, suspend and revoke licences. This will now provide us more power to safeguard protected species within forestry operations. To support its implementation we are overhauling the felling licence application process with regard to species, and producing new guidance documents for protected species in woodland. All elements will be published in early 2024.
- A project reviewing lesser horseshoe maternity roosts in North Wales has concluded; it has identified widescale improvement works required and many sites. Phase two of this project is in progress to look at mechanisms to initiate required works on failing sites.
- NRW introduced charging for certain licence types on 1st July this year. This mainly impacts development licences and commercial survey licences. Conservation licences, survey Licences for voluntary work and small scale/domestic licences may be exempt; please check NRW website for more information on waiver categories.

Continuing work:

- NRW continue to work closely with the Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membranes Steering Group to progress this matter.
- NRW continue to take an active role in Eurobats.
- NRW have been actively involved with production of BCT's Survey Guidelines and CIEEM's Mitigation Guidelines, and look forward to being part of the upcoming night vision aids guidelines.

APPENDIX E. NatureScot Update

Kevin Giles is the Team Leader for NatureScot's (NS) Bats-in-Houses (BiH) team and has up to 30 bat workers covering the whole of Scotland, responding to requests for help from primary residence householders and tenants with bat 'problems'. The bat workers work on a call-out basis following a trigger by the telephone person on the Helpline. Kevin is part of the Licensing Team in NS but works full time on BiH from April until October, assisted by a part-time Licensing Officer.

The BiH Team have remained extremely busy and six of our bat workers have been continuing to take shifts on the Bat Helpline, taking calls and giving advice, between 9am and 3pm, for which I thank them very much. Outside of these hours, I answer calls and there is voicemail for when the phone is not manned, which is available 24 hours a day, and is checked every time a message is left as we get an email notification through our Teams system.

This year, between April and September, there have been 400 calls to the Helpline, up 60% on the 250 received in 2022 resulting in 123 visits being requested, an increase of 38% from last year where there were 89 visits requested. This year saw a very different pattern of visits with less in the West of Scotland, a steady requirement in Southern Scotland but with a vastly increased number in the Central Belt and Northern Scotland, including Skye and Lewis. This seems to show that roosts are moving northwards but this will be examined and discussed over the next few months to establish if there is a pattern forming. We do see patterns of roosts being excluded and moving on to the next house in some villages.

The bat workers have seen an increase in roost sizes with several roosts having been in excess of 1,000 common or soprano pipistrelles, mainly across the Central Belt. There have not been many roosts of other species although a few brown long-eared roosts were found and fortunately were kept by the householders, as my bat workers always try and persuade the householders to retain the roost, even introducing them to any grounded/lost bat inside the house.

The visits have resulted in the exclusion of bats at 74 sites, which is on par with previous years, resulting in approx. 7,800 bats being displaced, which equates to 107 per site on average (range 1 - 1000 bats). Licences and advice emails are taking approximately 1-2 weeks to issue, and from enquiry to issuance is between 2 to 4 weeks which keeps the householders very happy.

We are currently running with only 86% workforce (26), mainly due to budgetary constraints, however, we are exploring the possibility of recruiting further bat workers to help to lighten the workload for our incumbent bat workers.

In February this year, we revived the Bat Workers Training Day which was enthusiastically attended by all the bat workers. We had some very interesting and useful presentations and discussions. A further Training Day is planned for Stirling on Leap Years Day in 2024 so, you never know, I may be asking for speakers!

APPENDIX F. BCT Update for Bat Workers Forum

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The aim of this update is to provide an overview of some of BCT's current projects and activities that are relevant to bat groups, volunteers, and bat workers.

1. Engaging with UK Parliaments

BCT continues to actively influence policy across three (UK Govt, Scotland, and Wales) of the four legislatures in the UK through our involvement on the relevant working groups of the country Links (Wildlife & Countryside Link (WCL), Wales Environment Link (WEL) and Scottish Environment Link (SEL)), Greener UK and the Better Planning Coalition.

In England, we have three MP species champions for the common pipistrelle, noctule and brown long-eared bat; in Wales there is one species champion in the Welsh Assembly for the lesser horseshoe; and in Scotland we currently have six nature champions.

The Levelling Up Bill has progressed since the last Forum and is nearing its last stages. As well as our previous concerns around the extensive powers being taken by the Government, additional clauses were proposed in the late stages of the Bill that could have undermined the Habitats Regulations regarding appropriate assessment and nutrient neutrality. These amendments were thankfully defeated but we will continue to monitor the situation in case other harmful actions are proposed and continue supporting positive amendments to improve the nature in protected landscapes.

Thank you to those of you who have written to your local representatives in the last year about the Retained EU Law Act, which passed in June. Unfortunately, the environmental non-regression clauses we had hoped for were not included and we are involved in sector efforts to scrutinise use of the powers of the Act going forward.

Other key areas of work continue to be around environmental targets, Biodiversity Net Gain, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, planning policy, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Environmental Land Management Schemes and more. We have responded to more than 15 consultations so far this year, across the UK and in response to lots of different organisations, on topics like Permitted Development Rights, tree felling and hedges.

2. Biodiversity: Wildlife Crime, Built Environment and Woodlands

Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines. We are delighted to announce that the 4th edition of these guidelines is now available on the [BCT website as a non-printable pdf](#) and hard copies are available to pre-order from NHBS, with a 20% discount for BCT members. Many thanks to all who worked on the guidelines with us, special thanks to the Technical Review Board and to our gold sponsor, Wildlife Acoustics, and to all of our six silver sponsors. We will shortly

release a webinar detailing the key changes made for this edition; you can register your interest in that [here](#).

Guidance for Bat Surveys with Night Vision Aids. Following the publication of Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th edition, BCT are setting up a working group to further develop more detailed guidelines for bat surveys with night vision aids, including thermal imaging and infrared cameras. The working group will attend a kick-off meeting in autumn 2023 and develop the guidelines through a series of meetings in late 2023 and 2024. We have set up a [public consultation](#) to collect information on current practices and desires/expectations from practitioners for new guidelines on this topic. **The intended audience is anyone who works with night vision aids for bat surveys. The consultation will take approximately 10 minutes to respond to. The consultation will close on 31st October 2023.** Please contact Jan Collins (jcollins@bats.org.uk) if you have extensive experience with both thermal imaging and infrared and would like to contribute to the production of the guidance.

Bat Mitigation. CIEEM's [UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines](#), which BCT contributed to as part of the Advisory Board, are now available.

Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning Project – Wildlife Assessment Check. The [Wildlife Assessment Check](#) (WAC) was a product of the Partnership for Biodiversity in Planning Project, which ran from 2015-2020 funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, involving organisations from the conservation, biodiversity data, planning and development sectors. The WAC is an interactive trigger list, which asks a series of questions about proposals to direct them to commission an ecologist where relevant and provides a list of designated sites and species that may need to be considered before submitting a planning application. The tool was aimed at small and medium-sized developers with a view to triggering ecological input early in development projects, and consider biodiversity in planning. We are in the process of securing funding for ongoing IT support and routine updates to this tool.

Bat Earned Recognition Project. The new approach to bat mitigation licensing developed in partnership between Natural England, BCT and CIEEM – has now been through two phases of trial, with the 'Beta' accreditation round coming towards an end. To date there are 80 ER Consultants accredited, and over 530 Site Registrations have been submitted. 100% of ER Consultants responding to the last survey felt optimistic about ER; giving quicker decisions, increased certainty and increased flexibility as reasons why. ER is now being rolled out as 'business as usual', with the intention of becoming the primary route for bat mitigation licences in the next few years. A further round of accreditation is planned for 2024. Robust assessment for accreditation – and the benefits that brings - will always be a significant investment in time. However the Partnership recognise that we can still make improvements and are working on making the process more efficient in future. We would encourage anyone who may consider applying for ER Accreditation to plan ahead by ensuring that you are keeping up your CPD, and keeping your own written records of your work.

Wildlife Crime. There were 84 police bat related incidents recorded by the project in 2022. This figure of 84 incidents is notable because it is much lower than previous years. The project commissioned the National Wildlife Crime Unit to Review police engagement and recording of police incidents to establish if this figure was reflective of the national policing picture. Nineteen constabularies responded to the data request; an additional 80 incidents were identified, giving a

combined total of 164 incidents relating to bats for 2022. The review concluded it is likely that the true incident figure is higher due to the limited response as there are some 43 forces in England and Wales alone. BCT and the National Priority Delivery Group for bat crime will be looking to develop solutions on the way incident data is captured for statistical analysis, including from Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, until wildlife crime is recordable and notifiable thus providing a more accurate picture for targeted intelligence-led responses against such offences.

Property developers fined for destroying bat roosts in Monmouthshire:

PC1154 Mark Powell, a Natural Resources Wales (NRW) seconded Police officer, successfully investigated a housing development company based largely within Monmouthshire. The company directors carried out a renovation of a former primary school and the creation of two 'new build' houses at the location. However, whilst doing so they failed to implement the conditions of a European Protected Species Licence issued by NRW in respect of bats known to be present on the site. Pleading guilty on behalf of the parent construction company, they were fined over £7,400. The officer stated, "their fines should stand as a warning to other developers in Wales who carry out work without first ensuring that the agreed licence conditions are followed and that all works support and protect all endangered species".

Roost Website & Roost Awards. The [Roost webpages](#) comprise of two main areas, the first being case studies showcasing bat roost mitigation and monitoring work with an annual award for best practice. The Roost Award 2023 was announced at the National Bat Conference, the winner was Vincent Wildlife Trust for [High Marks Barn SSSI](#) and collected by Daniel Hargreaves on behalf of the project team. Please consider any case studies that could be uploaded over winter to share best practice and lessons learned to further our collective knowledge. The next awards will run in 2025.

The second part of Roost is what we do with information we collect from research such as the Mitigation Project or industry feedback. We use this data to improve roosting opportunities for bats through our **Roost Partnership scheme**. This is a unique conservation-led built environment scheme between BCT and bat box/access product manufacturers; working together to provide bat conservation features that can be incorporated onto and into buildings and other structures, that are designed with the latest best practice guidance and research knowledge in mind. The Roost Partnership does not endorse particular products but rather promotes the important working relationship between BCT and Partners in a common goal of improving roosting opportunities for bats within our built environment. The Roost Partnership also acts as an information sharing hub used to gather feedback from industry professionals to constantly improve our understanding of bat roosting requirements. Our first partner is Green&Blue, who are now owned by Wildcare but retain this branding. Their BatBlock is made from 75% recycled materials and designed with a bat ecologist. Our second partner Just Lead, manufacturing lead bat access tiles and tubes, both honed with BCT's input. [Details of both Partners and links to buy their products can be found here](#). Jo Ferguson, BCT's Built Environment Manager, is in discussion with current partners about new products and recently signed new partner Manthorpe Building Supplies (who developed the RSPB swift brick) to develop a brand new bat roosting product, being field tested now for release in 2024 so watch this space!

Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membranes (NBCRMs). A steering group formed of BCT, SNCOs, academics from Reading and Leeds Universities, (and since 2021) Stacey Waring and roofing membrane manufacturer TLX, meet on a regular basis on the subject of bat entanglement and NBCRMs. Outputs include the independent testing methodology for snagging propensity in NBCRMs published in 2020, and publicising of this work throughout the industry, e.g. articles in Roofing

Today. The background to this issue, including the SNCOs current position and an FAQ can be all found on the [BCT webpage for NBCRMs](#). Please note, although BCT facilitate the steering group and are currently hosting this guidance we are not involved in assessing or approving NBCRMs, this is a technical and regulatory issue and therefore the appropriate guidance should be sought through the contact details on the BCT webpage for SNCOs and technical information.

Bats and Lighting. Jo Ferguson, BCT's Built Environment Manager, chairs the steering group on bats and lighting made up of lighting engineers and designers, and ecologists well versed in lighting research. The new guidance note, GN 08/23, developed by the group was published in August 2023, including case studies and a stronger emphasis on landscape scale planning. The free to download guidance can be found on the BCT webpage, along with the proceedings from a preview event that outlines major changes by the experts that produced it. We recommend these are read in conjunction with one another: <https://bit.ly/3PR3h3J>.

Bat Roost Tree Tag Scheme (BRTTS). We launched the BRTTS over a year ago because woodland owners, managers, and contractors on the ground often have difficulty locating and distinguishing trees that have been identified as a bat roost. The primary purpose of the BRTTS is to ensure trees containing confirmed bat roosts are easily identifiable, so when a woodland operative sees a tag and their actions may impact the tree, they know to seek appropriate advice before proceeding. So far over 300 tags have been sold. This will give a significantly increased level of protection for bat roosts in trees. [Tags can be ordered via BCT website](#).

Bechstein's bat – finding its limits project. Radiotracking data from Somerset was analysed and maps were provided to Paul Kennedy for his SW Conference talk about the 2022 radiotracking fieldwork, titled 'White Noise in the Woods – Chasing Bechstein's Bats'. Our findings were also shared with Swell Wood RSPB reserve staff. We planned to continue to improve our understanding of Bechstein's use of atypical landscape with fieldwork in late summer in Dorset, but unfortunately the surveys were rained off after the first night of trapping. Fieldwork will now focus on the pre parturition period during May next year.

Bat Habitat Keys. As of 17th April 2023, Henry Andrews very generously handed over the ongoing management of the [Bat Tree Habitat Key \(BTHK\)](#) and the [Bat Rock Habitat Key \(BRHK\)](#) to BCT. We are very grateful to Henry for trusting that we are the right organisation to take the projects forwards. We will be making changes to the website, and we plan to work with users of both projects to further develop them in due course. In the meantime, please do continue to submit records to us with supporting videos/photos. We will verify and process records submitted on a monthly basis following the pre-existing protocol. As well as the databases, there is a wealth of reference resources on the BTHK and BRHK websites including the recent Bat Prey Species Associations 2022 report, so do have a look under the Reference tab. BCT would like to thank Henry for all of his hard work and expertise in developing these projects and for the contribution they have made to bat conservation.

3. Science & Monitoring Projects

[NBMP Annual Report 2022](#) was published in May 2023.

NBMP Summer Surveys. In 2021 and 2022, summer survey participation levels were recovering after greatly reduced participation in 2020 due to Covid restrictions, though were not yet back to pre-Covid levels. Based on current data returns in 2023, it is likely that we will at least match the number

of sites surveyed in 2022 for the core summer surveys (Roost Count, Field Survey and Waterway Survey). There is good reason to believe that the numbers of sites surveyed will exceed the numbers for 2022 based on comparing data returns by the date of writing (25th September 2023) with data returns by the same date in 2022 (Roost Count: 646 sites in 2023 compared with 544 in 2022; Field Survey: 177 in 2023, 164 in 2022) Waterway Survey: 260 in 2023, 210 in 2022).

The Sunset Survey has again proved popular with 262 volunteers carrying out 762 surveys (as of 20th Sept 2023). The number of volunteers is currently quite a bit lower than the 349 who carried out surveys in 2022, but the number of surveys exceeds the figure of 754 in 2022. The survey officially continues until the end of October.

NBMP Hibernation Surveys. Surveys went ahead again in winter 2022/23 after being reinstated in winter 2021/22 following suspension of the survey in winter 2020/21 due the COVID-19 pandemic. Since winter 2021/22 surveyors have been asked to follow IUCN guidance on working with bats in close contact or proximity. The IUCN risk epidemiological risk assessment has been augmented by a further risk assessment from BCT based on the size of each site and the number of surveyors required to safely and effectively survey the site. In winter 2021/22, we received data from only 294 sites (compared with 516 sites in winter 2019/20), indicating that at many sites the risk assessments indicated a high potential risk of passing COVID-19 on to bats. For winter 2022/23, we have received data from 422 so far, indicating that the risk assessments came out more positively for enabling surveys to go ahead at a greater number of sites. If you managed to carry out hibernation surveys last winter and have yet to submit your data, we would be grateful if you could input your results as soon as convenient at <https://nbmp.bats.org.uk/Surveys.aspx> or contact us at nbmp@bats.org.uk.

National Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project. This project was also suspended during 2020 and 2021 following IUCN BSG guidance on trapping surveys. In 2022 the project licence did not arrive in time for the spring surveys, so only a limited number of late summer/autumn trapping surveys were able to go ahead. The project licence application for 2023 was submitted in January of this year but unfortunately was not granted due to NE tightening up the licensing of projects that cover multiple sites. This led to severe delays in the processing of licence applications this year which meant there wasn't time to submit a revised application. We are currently reviewing how we take forward this project in 2024 and beyond.

The Scottish Nathusius' Pipistrelle Project is the Scottish part of the national project. During 2022 and 2023 bat groups around Scotland have been undertaking static detector surveys for Nathusius' pipistrelle. In 2023, at least two bat groups also started trapping surveys, which are planned to continue during the 2024 season.

NBMP Bat Detector Workshops. We ran a mix of in-person and online NBMP workshop sessions this year; 20 workshops (10 in-person) for at least 438 individual attendees (many attendees attended more than one workshop, giving a total of 533 workshop attendances).

Forest Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) Surveys: Building on work started in previous years we continue with our Passive Acoustic Monitoring in woodlands with Forestry England, Forest Research and NE, using the BCT's sound classification system. Funded by NCEA and working closely with Forest Research, long term monitoring across National Forest Inventory Sites started this year.

Airborne DNA: Airborne DNA offers great potential for monitoring bat species occupancy, particularly for species that are challenging to survey acoustically. In 2020, BCT collaborated with

NatureMetrics to test the use of airborne DNA sampling for detecting bat species presence in churches. In 2021, we collaborated with Dr Joanne Littlefair at Queen Mary University London to test the use of airborne DNA sampling in bat hibernacula. This summer, with funding from Natural England, we are again collaborating with Dr Littlefair to identify a set of functional primer assays for UK bat species and establish the sampling duration needed to detect an airborne DNA signal from a target bat species at increasing distances from a roost in woodland.

NightWatch. NightWatch is a free, inclusive, tech-enabled night-time biodiversity survey open to all regardless of background, experience, or physical ability. The project is funded by the Esmée Fairburn Foundation, JNCC, the Ernest Kleinworth Trust and the Chapman Charitable Trust. AudioMoths are loaned to NightWatchers to place in their window, garden or local green space, and sound recordings were classified using BCT's AI Sound Classification System (SCS). NightWatchers also undertook a manual survey for approximately an hour after sunset to record other nocturnal species they see or hear, which has been developed in collaboration with PTES. It has the dual aims of collecting robust, locally focused biodiversity data, while at the same time engaging a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds and abilities.

During the first two survey seasons, we engaged 456 participants, of which approx. 24% were ethnic minority participants. We have found that events help us to engage best with different community groups. In 2023, we have had at least 243 individual surveys take place across the United Kingdom via our [Survey Portal](#), and another 30 take place at different sites through our '*NightWatch Influencer Network*'. We also expanded our engagement activities into new cities such as Nottingham and Birmingham. Finally, we launched our '[Guide to Nighttime Wildlife](#)', an online resource to help people understand the ways in which they can make a difference!

British Bat Survey (BBats): BBatS is a structured citizen science survey that aims to use passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) to plug gaps in monitoring and tackle underrepresentation in bat trends. In 2022 a nationwide pilot had 90 surveys take place including repeated sites and some NBMP Field Survey sites. In 2023, we had 74 surveys take place, booked via BCT's [survey portal](#), which have mainly been repeat sites from last year. Next year it will be officially launched as part of the NBMP and will follow a stratified sampling method. This means you will be able to select a site based on a 1km grid square, and squares will be available based on the habitats in the area with a focus underrepresented habitats. BBatS will provide additional vital evidence to produce trends on bat species that have been previously difficult to monitor via existing schemes.

BCT's Sound Classification System (SCS): The SCS is an auto-identification system hosted in Amazon Web Services (AWS) for uploading, processing, classifying, and reporting on acoustic data. It underpins all our passive acoustic monitoring work at BCT, including projects such as Species on the Edge and Woodland Hope. We are currently undergoing a major redevelopment of the SCS with an external AWS developer to streamline the system and the way data is processed. We have launched the next iteration of the system and are currently testing it with data from this year's field season. Further system developments including improving data upload, changes to the system architecture and the generation of automated reports are planned for the rest of the financial year, where funding allows.

Kate Barlow Award. The 2023 winner is Oliver Aylen for his project 'Arid zone bats resource availability and predation risk surrounding fenced conservation reserves'. Since European colonization, Australia has been altered by land-use change, the introduction of feral herbivores and predators, and the removal of native predators. This has had multiple impacts on native bat

populations, including predation of bats by cats, and changes to vegetation structure because of increased herbivory which may reduce insect abundance and recruitment of roost trees. Fenced reserves are an increasingly used conservation tool to protect native/threatened nonvolant species in Australia, and globally. Oliver's project will investigate whether fenced reserves reduce bat predation, harbour increased food resources and/or roost sites. To read more about Oliver's project or details and final reports of other Kate Barlow award winners, see: <https://bit.ly/3Dm7EwV>.

4. Conservation Projects

Bats in Churches Partnership Project (BiC). The project is coming to an end in November 2023. Work is currently underway to evaluate and share learnings from the project. In September the project held a celebration event to mark the occasion and share case studies and findings. BiC will leave a host of legacy resources, available from the website: www.batsinchurches.org.uk.

The project has carried out capital works at 31 churches, plus provided heritage specific interventions (e.g. bespoke covers or cabinets for important monuments) at 7 churches, and in total 54 churches had full ecological surveys and management plans. Citizen science work included records from 753 churches. The findings are currently being written for a final report and manuscript which we hope to publish in an open access journal. Key findings have already been shared with the volunteers and at the regional bat conferences in 2022/2023. However, during the summer of 2023, we have continued to share equipment with 37 churches and carry out sound analysis to provide churches with information on the bats species using their church. Over the course of the project over 1,800 participants have attended training events, from cleaning workshops focused on conserving heritage, to bat survey techniques to best practice when working with churches. The events and activities run by the project have directly engaged over 20,000 people across England.

Species on the Edge (SotE). The Rethink Nature partnership* along with NatureScot, have developed a multi-year project with funding provided by National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) for their SotE project. This project in Scotland presents a new way of working, enhancing collaboration between organisations through multi-species work plans delivered by a shared resource. Nurturing collaborations with communities, SotE will safeguard a suite of nationally and internationally important species, encourage new skills, inspire and re-connect people with nature to foster an inter-dependency of community and species conservation action. In June 2022, the partnership was informed by NLHF that they had been successful in the bid for funding of the delivery stage of this programme. The four-and-a-half year programme will support seven project areas, from the Solway to Shetland and from the East Coast to the Outer Hebrides. There will be consideration for bats across the piece but with a specific focus on Skye.

Our Project Officer Cathryn Baillie started on Skye in January 2023 and has already worked with several landowners to carry out bat monitoring work including monitoring at over 20 locations, from NBMP surveys to passive acoustic surveys. She has delivered six engagement events and several bat survey training sessions. We've also worked closely with other partners, helping moth surveys on Skye, and facilitating bat survey work in other project locations. Over the autumn/winter, the programme will be forming a crofting advisory group and a programme youth panel to help shape and co-design some of the programme delivery.

Natur am Byth. This partnership project has the same ethos as Back from the Brink and Species on the Edge and will see a collaboration across a number of areas in Wales with a focus on species

recovery but also on community involvement. The partners comprise the Rethink Nature Partnership*, alongside the Marine Conservation Society, Vincent Wildlife Trust and Natural Resources Wales. BCT has a key focus on the lesser horseshoe bats on the Gower and the potential isolation they face due to the urban infrastructure, especially lighting, that forms so much of the landward boundary with the rest of Wales. In June 2023, we received the great news that Natur am Byth has received funding to begin the delivery phase. BCT, along with project partners are currently recruiting Project Officers.

*The Rethink Nature Partnership is a group of leading species conservation organisations working together to catalyse the action that species need. The organisations are Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Bat Conservation Trust.

Gobaith Coetir – Woodland Hope. This is a two-year NHLF Project (via the NRW Nature Networks Fund) running until March 2025 that aims to connect people and communities in North Wales to their Celtic rainforest heritage and the woodland species that reside there. This project will work around the Meirionnydd Oakwoods and Bat Sites SAC in North Wales where 13 of the 17 woodland component SSSIs have unknown status and four are unfavourable. The project aims to engage communities with their local environment whilst gaining valuable data on the health of the woodlands using PAM of bat species. One key aim is to involve and upskill those from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially young people. The project is progressing well, with a new Wales Officer and an assistant project officer employed as part of the project at BCT, based locally in North Wales. This year we have collected pilot data in a subset of woodlands to be able to develop robust methodology to assess woodland health in future years. We will also lay the foundations for future engagement as part of the project with local schools, community groups as well as developing partnerships with other organisations local to North Wales.

Ringling the Changes. A huge thank you to everyone who has provide/offered support for the project to implement a bat ringing database and produce up to date ringing guidelines. We have received financial contributions from bat groups and bat ringers (without this support, for which we are very grateful, it wouldn't have been possible to move forward) and offers of time with database testing or inputting to the guidance. Progress with the two project workstreams is as follows:

1. **Ringling database** – A contract with Idox, for the development of the ringed bat database and online sales and recording system, has now been signed. The development kick-off meeting was 7th October.
2. **Ringling guidelines** – A workshop at National Bat Conference (Sunday 17th September) was held to discuss the ringing guidelines. A second draft of the guidelines is in preparation for circulation to an editorial panel this autumn. The aim is to produce the guidelines in parallel with the database development.

We are working towards a deadline for completion of both workstreams by the end of 2023/24 financial year. An update will be circulated to people who have purchased bat rings and others who have supported the project, by the end of October (with a shorter update included in the October Bat Group Bulletin).

Bat ring orders can be placed via our website at: <https://bit.ly/3rMt3Ov> (please note we cannot send out orders without having first received a copy of a current project licence covering ringing). We have a dedicated web page for anyone who **finds a ringed bat** with details of what information to provide: <https://bit.ly/3zJwAf>.

5. Conferences & Training

Conferences. A cornerstone of the annual bat calendar, we held the 2023 National Bat Conference at University of Nottingham and on Zoom for over 400 registered delegates across both audiences. Our hybrid English regional conferences have been very successful this year with conferences held in York for the North of England and in Tiverton for the South west with positive feedback from both. We have the Bat Care Conference coming up in November. The Wales Bat Workers Day is being held on 4th November near Machynlleth, as a hybrid event including talks and workshops. The next Scottish Spring Into Action bat skills training day will take place in March 2024 and the next Scottish Bat Conference is scheduled for March 2025.

Training. We have a blended programme of in-person and online [training courses](#) which we run for a variety of professional and volunteer audiences. We are currently updating key parts of courses in line with the 4th edition of Bat Surveys Guidelines and look forward to launching some new ones soon.

BatFest. We are repeating [BatFest](#) again this year, however we have moved it to October to run up to Halloween. The programme features a mixture of our most popular events like the Sketch-a-bat and Bat Care for Non-Bat Carers as well as a few new ones like our Halloween collaboration/competition with Buglife – Bats vs Spiders!

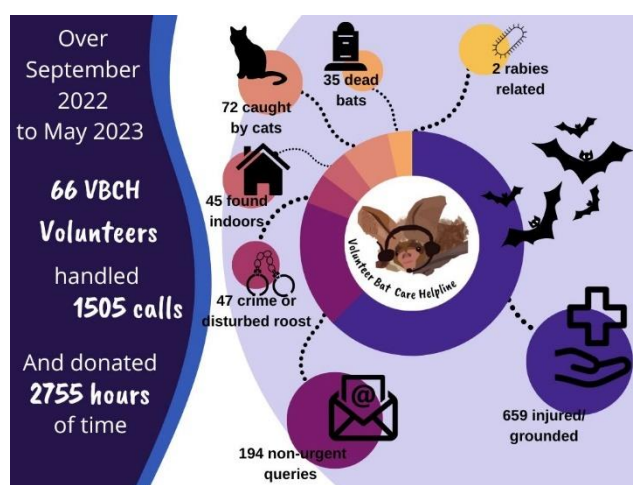
6. Helpline

Staffing. This summer the Helpline team consisted of 11 members of staff: two Managers, one Assistant Manager, three Senior Bat Advisors, and five Seasonal Bat Advisors. Our Seasonal Bat Advisors started in early May and finished in September and October. Two bat advisors are starting in October, one of which is a maternity cover post.

Helpline call volume. Between January and August 2023, we have received 7,851 enquiries (4,831 via the BCT Volunteer Bat Care Helpline). Around 1,398 of these enquiries were related to Natural England's free advice service, around 3,547 were related to bat care and 56 were related to bat crime.

Volunteer Bat Care Helpline (previously OOH). Last year's winter service began on 12th Sept and ended on 14th May 2023. Over this period 66 VBCH volunteers handled 1,505 calls and donated 2,755 hours of time.

The 2023 summer service began on 15th May and ended on 15th September. The summer VBCH operated from 9:30am-4:30pm and 6pm-10pm on weekdays and 10am-10pm weekends and bank holidays. As of the end of August, over 4,000 enquiries had been taken by volunteers during the summer service. BCT provides back-up staff support for each shift.



Natural England's free Bat Advice service. The Helpline have continued delivering this advice on behalf of Natural England. So far this year we have organised 514 roost visits.

BCT UK Bat Care Network. The network now has 215 registered carers, 44 ambulance driver and 28 hospitals & regional helplines. We are currently working with Naomi to prepare for the bat care conference in November.

Figure 1. The breakdown of the enquiries outlined above by month; this includes VBCH calls.

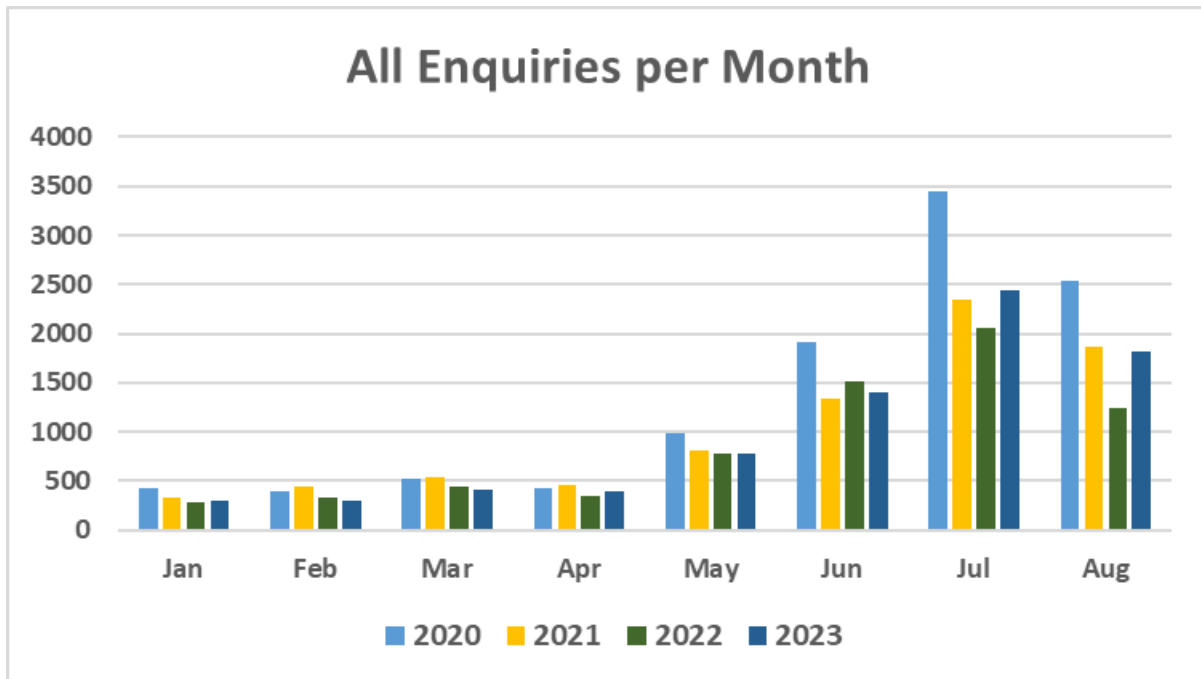
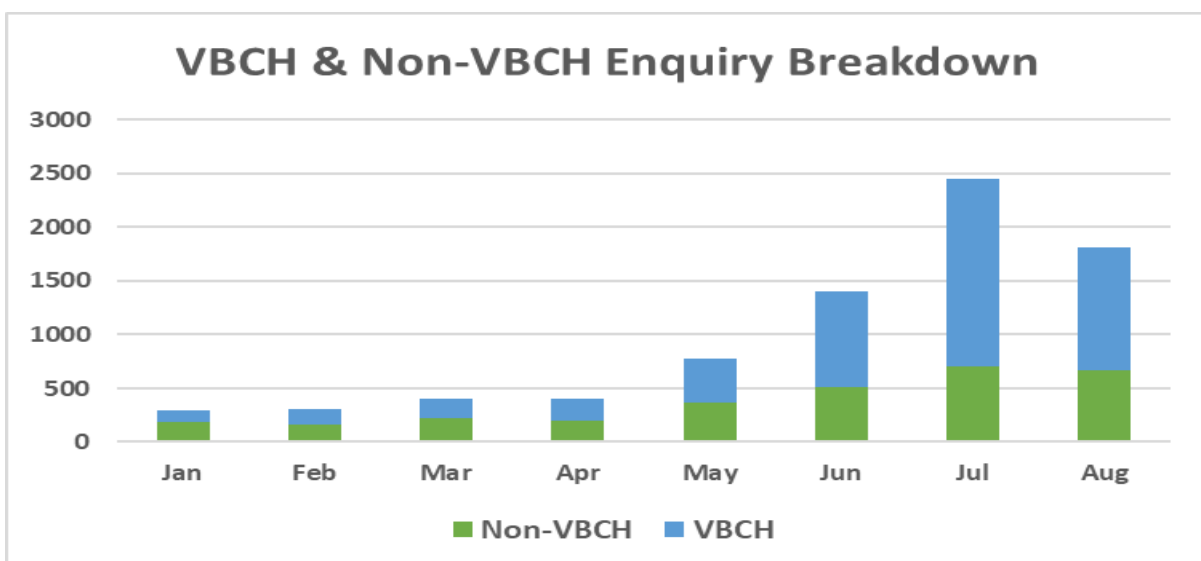


Figure 2. Proportion of enquiries that came through the VBCH service in 2023



7. Bats & Health

COVID-19 and bats. A reminder that anyone undertaking activities that involve direct contact with bats should continue to take appropriate precautions to minimize the risk of human to bat transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans). We continue to participate in the IUCN Bat Specialist Group's One Health Working Group. The guidance on bats and COVID-19 is available on the [IUCN Bat Specialist Group website](#) (guidance for field work, bat rehabilitation and cavers). The Group is also working on wider biosecurity guidance, going beyond COVID-19, to cover field work with bats.

Where bats in care have come into contact with people who have COVID-19, then the bats should be tested prior to release. The Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA) now undertake this testing (it was undertaken by Imperial College London prior to 2023). Please contact BatCare@bats.org.uk for more details (we will be communicating separately with carers with a reminder of this shortly).

European Bat Lyssaviruses (EBLV). There have been 13 EBLV cases so far in 2023 (compared to 11 reported by the same time last year). All have been EBLV-1 cases in serotine from Dorset and Somerset. We are preparing a [special edition bulletin](#) for circulation in October. If you were at the Sunday of National Bat Conference, you will have heard the presentation from Megan Golding at APHA. Research by Megan and colleagues, comparing the genome sequences of the virus in the UK with sequences from other European countries. Her results suggest that EBLV-1 in the UK is from a single introductory event (of a serotine from Northern France, likely from Brittany) and this may have happened as long ago as 2009 (our first confirmation of EBLV-1 in the UK was in 2018 via passive surveillance, but active surveillance had found EBLV-1 antibodies in a serotine over 10 years before this).

These cases are an important reminder that anyone who handles bats continues to wear gloves of an appropriate thickness to prevent bites getting through, that anyone regularly handling bats has pre-exposure vaccinations, and that anyone bitten, licked, nibbled or scratched by a bat, of any species, should seek prompt medical advice (even if they are already vaccinated). We have a dedicated web page on [rabies pre-exposure vaccinations](#). We ask that if you have any questions about pre-exposure vaccinations you check that page first before contacting BCT.

We are in the process of reviewing and updating our [rabies guidance information for bat workers and bat rehabilitators](#). This work will be completed in October, with the revised documents made available on the BCT website and details will be shared via relevant bulletins. The updates won't change the core advice but will overhaul the presentation of the guidance documents and update other information.

Dead bat packs. Thank you to everyone who submits dead bats to APHA [passive surveillance scheme](#). Please do continue to send dead bats, of any species, as this scheme is essential for our understanding of EBLV in the UK. APHA renewed their contract with BCT for support of the passive rabies surveillance scheme to end of March 2023, including sending out dead bat packs to member of the public and bat workers. Please see the [online dead bat pack request form](#) if you have a bat to submit.

Bats and biosecurity. In addition to the COVID-19 guidance mentioned above, the IUCN Bat Specialist Group's One Health Working Group is working on wider biosecurity guidance, going

beyond COVID-19, to cover fieldwork with bats. The 4th edition of BCT's Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines includes more details on biosecurity than previous editions.

8. Membership, Communications and Education

Membership. BCT's membership income and donations have continued to grow although we have seen a distinct slowdown in 2022-23, compared to the previous year.

We currently have the support of:

- Nearly 5,000 members including:
 - 92 Life members
 - 91 Young Batworker members
 - 38 Corporate members
- 507 Adopt a bat subscribers

Earlier this year BCT considered increasing membership fees again (the last time was in 2020) but have decided to freeze these for now since we know many people are already struggling. We will review the membership fees again in 2024. In the meantime, we are exploring ways to create new corporate membership opportunities and increase income this way.

Our membership magazines, Bat News and The Young Batworker, continue to share key stories from across the bat conservation world. Bat News has the Spotlight on Bat Group pages so do please contact Abby Packham (batgroups@bats.org.uk) with any stories you want to share with BCT members.

Fundraising. Membership is not the only way to raise funds for bats of course. It is vital that we diversify our income streams and explore other fundraising opportunities. In 2023, we were successful in our application to the Big Give's Green Match Fund and we raised over £10,700 in unrestricted funds. After an unexpected delay, Janet Baumkotter took the Swim Serpentine challenge in September and raised over £700. We are looking at ways of inspiring more people to raise money by taking up challenges. Other supporters choose to donate when they are shopping online at no extra cost to them and/or by shopping second-hand clothes and recycling! There are an [ever increasing number of ways to donate](#) and we even have several retailers who donate a percentage any purchases made protect bats. We launched a new cuddly bat keyring as part of the Adopt a Bat subscription which has received positive feedback. We think this will make a popular gift around Christmas.

Social Media Outreach. A strong social media presence provides a way to engage with larger and wider audiences. Our platforms have raised awareness of bats and their conservation with professionals, academics, enthusiasts and the general public. We are able to share the latest research, promote key messages about best practice as well as encourage more people to contribute towards bat conservation either through donating time (e.g. volunteers for NBMP) or money.

We currently operate across five platforms and our following keeps growing. This year saw:

- 126,000 followers on Facebook (in 2021-22: 119,000)
- 56,500 followers on Twitter (in 2021-22: 54,000)
- 9,000 followers on LinkedIn (in 2021-22: 7,000)
- 27,000 followers on Instagram (in 2021-22: 24,500)
- 560 subscribers on our YouTube Channel (in 2021-22: 529)

Other Comms and Engagement. We have published a total of 29 stories on our website in 2022-23, covering a variety of topics including wildlife crime convictions, publication of reports, policy campaigns and general news pieces of interest. We also welcome blogs from members, supporters, or anyone with an interest in bat conservation. We have published three blogs in 2022-23.

Communications demands have grown exponentially so we now have a communications cover split over two roles (Claire Moran is our Communications Officer from Mon to Wednesday and Alex Morss is our Press & Communications Officer on Thursdays and Fridays).

The BatChat podcast, created and produced by BCT trustee, Steve Roe, will start its fifth season in November. Its audience has continued to grow and it has had over 63,000 downloads. Steve Roe was awarded the CIEEM NGO impact award and the Pete Guest Award in 2023.

We produce the free e-Bulletin which is sent monthly to over 3,100 subscribers and is available on our website, and the corporate e-Bulletin (also sent regularly) is sent to over 200 subscribers.

We continue to produce and distribute a number of different information leaflets, demand has again increased exponentially so we have reviewed how we do this in order to try and recover some of the costs associated with producing this important resource. We have six pin badge designs available (common pipistrelle, noctule, lesser horseshoe bat, barbastelle, Bechstein's bat and Daubenton's bat) which are widely used both as an engagement and fundraising tool.

Our ambassador programme is something we aim to grow going forward. We currently have two ambassadors: Kate Rusby (English folk singer) and Aruhan Galieva (Actor, Singer, Comedian, Writer and Intersectional Environmentalist). The importance of having ambassadors speaking up for bats was clearly demonstrated this year when our patron, David Gower OBE, was quoted in the Daily Express and subsequently in the House of Lords in relation to the debate around the Retained (EU) Law Bill.

Education. Our engagement with children continues thanks to The Young Batworker magazine led by BCT's Honorary Education Officer, Shirley Thompson, our social media presence and a range of resources available from our website which include a bilingual educational pack (Welsh and English). This year we have recruited a part-time Education and Engagement Officer to further develop our work in this area. We have carried out a survey to see how bat groups, teachers and parents are using our current resources; our intention is to identify where we want to prioritise and focus our efforts going forward.

- End -

APPENDIX G. Questions Raised Prior to the Forum

Priorities raised for the Bat Workers Forum

During the online booking form there was the opportunity to submit priorities for raising at the Bat Workers Forum (BWF). These are collated below along with those submitted to BCT's Board of Trustees meetings.

We have followed up on the issues raised with BCT colleagues and external organisations as appropriate.

Points raised in this section include:

- Class licence returns and data
- VBRV retention
- Home insulation
- Latest guidance

Class licence returns and data

Priority raised: *Following on from Phil Bowater's response to last year's priority regarding NE class licence returns date; is there further update on the proposed consultation or any plans for change in 2024? As demonstrated by licence applications, submission doesn't necessarily reflect the time of processing, so I can see no reason why the class licence return can't be brought in line with the actual licence period, i.e. annually in January, leaving NE to process the return when it sees fit.*

Response from Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Service Advisor, Phil Bowater: As highlighted previously, we very much recognise that the current bat class survey licence return date occurring during the height of the bat survey period is not ideal. Altering the licence return date is regrettably not as easy as we would like due, in large part, to legacy IT systems. Submitted licence returns still have to be uploaded which takes significant staff time using current systems, so we have previously had to space licence returns throughout the year. We are however pleased to inform you that, due to proposed changes to our IT systems, it is extremely likely the return date will change in 2024. Whilst yet to be confirmed, the due date will probably move to December. As mentioned in our wider update, alongside the above, we are planning to undertake an in-depth review of bat sci-con licensing in 2024/25.

Priority raised: *After the effort required from bat workers submitting their returns, is the most being made of these large annual data submissions? The BTO produced a summary of birds seen, by county, which is incredibly motivating and makes you feel part of a larger movement, really informative and supportive. Do NE see themselves as only regulatory rather than having a supportive role?*

Response from Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Service Advisor, Phil Bowater: Whilst Natural England has a crucial responsibility as the regulator for bat licensing, we have a much wider remit with our core purpose being to conserve and enhance the natural environment. We recognise the significant value of being able to mobilise the data provided in bat licence returns and do have aspirations to put this information in the public domain in an easily accessible format. As with any

organisation we are of course guided by the resources available to us and need to prioritise these to where the biggest gains for the natural environment can be made. We are, however, currently transitioning our IT systems which will help us better manage licence returns. Our hope is that these improvements will allow for licence return data to be used in NE's own work as well as external impact assessments and research by (e.g.) consultants and academics. Our first step in this process is ensuring we are collecting the best possible information and ensuring that this can be readily interpreted. As part of these measures, licensees may notice some changes to the licence return information requirements over coming months.

VBRV retention

Priority raised: *Roost visiting - rabies vaccination not necessary. What are NE doing to increase the number of VBRVs? What are NE doing to get lapsed visitors back on the list? Licensing requirements for volunteers.*

Response from Natural England's Volunteering Support Team Leader, Julie Harwood: Natural England shares the concerns raised during this Forum, and about the continued drop in active VBRVs. Some internal changes to how the advice service is managed have been made in order for us to gain capacity as a team to spend on the recruitment of volunteers. A meeting will be held in November 2023 to agree a project plan for a recruitment campaign, working with BCT's Helpline managers. Progress of this plan will be shared via the Facebook group and email communications.

The removal of the requirement of the rabies vaccination is a start to this process, but there are only currently 26 VBRVs that are inactive due to a lack of rabies vaccination or boosters. We do acknowledge that difficulties in getting the vaccine may have influenced some of those inactive for other reasons, in addition to not completing their renewal or health and safety training for example. However, this change means that a further 62 VBRVs who's rabies boosters are due over the next few months aren't at risk of being made inactive due to lack of vaccination. To read more on the change to the rabies vaccination requirement, please see BatLine or the Volunteering Support Team update in the BWF 2023 minutes.

Priority raised: *South Lancashire Bat Group are increasingly concerned about the future of the VBRV service provided via NE. We would like to know how successful NE considers its contact programme, detailed in the minutes of the 2022 BWF, to change VBRV's with an Inactive status to Active given the context of the numbers reported in the Batline which were as follows: March 2021 – 486 Registered, 289 Active (197 inactive) May 2023 – 355 Registered, 235 Active (120 inactive). Do NE also consider this attrition rate sustainable, and how many of the currently inactive 120 VBRV's do you realistically expect to become active, based on past performance, and what are you doing differently this time to re-activate them? In the South Lancs area, of 16 VBRV's 7 have now struggled to remain active or have left completely. Two were affected by the inability to obtain the rabies vaccine, and when NE arranged this via Health Partners they gave up days of work to attend an appointment only to be told they could not be given the vaccine as the pharmacy NE sent them to did not offer rabies vaccinations for occupational health. Another left stating the restrictive Health and Safety regime prevented them for doing visits effectively, another left after being told they had not completed their licence return despite them repeatedly forwarding the acknowledgment email sent when they completed their licence return. Three more became inactive or removed from the list as they did*

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ignore the generic emails sent with reminders to do activities and give deadlines. None of these received a thank you for the work they did (nor did those who simply left). No-one received a phone call or acknowledgment of their resignation, and none were asked for feedback on why they'd left/not responded. The loss of these VBRV's, or their inactivity, has a direct impact on those still undertaking the role, and they are in danger of burn-out. One of our VBRV's this year suggested at the busiest time of year that those inactive solely due to not having the rabies vaccine could still do virtual visits, but it took until 30/08/2023 for this to be announced by NE, well after the busy summer period for visits is over. SLBG consider this to be very poor. This issue is a repeated subject at BWF and it appears to us to be moving in the wrong direction. What steps are NE taking to address these issues, and we would like to ask for actual detail, rather than the generic responses normally given at BWF meetings? How will NE measure the success of these steps, and how will this be communicated to VBRV's?

Response from Natural England's Volunteering Support Team Leader, Julie Harwood: See previous response regarding a recruitment campaign. This project plan will be developed with the BCT Helpline managers as we value their expertise in species work but also in working with volunteers. Progress of this will be shared.

In terms of licensing, unfortunately the Volunteering Support Team has no control over wildlife licensing. However, in response to issues experienced by some VBRVs in returning their licenses last year, the team have initiated a working relationship with the relevant team in licensing in order to gain insight and an ability to support VBRVs in submitting their returns. Last year we advised of a change to the system used for submitting returns of other wildlife licenses. This system allowed for the submission of VBRV licence returns, but did not process them. This led to a number of VBRVs receiving acknowledgements of returns that weren't being processed due to the error in the system. This was addressed at the time via the Facebook group, and support was given to a number of VBRVs to resubmit their returns after the deadline.

The use of virtual surveys has been adopted since the restart of onsite surveying following the COVID pandemic on a case by case basis. Whilst a useful alternative, it's not considered suitable for all surveys and can only be offered as an option to VBRVs who were inactive due to a lack of rabies vaccination. We acknowledge we were late in confirming that to VBRVs, however both the team and BCT's Helpline did use that if they felt it was appropriate. We finalised that as an option as a result of the unfortunate failure of using our occupational health provider to secure vaccinations for VBRVs, issues included miscommunication with pharmacies and low supply of the vaccine. We are sorry that this system did not work, and have dealt with complaints individually.

Regarding replies to auto-generated emails, we do understand that VBRVs are giving up their spare time to fulfil this role, however the requirements of health and safety and renewal are necessary. If not completed, the change to inactive status is automatic. We do agree that we can thank people for their time as part of these auto-generated emails. However, we do ensure that VBRVs who resign formally receive a response from the team, thanking them for their time. In response to discussion at the Forum, we are going to ask for feedback when VBRVs do not respond to us or resign, and use that information to improve our processes.

Home insulation

Priority raised: *How are bats to be considered within any potential government initiative for enhanced insulation within existing homes?*

Response from BCT's Species Advocacy & Policy Officer, Lil McDermaid and BCT's Built Environment Manager, Jo Ferguson: BCT are in contact with representatives of the insulation and energy saving industries and organisations such as the UKGBC Retrofit Working Group and the Insulation Assurance Authority to raise awareness and guide on best practice approaches, where these are known, or look for potential solutions, to carry out work while considering bat roosting features.

In addition, BCT are continuing to work in coalitions on broader policy and advocacy issues, which can include retrofitting and insulation schemes. If you have any suggestions for how bats should be considered in future government schemes, we would encourage you to write to your local elected representative (e.g. MP, MS, MSP). We have an [advice document with pointers about how to do this](#). You could alternatively write directly to the relevant government department, which would likely be the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero in this instance. We will monitor the situation going forward.

Latest guidance

Priority raised: *Updates on the new guidance on survey methods, bats and lighting, and mitigation guidelines would be appreciated.*

Response from BCT's Head of Biodiversity, Jan Collins: We are pleased to say that the 4th edition of the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines were released on 15th September, just before the National Bat Conference. These guidelines are available as a non-printable pdf from the [BCT website](#) or to [pre-order as a hard copy from NHBS](#).

The updated bats and lighting guidance note was released in August 2023, and shared through the Bat Group Bulletin and press releases from BCT. [Guidance Note 08/23 can be downloaded here](#) and a [news piece by BCT can be read here](#). This guidance was previewed at an event in February 2023, where members of the Steering Group presented on case studies and background to the development of the guidelines. The presentations were recorded and are [available to view online](#) as you read the guidance.

The latest mitigation guidelines were released by CIEEM in August 2023 and can be [downloaded from here](#).

Pre-submission screening service (Submitted during the Bat Workers Forum)

Priority raised: *Is a representative from NE able to provide an insight into the availability of NE staff to engage via NEs Pre-submission Screening Service please? We have been trying to engage with NE via the PSS for a complex situation for an important roost. The first PSS request submitted to NE in*

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April was declined (with an invitation to resubmit 3 months later). The PSS request was resubmitted in July but received no response and no response to follow-up emails or phone calls. I know there is no guarantee that NE are able to engage via the PSS but to receive no response I am wondering if the PSS Service is available at the moment?

Response from Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Service Advisor, Amanda Fegan: Natural England's Wildlife Licensing Service has had very limited capacity to engage in the Pre-submission Screening Service in recent months. Nonetheless, we are sorry that you haven't had a response to your most recent request, and would like to look into this for you if you'd be happy to pass the case details on. We do understand how valuable early input can be in particular situations, and so are hoping to build our capacity for discretionary input through both our Pre-submission Screening Service and our Discretionary Advice Service over the next few months, so please do continue applying where this would be useful to you. The initial team who triage these requests do always endeavour to point prospective applicants to alternative resolutions when there is not capacity to take these requests at any given time.

Priorities raised at English regional conferences

Hybrid conferences give the opportunity to raise regional priorities at the time of booking, via the online booking form.

We have followed up on the issues raised with BCT colleagues and external organisations as appropriate.

East of England Regional Bat Conference

26th November 2022

Points raised were:

- Protection of important habitat

Priority raised: *The potential impact of Norwich Western Link Road is a major concern in this region.*

Response from BCT's Director of Conservation, Lisa Worledge: BCT released a position statement in March 2021 following concerns raised regarding the nationally important colony of Barbastelles along the proposed route: <https://bit.ly/3rHfdwT>. There has since been a decision to "refine the route" to avoid the barbastelle roosts, set out in an Alignment Refinement Appraisal Report. However concerns remain that the road would affect foraging habitat. From our understanding evidence gathering is still underway to assess impact and effectiveness of mitigation strategies. Documents on the NDR, including council meeting minutes can be found here: <https://bit.ly/46wU6g5>.

Priority raised: *Need for designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for key barbastelle colonies (protection of roost woodlands, foraging areas and commuting routes). Some of the largest/nationally important colonies remain unprotected and face significant threats from development/infrastructure schemes (e.g. the Wensum Valley 'super-colony' in Norfolk).*

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Response from Natural England's Senior Mammal Specialist, Kat Walsh: SAC designations are a matter for the Defra Secretary of State, acting on the advice of Natural England and the JNCC. At the point of EU Exit the JNCC considered that the UK network of SAC's was sufficient for bats. We would direct you to the JNCC should you wish to seek further information on this matter.

South West of England Regional Bat Conference

25th March 2023

Points raised were:

- Ash Dieback
- Threatened species
- Site designation/protection
- Public engagement
- Wildlife crime
- Local Planning Authorities (LPAs)

Ash Dieback

Priority raised: *The lack of concern with most conservation minded bodies on the present and future threat of the removal of trees to woodland bats due to Ash Dieback!*

Response from BCT's Woodland Specialist, Sonia Reveley: We share guidance on managing woodlands with ash die back and this is kept current. Conservation minded bodies are encouraged to use the guidance already available. All current ash die back guidance and information should be used in conjunction with the SNCB's EPS best practice guidance on managing woodlands with bats and with wider guidance on forestry, woodland management and woodland surveying. All these documents can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3F4qpqn>. This information is also shared with participants attending Bats and Arb training, woodland management training and landowner workshops.

Threatened Species

Priority raised: *Grey long-eared bat conservation, what's next?*

Response from BCT's Director of Conservation, Lisa Worledge: There is guidance for Local Planning Authorities about grey long-eared bats and the need to understand the difference in their status compared to brown long-eared bats, and how that should be taken into account. The 'long-eared bats guide' is available on the BCT website at <https://bit.ly/46yTV3h>, where information on managing habitat for this species can also be found. We are also working on a new document, 'Wildlife and development guidance note: Grey long-eared bat', with Devon County Council and Teignbridge District Council, which we hope will be published in the New Year. Following earlier successful projects in Devon ([Back from the Brink](#) and [Return of the True Night Rider](#)), we have a large bid which includes land management in the county and has grey long-eared bats as one of its key species. (Watch this space!) We are also seeking opportunities for further work in relation to the species in Dorset and the Isle of Wight.

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Priority raised: *Horseshoe mitigation – foraging habitats / roosts*

Response from BCT's Built Environment Manager, Jo Ferguson: BCT's Roost Awards encourages the sharing of [case studies of best practice of mitigation](#) that are available to view and search through on our website, including for both horseshoe species, then recognising exemplar practices.

Response from VWT's Bat Programme Manager, Daniel Hargreaves: The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) lead on creating bat reserves focusing on the greater and lesser horseshoe bats. Their recent paper published in the Conservation Evidence journal details how effective building management at VWT's bat reserves has resulted in stronger greater and lesser horseshoe bat population size increases compared with unmanaged sites. VWT have recently provided workshops on creating and improving horseshoe bat roosts at the National and regional bat conferences.

Site Designation/protection

Priority raised: *I would like to see more sites designated for bats in Cornwall. eg VWT reserves, SSSI etc, as I (sadly) see this as the only way to make developers consider bats at the planning stage. I feel that the lack of designations (despite having qualifying species/habitats in Cornwall) makes it harder to protect bats and their roosts and key CSZs (core sustenance zones) in the county (unlike places like Devon and Wiltshire with well-known designated sites for bats). I would welcome any thoughts and advice on how this could be achieved in Cornwall. Thanks.*

Response from Natural England's Senior Mammal Specialist, Kat Walsh: SSSI's are a representation of the best sites in the country for a particular notified feature. The aim is not to designate every site that could qualify. Bats are still a fully protected species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended. To note a number of new bat SSSI's are currently moving through the designation process.

Public Engagement

Priority raised: *We need more public engagement. Events are run by a small number of people and we need more people to become involved as public education is very important.*

Response from BCT's Education and Engagement Officer, Naomi Webster: We agree that outreach and public engagement is a crucial part of bat conservation and it is an area that BCT has been increasing its investment as well as support for bat groups. BCT regularly offers conference workshops and training courses relating to this topic e.g. our "Engaging, recruiting and retaining volunteers" conference workshop and "How to run a bat walk" training course which is available online, in person or as a short talk in place of a partner bat group meeting.

A number of BCT's projects incorporate engagement activities into them such as the wonderful outreach undertaken through the Bats in Churches project team and the new relationships the NightWatch Project is building with under-represented audiences as well as the great work started by the Species on the Edge and Woodland Hope Projects.

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BatFest has been running for a number of years engaging different audiences online with bats. This year it is moving to October and will run up to Halloween when it will culminate in a collaboration with Buglife called Bats vs Spiders. BCT also offers a range of resources and activities, including teacher packs and the Bats for All resources, on the website and has funded an Engagement and Education Officer this year specifically to increase our capacity for developing new opportunities over the coming months. We encourage all bat groups to use the resources, such as leaflets, that we currently have available. We are planning to secure funds to update and create new ones. We would also like to encourage all bat groups to put forward ideas on how to support their public engagement activities. We have limited resources, which means we can't promise to act on all of them, but we can explore what's possible.

Wildlife Crime

Priority raised: *I'm concerned the police and councils don't take wildlife crime seriously.*

Response from BCT's Wildlife Crime Project Officer, Mark Goulding: The Police do take wildlife crime seriously, the Police service launched their updated [National Wildlife Rural Crime Strategy](#) in 2022, the purpose, to provide a framework through which policing, and its partners can work together, to tackle the most prevalent threats and emerging issues which have the greatest impact on our wildlife and rural communities. The Police National Wildlife Crime Unit under Chief Inspector Kelly secured funding to directly support the seven UK Wildlife Crime Priorities and their delivery groups, to action this strategy's vital work.

Local planning authorities (LPAs) play a key role in the protection of European Protected Species, the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) states that: 'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment' and 'Protect and enhance biodiversity'. Further, Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) requires all local authorities to exercise their functions with due regard to their likely effect on crime:

'It shall be the duty of each authority to which this section applies to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area'. The LPA's support police investigations into wildlife crime when subject of development.

Priority raised: *It appears to be cheaper for a developer to destroy a roost and get away with it than to do the right thing.*

Priority raised: *Lack of prosecutions for bat crimes, even when good and recent evidence provided.*

Priority raised: *Lack of action when wildlife crimes are reported.*

Collective response from BCT's Wildlife Crime Project Officer, Mark Goulding: BCT's wildlife crime project works with UK Police services providing wide ranging advice and guidance, this can be anything from reviewing planning applications and ecological surveys to establish if the circumstances around such documents support an offence to criminal evidential standards, to providing conservation impact statements for court.

The project's work with the police has supported out of court disposals as well as prosecutions which have seen a wide range of financial penalties against developers and others from £2,000 in

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costs to over £600,000. During 2022, a developer in South Wales was fined over £6,000 for impacting a roost during building renovations having breached license conditions, you can [read about that case here](#). A London based developer was fined over £10,000 in 2023 for destroying a day roost during renovation work, and their architects received a police caution. The penalties can vary due to mitigating factors that the courts must consider, such as an early guilty plea, currently there are no wildlife crime sentencing guidelines for the courts which BCT wishes to see changed.

The wildlife crime project is looking to raise the profile of its work, and that of the police in the coming year.

UK police services continue 24/7 working hard to protect our communities, to prevent wildlife crime, and investigate wildlife crime at a time when their resources are stretched and public opinion on them is low; without a doubt the police need support from us all, it is critical and very much needed in protecting ourselves, our communities, habitats and our species from criminality. However in a global context, we must all play our part in lawfully protecting our environment, conserving our species, our habitats, our earth for future generations.

Local Planning Authorities

Priority raised: *LPA's (local planning authorities) in Devon not having council ecologists and the poor standard of reports they are accepting.*

Response from BCT's Head of Biodiversity, Jan Collins: BCT are aware of the lack of ecologists in many local planning authorities and we do cite this as a real issue in our policy and advocacy work for bats. The bat survey guidelines (4th edition) have a chapter dedicated to report writing, and report writing guidelines are also available from CIEEM. The Earned Recognition Project aims to raise standards in bat mitigation work, by assessing and accrediting ecologists working on development projects. Where poor standards of work are produced and the consultant ecologist is a member of CIEEM there is a complaints process.

North of England Regional Bat Conference

15th April 2023

Points raised were:

- Opportunities for trainees trying to gain licenses
- Not enough bat carers

Priority raised: *Opportunities for training ecologists & volunteers working toward their bat licence.*

Response from BCT's Training & Conferences Manager, Naomi Webster: There are a variety of ways to develop your skills and knowledge and gain experience towards your bat licence. It is important to regularly update and review your logbook so that you can identify the gaps and focus on these. The Professional Training Standards may be helpful in identifying gaps. In terms of addressing those gaps, training courses can be helpful particularly in growing knowledge and skills, although BCT's short courses do not offer sufficient experience for a reference, they are designed to target key skill/knowledge gaps and provide a series of introductory courses that give foundational knowledge

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for the intermediate and advanced level courses. Other training providers also offer a range of courses you may find helpful. Conference workshops can be another way to develop your skills and knowledge in a new area.

In terms of building experience towards a reference, this will tend to involve a longer-term commitment to enable the individual to observe your skills sufficiently over time. This could be achieved through volunteering with a bat group, and specific activities can be useful for key areas e.g. bat care or helping a bat group monitor bat boxes will provide opportunities to practice bat handling and species identification, whereas volunteering with the National Bat Monitoring Programme can help you develop your call identification skills. Alternatively, working with or shadowing an ecologist can provide other surveying opportunities. However you build your experience, it is important to remember that the relationship should be mutually beneficial and not to view it simply as the means to your licence. There may even be opportunities for consultancies with multiple people to train to build a relationship with their local bat group to support specific projects as part of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) or ESG (Environmental Social Governance) activities.

Priority raised: *There are not enough bat carers.*

Response from BCT's Bat Care Co-Ordinator, Charley Bird: Assisting bat groups in filling gaps uncovered by bat carers is a priority for the UK Bat Care Network project. BCT's training and fundraising departments are working to secure funding for the digitisation of Maggie Brown's Introduction to Bat Care online course, with the aim of making training more accessible. Abby (BCT's Bat Groups Officer) and I are in the process of putting ideas together with the intention of supporting bat groups with bat carer recruitment.

Current areas of concern are: Cornwall, Dorset, Cumbria, North-east Wales and South Wales, and Scotland.

Please note that remote training of carers is a possibility, and I can be contacted for support about this if required at batcare@bats.org.uk.

Please keep an eye out for updates via the Bat Care Bulletin as usual.

Priorities raised at the Scottish Bat Worker's Conference

4th March 2023

Points raised were:

- Bat records in Argyll and Bute, and Dunbartonshire
- Current BCT Project involving Audiomoth bat detectors
- Species on the Edge Project
- There is a difference in daylight availability in the north of Scotland to the south of Scotland; how does the new bat survey guidance consider this regarding the requirement to use infra-red technology?
- Expanding the bat care network in Scotland
- National/Scottish Nathusius' Pipistrelle Programme as a priority in Scotland

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- Curtailment at onshore and offshore wind farms in Scotland
- Putting bat groups on the map

Priority raised: *Regarding bat records in Argyll and Bute, and Dunbartonshire – there is a lack of data about bats of that region.*

Response from BCT's Scottish Bat Officer Claudia Gebhardt: There are large areas are not covered well regarding bat monitoring. The NBMP has monitoring areas across Scotland and monitoring locations can be taken up by volunteers.

Priority raised: *Current BCT Project involving Audiomoth bat detectors.*

Response from BCT's Scottish Bat Officer Claudia Gebhardt: Several BCT projects using Audiomoths are in the pipeline, and will be available throughout 2023 as a trial and hopefully later for more volunteers. BCT is making use of the new technologies to reach people that wouldn't necessarily be involved (including areas in Scotland where bats are currently under recorded). A limited factor is the amount of bat detectors available and the capacity of the IT infrastructure. BCT is working on those items.

Priority raised: *Species on the Edge Project.*

Response from BCT's Species on the Edge Project Officer – Argyll and Inner Hebrides Cathryn Baillie: Species on the Edge is a National Lottery Heritage Fund funded partnership programme of NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities. The project is active in seven landscape-scale areas around Scotland, including Argyll and the Inner Hebrides and the Solway Coast. Project will include the use of Audiomoth bat detectors to undertake surveys and collate conservation data to provide a better understanding of bat species present in these areas. The project also works with local communities and landowners, as well as the Skye and Lochalsh Bat Group.

Priority raised: *There is a difference in daylight availability in the North of Scotland to the south of Scotland; how does the new bat survey guidance consider this regarding the requirement to use infra-red technology?*

Response from BCT's Head of Biodiversity Jan Collins: BCT will be working on some guidance for the use of night-vision aids (NVAs) for bat surveys from the autumn. The 4th edition of the bat survey guidelines, which will be published at the National Bat Conference in September, acknowledge that in some situations NVAs may be less important (e.g. for known roosts where bats are confirmed to emerge early or in situations/locations with higher levels of natural or artificial lighting) but not using them should still be justified in reporting.

Priority raised: *Expanding the bat care network [in Scotland].*

Response from BCT's Training & Conferences Manager Naomi Webster: There don't seem to be enough bat carers in Scotland and the existing carers seem to cover very large areas – BCT has just run a training course online on this and there are plans for further training, including covering Scottish new bat carers. We also have a new Bat Care Co-Ordinator at BCT, Charley Bird. There will be a Bat Care Conference in November in Birmingham (and online).

Response from member of the audience at the conference: Some Scottish trainers run bat care training courses, which are generally over-subscribed, but rarely result in new bat carers (the reason is not quite understood). There are also WhatsApp support groups set up by some carers and generally there are support networks providing support for each other. It was noted that bat care is important for bat conservation and communication.

Also see: Response from BCT's Bat Care Co-Ordinator, Charley Bird in section above on page 36.

Priority raised: National/Scottish Nathusius' Pipistrelle Programme

Response from BCT's Scottish Bat Officer Claudia Gebhardt: The National/Scottish Nathusius' Pipistrelle Programme will continue to be a priority in Scotland. There are plans to deliver more training for Nathusius' survey skills at the Scottish conferences and Spring Into Action (March 2024), as well as further online Zoom training workshops. The Scottish Bat officer will also arrange field survey sessions with Scottish bat groups who would like to develop their field skills and have found potential trapping sites for Nathusius' pipistrelle in there are. Please get in touch with Claudia if your bat group is interested in this. The Scottish Bat Officer would also be interested in any reports about bat group activities as part of the project during the 2023 season (please send these to cgebhardt@bats.org.uk).

Priority raised: Is curtailment currently used by windfarm developers in Scotland (onshore and offshore)? Is there potential to ensure it is used more?

Response from BCT's Head of Biodiversity Jan Collins: BCT are not currently able to monitor how much curtailment is used by wind farm developers. Onshore wind farm developers should be using the guidelines published by NatureScot, which outline when curtailment is appropriate: <https://bit.ly/48JyIFR>. For offshore wind guidance is not available, although the EUROBATs Wind Turbines and Bat Populations recognise this as a gap. There is much research to be done to understand how offshore wind impacts bats and BCT are currently looking at how this can be progressed.

Priority raised: Putting Scottish bat groups on the map.

Response from BCT's Scottish Bat Officer Claudia Gebhardt: BCT is currently working on a map to show all the bat group areas around Scotland. The map will also include all bat groups of the British Islands. Many thanks to all the bat groups that have provided information on the areas they are active in and responded to our questions throughout the mapping process. We are at a stage where we are looking for funding to make the map accessible on our website and will notify all bat groups when the map is available.

- End -

APPENDIX H. Comments from the zoom chat

The table shares comments put into the zoom chat that haven't already been included in the minutes.

Relating to item	Comment by	Comment
3.1.2 NE Licensing update	Tricia Scott	Thanks Amanda. let's hope NE are able to deliver on a change of date for bat licence returns in 2024.
	Graham Hart	I agree with Nick. The webpage for submitting licence records is cumbersome, extremely time consuming and very frustrating. We need a much more streamlined and user friendly way to submit this information to NE.
3.1.3 NE Volunteer Support Team	Nick Tomlinson	Showing a householder their bats could be considered as conservation - if it helps them feel more comfortable with their bats?
	Steve Parker	Thanks Nick. I agree very strongly with this. The wording on the licence states 'Conservation' but I don't see this defined on the licence - I've just checked it, so I do consider it possible to do this. Unless NE can advise why this isn't consider conservation.
	Nick T	I think thinking can be in silos - but we all know it does not work like that. If you do something that makes someone like bats better, or feel less worried about them, that is conservation - conservation is about wildlife AND people, so education is, in my honest opinion, something that should be dropped, it's misleading! My view would be it is conservation, but changing NE's view might be harder, hence my wanting bat workers, the people on the ground, involved more with NE's thinking process!
	Steve P	I've already emailed to offer my input to this. I've also worked with Julie on the most recent two Training for Trainers courses, where we covered this reason for taking and handling bats, so it's interesting to hear a different interpretation this evening.
	Nick T	Other bat workers in Dorset were very complimentary about your input to the course - we need to think a little less 'boxed'.
3.3 NS update	Joanne Hamilton	<i>(In response to Kevin's enthusiasm regarding bat advice calls)</i> In the six years I've been involved with working with bats I have only had two negative calls, most finders end up being incredibly fascinated by them, it also helps to clear up misconceptions about bats too
	Gail Armstrong	Nice to hear Kevin talking about "my bat workers" and knowing the details of their work
3.4 NIEA update	Joanne Hamilton	Hi, I'm involved with NIBG Northern Ireland, we have 8 licenced carers around the six counties, 18 ambulance drivers around the 6 counties and 12 licenced roost visitors around the 6 counties also
4. Priority raised: home insulation	Gail Armstrong	Hasn't the insulation initiative been cancelled by the Govt?
	Lil McDermaid	I think the Government generally have multiple schemes to do with insulation at any one time so I'm not sure which you

		are referring to. Energy Performance Certificate improvements that had been proposed is reportedly being scrapped - is that what you are referring to?
	Gail A	I think it was for Landlords
4. Priority raised: not enough bat carers	Steve Parker	South Lancs Bat Group would be happy to help new carers in NE Wales, one of the areas just mentioned as short of carer cover.
	Gail Armstrong	North Lancs already help Cumbria and can help further if necessary
	Nick Tomlinson	I think a workshop/conference on bat care, not about how to do it, but how to attract carers, would be brilliant, speaking as someone from a county where we have some 'wrinkles' in our ability to deliver the level of bat care we would like to.
	Hannah Van Hesteren	Great feedback - we're finalising the schedule for the upcoming bat care conference so we'll make sure this idea is passed on
	Nick T	we are struggling to make it work, so help to find a way through that would be great
6. Pete Guest Award	Lisa Worledge	Yay Steve! We actually have some previous winners with us tonight too! :-) Shout to Shirley Thompson, Steve and Fee Parker and Gail Armstrong
	Many people gave clap or thumbs up emojis to Lisa's comments	
7.1 Bat box check guidance	James Porter	I agree that we can't really have guidance that's that far out of date.
7.3 More frequent discussion	Tracey Jolliffe	I agree too. I'm not a roost visitor but would still appreciate more opportunity to chat more often
	Natalie Todman	We have regional and national meetings of our Bat Workers at NatureScot, and I agree they are very useful for sharing experiences and cases that help us all.
	Kevin Giles	As Nat says in NS we meet online and in person And we have some very good speakers too