

NBMP Hibernation Survey COVID-19 risk assessment

Introduction: Covid-19 and safety to bats

This guidance relates to assessing whether to proceed with hibernation surveys from the point of view of the safety to bats. The IUCN Bat Specialist Group has highlighted that there is a low but credible risk of human-to-bat transmission of SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). It is vital to follow all the mitigation measures to reduce risks to bat populations.

The IUCN Bat Specialist Group has produced guidance and risk assessments for assessing whether to go ahead with bat surveys that involve close proximity to bats (<https://www.iucnbsg.org/bsg-publications.html>). It is ESSENTIAL that individual assessments at the regional, survey team and site level are carried out by the survey organiser/leader to assess whether to survey each site.

Even while the NBMP Hibernation Survey is going ahead it may be the case that many sites do not pass the bat safety test for surveys to take place currently.

We have produced three forms designed to assist surveyors with carrying out assessments of risks to bats and recommended precautions:

- **NBMP Hibernation Survey Covid RA 1** – the IUCN risk assessment turned into a form including links to information and suggested benchmarks for the UK (revised for 2023/24 with the need to assess vaccination status now removed as the UK vaccination programme is currently very restricted)
- **NBMP Hibernation Survey Covid RA 2** – a site-specific form to assess the extent to which it is possible to minimise risks to bats at each site
- **NBMP Hibernation Survey Covid RA 3** – a checklist of precautions you should take when surveying sites that have been identified as appropriate to survey

We have also updated our risk assessment template for surveyors to include COVID-related risks to people (see **Risk assessment form for bat surveys at hibernation sites**).

BCT will regularly reassess the risk level at the UK scale and if this changes to high (red) then it is likely that we will request that surveyors postpone their NBMP Hibernation Survey visits until the overall risk level returns to amber or green level.

We will keep NBMP Hibernation Survey volunteers updated on any changes to the status of the survey.