

# Species Action Plan

## Bats



pipistrelle bat © John J Kaczanow

***“The individuals which are so common in South London, even in thickly populated neighbourhoods like Battersea and Chelsea and Vauxhall, must, I think, be principally the pipistrelle...We see [them] from the spring months until the early winter, both in our open spaces and in the busy street” (Johnson, 1930)***

### **1. Aims**

- To reverse the current population declines in London's bats.
- To Change Londoners' misconceptions about bats and secure their status as a culturally valued species.

### **2. Introduction**

Bats are highly adapted nocturnal mammals – the only mammals to have evolved powered flight. Often called flying mice, they are in fact more closely related to humans than to rodents, and form a special group of their own: the *Chiroptera*, meaning ‘hand-wing’. Bats are generally only seen briefly at dusk and their seemingly furtive nocturnal habits have, over generations, resulted in popular misconceptions and even misplaced fear of them. Modern horror stories, films and the media quoting fiction as fact have not helped to improve this tainted public image.

Britain’s sixteen species of bat only eat insects. Serving as natural insecticides, they consume huge numbers and variety of prey – a single pipistrelle can eat 3000 midges in a night. With the loss of natural roost sites such as trees, bats have adapted to living in buildings and many Londoners are surprised to discover unexpected lodgers for a few weeks during the summer when females need somewhere warm to raise their young. Their reliance on buildings for roosting greatly focuses conservation efforts on people's tolerance and goodwill. Bats are an excellent indicator of the quality of our environment, as their complex ecological requirements leave them highly sensitive to environmental changes. Their serious decline should be a wake-up call to us all.

All of London's bat species are dealt with collectively in this plan because:

- Those currently concerned with the conservation of bats deal with all species;
- All bat species and their roosts are equally protected by law;
- The conservation problems faced by all bats are believed to be generally similar, so measures proposed here are likely to be of benefit to a number of species.

### **3. Current Status**

At least eight species are known to be breeding in Greater London (see Species Audit in the Annex). The two pipistrelles are by far the most common and still occur in all London Boroughs. Noctule and Daubenton’s bats are regularly recorded and widespread.

Little is known about the current status of most species nationally, although the available evidence suggests an overall decline in populations. The pipistrelle (both species) is thought to have declined by an estimated 70% between 1978 and 1993 (Harris *et al.* 1995).

A recent repeat survey in London found that there has been a statistically significant decline in the bat population of Greater London since the mid-1980s, particularly for noctules, Leisler's bats and serotines (Jones, *et al.* 2000 in prep). Further information on the status of London’s bats can be found in the Annex.

## **4. Specific Factors Affecting the Species**

### **4.1 Loss of maternity roost sites in buildings or trees**

Disturbance, damage or destruction to roosts can occur as a result of a lack of public awareness and understanding of bats, and ignorance of the legislation protecting bats, which often leads to the legal consultation process being ignored.

## **4.2 Loss of and disturbance to other roost sites**

Hibernation and other seasonal roost sites can be disturbed or damaged for the same reasons as above. These sites include buildings, trees, bridges and underground roosts.

## **4.3 Loss of feeding habitats**

Changes in land use can result in the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats such as wetlands, woodlands and grasslands.

## **4.4 Disturbance to commuting routes**

Flight paths to and from feeding areas and roosts may be disturbed through the loss of flight line features such as green corridors, or through introduction of new features such as artificial lighting.

# **5 Current Action**

## **5.1 Legal status**

All species of bat are protected in the UK on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended) and on Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations (1994). The latter further implements European legislation protecting bats. Bats are also protected by the Wild Mammals (protection) Act, 1996.

The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe which came into force in 1994, set up through the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979). While this is not strictly a legal instrument, as a signatory the UK is obliged to abide by such agreements.

## **5.2 Mechanisms targeting the species**

*These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.*

### **5.2.1 Bat wardens**

The London Bat Group co-ordinates a network of licensed bat wardens, working in liaison with English Nature to safeguard bat roosts, particularly in houses.

### **5.2.2 Awareness-raising**

The place of bats in London life is promoted regionally, locally and London-wide by organisations such as the London Bat Group, London Wildlife Trust and Local Authorities through a leaflets and other publications, as well as a programme of guided walks, illustrated talks, training and articles.

### **5.2.3 Survey and Research**

London Bat Group volunteers participate in national and local surveys and research, including The Bat Conservation Trust's National Bat Monitoring Programme.

## 6. Objectives, Actions and Targets

*Most of these actions are specific to this species. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate 'Generic Action' section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.*

*Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.*

### **Objective 1 To raise awareness among key audiences, specifically planners, land managers and tree contractors.**

**Target: Disseminate best practice advice by 2001.**

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Ensure that suitable sites for bats are in optimal condition to receive colonists by encouraging land managers and owners to follow good practice	Ongoing	LBG	LA, GLA, FC, BTCV, Groundwork
Produce and promote a Bat Advice Note for all local authority planners	2001	GLA	EN, WLOs
Promote best practice to all major tree contractors/wardens through written letters and the existing Bats In Trees leaflet	2001	LTOA	BTCV, BCT, LBG, LA

### **Objective 3 To increase knowledge of bat distribution and population change.**

**Target: Monitoring programme initiated by 2001; collation of existing data completed by 2003.**

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Establish a long-term pipistrelle monitoring programme	2001	LBG	RP, CoL, LA, GLA
Collate current and historical records for all bats in London	2003	LBG	BCT, LNHS, EN, RP, LWT

**Objective 2 To protect and create roost sites and suitable feeding habitat.**

**Target: Establish 40 new roosting opportunities by 2006**

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Identify potential sites for roost creation opportunities	2001	GLA	Land owners and managers
Create new roost opportunities on 40 identified sites	2006	LBG	LA, BTCV, Groundwork, TW, Railtrack, RP

**Objective 4 To increase public awareness of and involvement in bat conservation.**

**Target: 20 licensed bat workers by 2005; 2 Hibernation Licence holders by 2002; Training Licence Holder by 2005.**

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Maintain co-ordinated programme of guided walks, illustrated talks and popular written articles	Ongoing	LBG	BCT, LWT, WWT, LA, RP, CoL. General Media
Run training courses in bat detection for potential leaders of bat walks	2003	LBG	RP, CoL
Recruit a London-specific bat licence trainer	2005	LBG	EN
Set up a programme of training for bat box inspection licences	2002	LBG	EN, RP

**Objective 5 To make a significant contribution to urban bat conservation through new ecological research.**

**Target: One research topic completed and disseminated by 2008.**

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
Complete a desk-top study of current research on artificial light and mammal ecology	2003	LBG	EN, LWT, GLA
Commission and complete new research into links between urban bat ecology and artificial light	2005	LBG	LWT, GLA

## **Relevant Action Plans**

### **London Plans**

Woodland; The Tidal Thames; Canals; Private Gardens; Wasteland; Open Landscapes with Ancient/Old trees; Grassland, Meadows and Pasture; Grazing Marsh and Floodplain Grassland; Marshland; Reedbed; Ponds, Lakes and Reservoirs; Churchyards and Cemeteries; Railway Linesides; Farmland; Parks, Amenity Grasslands and City Squares; Hedgerows

### **National Plans**

Pipistrelle bat

## **Key References**

Harris, S., Morris, P., Wray, S. & Yalden, D. (1995). *A Review of British Mammals: population estimates and conservation status of British mammals other than cetaceans*. JNNC, Peterborough.

Johnson, Walter. FGS. 1930. *Animal Life in London*. The Sheldon Press, London.

Jones, K. Guest, P. Tovey, J. In preparation. *The status of London's bats (Mammalia: Chiroptera) 15 years on*.

JNCC (1999). *Bat Worker's Manual - 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*.

Mickleburgh, Simon (1987). *Distribution and status of bats in the London area*: The London Naturalist, no.66. LNHS

## **Abbreviations**

BCT - Bat Conservation Trust  
CoL – Corporation of London  
EN - English Nature  
FC – Forestry Commission  
GLA - Greater London Authority  
LA – Local Authorities

LBG - London Bat Group  
LNHS – London Natural History Society  
LWT - London Wildlife Trust  
WWT - Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust  
RP - Royal Parks  
TW – Thames Water  
WLOs - Wildlife Liaison Officers.

## **Contact**

The Lead for this species is the London Bat Group. Please note that although the London Bat Group will co-ordinate these actions on a London-wide scale with the support of the Partnership, it unfortunately cannot currently resource action at a Borough or Local Level.

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## Annex

### London Bat Audit

Species		UK Status	London Status	Notes
Greater horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	Endangered	Extinct	Last Greater London record from Oxleas Wood in 1953.
Lesser horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>	Endangered	Extinct	Last Greater London record from Abbey Wood (Woolwich) in 1952-3.
Whiskered bat	<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>	Vulnerable	Rare	Due to difficulty in separation, these are considered together. Found in small numbers in outer London Boroughs such as Hillingdon, Richmond, Bexley and Bromley.
Brandt's bat	<i>Myotis brandtii</i>	Vulnerable	Rare	
Natterer's bat	<i>Myotis nattereri</i>	Vulnerable	Scarce	Relatively few records in Greater London. Most central location is Highgate Wood and Hampstead Heath, otherwise Richmond and Hounslow and other outer London Boroughs.
Daubenton's bat	<i>Myotis daubentoni</i>	Not Threatened	Frequent in certain areas	Relatively common and strongly associated with ponds, lakes & rivers. Roosts in trees have been found on Wimbledon Common and Ruislip Woods, and another is believed to be in Crystal Palace Park.
Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>	Vulnerable	Rare	Serotines are found in outer London Boroughs especially Bromley, Havering, Sutton and Richmond. Roosts are known from Bromley and Teddington, and are suspected in Sutton.
Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	Vulnerable	Widespread	Regularly recorded throughout Greater London. A number of tree roosts have been found at sites including Crystal Palace Park, Regents Park and Ruislip Wood.
Leisler's bat	<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>	Vulnerable	Scarce	A few Leisler's bats have been recorded in the Greater London area, and the species appears to be most frequent in the east. A roost was found in the Aveley area just outside Greater London in 1987, and two dead bats were found in Highgate Woods in 1986.
Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i> <i>P. pygmaeus</i>	Not Threatened	Common	Recently split into two species, the pipistrelles are by far the most common bats in the UK and both species are widespread in Greater London.
Nathusius's pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>	Rare	Rare	Only recently confirmed as a UK breeding species, but there are bat detector records from Lesnes Abbey Woods and the Wetland Centre at Barnes. One was found in the City in 1989, and two were found in a bat box in Hounslow in Summer 2000.
Brown long-eared bat	<i>Plecotus auritus</i>	Not Threatened	Scarce	Brown long-eared bats are fairly secretive and so are probably under-recorded in Greater London. Roosts are known from Bexley, Bromley, Hounslow, Wandsworth, Kensington & Chelsea, Barnet, Richmond.

#### Data Limitations

This audit is based on data from the London Bat Project collected in the mid-1980s, as well as that collected since by the London Bat Group and is therefore not systematic. This audit is the best possible understanding of the status of bats in London that can currently be realised by the London Bat Group.

In general, every borough will have bats present, as even in the inner boroughs there are usually some areas of suitable habitat that can provide feeding habitat for small numbers of at least the common pipistrelle species. In general, the outer boroughs with larger areas of more suitable habitat should be expected to have higher numbers of bats and a greater diversity of species.