



BCT guidance on multiple bat group coverage within same county/administrative boundaries

1. Background

The UK is covered by around 90 bat groups, operating along various county and/or administrative area boundaries. These groups are recorded on the Bat Groups Database within BCT and links are provided at: <https://www.bats.org.uk/support-bats/bat-groups> for members of the public who want to find out about their local groups. Most of these groups are bat specific covering several aspects of bat related activity but, in some cases, they may have a single focus such as bat research or bat care. Or bat conservation may be part of a broader group's interests, such as a mammal group.

BCT would like to ensure that the geographical coverage and support BCT provides for bat groups remains as efficient and achievable as possible, whilst still meeting the main aim of bat conservation. Generally, this would mean a single group would cover a county/administrative area however, in some circumstances it is necessary, or desirable, to have another bat group within the same county/administrative area.

2. Reasons for more than one bat group

To avoid a proliferation of bat groups, at least one or more of the following must apply if an additional bat group is to be recognised by BCT in an area that is already covered by an existing and active bat group:

- Geography/accessibility of an area makes it advantageous to have multiple groups
- Different personalities/conflicts make establishment of another group the only way to further bat conservation (without losing valuable expertise) after exhausting other possibilities
- Different activity aims can be best met by a new bat group forming (e.g. scientific survey versus public engagement)
- Existing group is no longer active/accepting new members (but has not formally disbanded)
- Existing bat group cannot/will not cover an area of a county
- Existing bat group does not view itself as a "group"

3. BCT's response to new groups forming

- *Can BCT stop a new bat group from forming?*
BCT cannot stop another bat group from forming but BCT can decide what level of relationship, if any, that new group will be able to have with BCT.

- *Can BCT recognise new groups?*
BCT can and should recognise new groups, e.g. having a link to their website from the '[Contact your local bat group](#)' page on the BCT website, unless there is good reason not to, for example none of the criteria listed in section 2 apply.
- *Should BCT send info to new groups?*
Yes, in line with BCT Partnership and Network agreements. Most information and support guides are widely available on the website at <https://www.bats.org.uk/resources/resources-for-bat-groups>.
- *Should BCT consult with existing group prior to new group establishing?*
Yes. BCT should ensure that all groups within the administrative boundary know of each other's existence in order that:
 - 1) Bat conservation is not compromised.
 - 2) Both/all groups know what each other are doing, for example with respect to survey work, in order to minimise disturbance, with engagement work to reduce duplication of effort, etc.
 - 3) Multiple roost visits do not occur (e.g. to prevent multiple hibernation site visits by different groups).
- *What if an existing group objects to a new group setting up?*
An existing group cannot stop another group from forming. BCT will encourage the new group to join with the existing group if possible. If this is not possible, BCT will decide what sort of relationship the new group would have with BCT.
- *What happens where multiple coverage exists and one of those groups ceases to operate?*
Although a precedent may have previously been set, if a group folds and another group is set-up in its place, the reasons for the formation of any new group, as listed in section 2. above, will still need to apply.

4. Good practice for multiple bat groups in an area

BCT will:

- Encourage multiple bat groups to accept each other's presence in a non-competitive way.
- Share data, preferably passing records to Local Record Centres/National Biodiversity Network.
- Encourage bat groups to let each other know when/if working in each other's "area".
- Encourage bat groups not to act to the detriment of the other group, e.g. restricting training opportunities for trainees obtaining a roost visitor licence.
- Encourage bat groups to be responsive to trainers from the other group within the county/administrative boundary wishing to train as a trainer or train new roost visitors within that area.

5. Bat Group Objections

An existing group may object to a new group setting up because it is thought it will: "poach" bat work or new and existing bat volunteers; add confusion as to who members of the public, planning authorities, etc. should consult with; duplicate bat work; or dilute efficiency. These are unlikely to be reasons that prevent a new group setting up, provided that at least one or more of the criterion listed under section 2 apply.

If the objection is sustained by the existing group, it is more likely that the cause is a conflict of personalities which makes resolution of the situation to the satisfaction of both sides very difficult. However, it should be considered whether mediation between groups can be offered by someone from BCT (although it is not expected that this will necessarily be a member of the Bat Groups & Country Officers Team). This is at BCT's discretion.