

Habitat management for grey long-eared bats



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THIS HABITAT MANAGEMENT SHEET COVERS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:

- Introduction to the grey long-eared bat
- Benefits of bat-friendly land management
- Land management for different habitat types including:
 - Grassland
 - Hedgerows
 - Wooded habitats
 - Arable land
 - Riparian habitats

Introduction to the grey long-eared bat

With as few as 1000 individuals left in the UK, the grey long-eared bat is one of our rarest mammals. Their distribution is restricted to the southern coast (Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Sussex) and there are only 9 known maternity colonies, meaning that this species is on the edge of extinction in this country.

Their decline is related to the loss of suitable maternity roosts – large, open roof spaces and a loss of their foraging habitat and connectivity – lowland unimproved grassland, marsh and riparian habitats and hedgerows. Therefore, suitable habitat management around the existing roosts is vital for this species' survival. This project aims to work with landowners within a 5km 'sustenance zone' around and between Devon's maternity roosts to help create and maintain high quality foraging habitat and connectivity, securing the future survival of this species.

Benefits of managing the land for grey long-eared bats

Bats are recognised as a 'bioindicator' – a group of species whose population can indicate the health of the wider environment. Essentially, if you have healthy bat populations, then you have a healthy wider ecosystem – which is desirable for a number of major practical and moral reasons...

- Pest suppression – bats are natural pest predators and feed on the adults of cutworms, chafers, wireworms etc. One of the grey long-eared's favourite food is the crane fly, the adult form of leatherjackets.
- Resource protection – less intensive

management of hedgerows, grass margins, permanent pasture and buffer strips all help with soil, water and nutrient conservation, all vital for long term viability. These are all good foraging opportunities for grey long-eared bats.

- Livestock/crop protection – mature hedgerows and trees protect livestock from extremes in weather conditions. They also provide opportunities for invertebrates to complete lifecycles and provide food for grey long-eared bats.
- Managing the land for grey long-eared bats will also benefit pollinators – agricultural pollination by insects is valued at £600m per year (NFU, 2017)
- Grey long-eared bats are good news! Having good populations of rare bats means you are managing the land in a sustainable way.

Habitat types and guidance for grey long-eared land management

Grassland



- Increase availability of permanent pasture with very low or no inputs
- Increase flowering species by creating/ managing wildflower meadows – a favourite foraging site for grey long-eared bats
- Consider making hay as opposed to silage – this allows more insects to finish life cycles

- Allow some grassland to become rough and tussocky, particularly around field edges and corners– this gives nesting opportunities to many insects and foraging opportunities for grey long-eared bats.

Hedgerows



- Manage hedgerows extensively (2/3 year rotation) to allow hedgerow plants to flower and fruit – thus providing opportunities for more invertebrates
- Increase availability of hedgerow trees – grey long-eared bats forage around complex vegetation structures through gleaning of insects from surfaces as well as hawking of insects in flight
- Plant more hedgerows, where possible linking with existing hedgerows and woodland– bats need hedgerows to navigate through the landscape, as well as for foraging
- Infill hedgerow gaps of more than 5m as these may deter bats from using them.

Woodland/copses/shelterbelts/orchards



- Increase availability of woodlands and copses – plant on appropriate sites
- Manage woodland to optimise edge habitat by creating/maintaining rides and clearings– grey long-eared bats are an ‘edge habitat forager’
- Encourage woodland connectivity by planting hedgerows and shelterbelts between them
- Old orchards with mature trees and rough/species-rich grassland can provide excellent foraging opportunities for grey long-eared bats.

Arable

- Increase availability of grass buffer strips and wildflower margins, especially on edges of woodland, hedgerows and riparian habitats – and manage effectively by cutting/grazing. Grey long-eared’s tend to use arable the least for foraging, so creating opportunities for them in intensively managed land is important.
- Minimise pesticide use – look for alternatives such as resistant crop varieties, crop rotation and integrated pest management that will support more natural cycles and allow retention of invertebrates.
- Consider crop diversification to include more flowering plants – legumes (peas, beans, lupins) provide a free source of nitrogen and support a wide range of insects.

Riparian habitats



- Increase availability of riparian habitats including ponds, streams, marsh and reed beds – another favourite foraging site for grey long-eared bats
- Ensure riparian habitats are protected from inputs through the use of buffer strips
- Increase the extent of riparian vegetation (mature shrubs and trees).

Buildings

Many buildings on farms can provide important roosts for grey long-eared bats, particularly large stone buildings with slate roofs and large, open roof voids. These can provide vital maternity roosts, temporary day and night roosts and opportunities for hibernation. As all bat species are protected, if you are planning to carry out any work that might cause disturbance, please seek advice from Natural England via the National Bat Helpline (0345 1300 228).

For more information contact Craig Dunton (Grey long-eared bat project officer) on cdunton@bats.org.uk.