Species Action Plan

Bats

"*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 it from the spring months until the early winter, both in our open spaces and in the busy street"* (Johnson, 1930)

This Action Plan is dedicated to the memory of Pete Guest, former Chair and leading light of the London Bat Group, who achieved so much for bat conservation in London before his sad and untimely death in late 2003.

1. Aims

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

2. Introduction

Bats are highly adapted nocturnal mammals – the only mammals to have evolved powered flight. Often thought of as 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 a misplaced fear of them. Modern horror stories, films and the media quoting fiction as fact have not helped to improve this tainted public image.

British bats 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 in trees and woodlands, many bats have adapted to living in buildings. Some favoured Londoners may therefore be surprised to discover these unexpected lodgers for a short period during the summer, when female bats 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. Any serious decline in their populations should therefore be of major concern to us all.

The UK BAP was recently reviewed and of the species occurring in London, the BAP currently prioritises soprano pipistrelle, noctule and brown long-eared bat.

The common pipistrelle is no longer a UK BAP priority species. However the London BAP identifies all of our bat species as priorities, dealt with collectively in this grouped Species Action 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 of bat are known to breed in Greater London (see Species Audit in the Annex). The soprano pipistrelle is by far the most common and occurs in all London Boroughs. The common pipistrelle, noctule and Daubenton's bats are also regularly recorded and widespread.

Thanks to the Bat Conservation Trust's countrywide monitoring scheme there is now clearer information on the changing status of most species nationally. Following the catastrophic crash of bat populations (for at least one species to the point of extinction) during the second half of the last century, there are at last signs of recovery in some species. For example, the common pipistrelle was estimated to have declined by approximately 70% between 1978 and 1993 (Harris *et al*. 1995), but would now appear to have at least stabilised.

In London however, some population trends are apparent that contradict those of the rest of the UK. A 1999 survey which sampled bat activity at sites across the region concluded that there was a significant decline in the overall bat population of Greater London within the preceding decade, reflected most obviously by a lack of records for noctule, Leisler's bat and serotine (Guest *et al*. 2000). Since then, our soprano and common pipistrelles appear to be recovering well, the decline in noctule has gathered pace and apparently Daubenton's bat is now also causing concern. 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 and trees

Destruction of, disturbance or damage to vulnerable maternity roosts can result from a lack of public awareness and understanding of bats, as well as ignorance of the legislation protecting them.

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 (mainly their roof spaces), trees, bridges and various underground structures, such as cellars, tunnels and disused mines.

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 by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000), and on Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations, (as amended 2007). The latter further implements European legislation protecting bats. Bats are also protected from cruel ill-treatment 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 Natural England to safeguard bat roosts, particularly in houses.

5.2.2 Awareness-raising

The place of bats in London life is promoted regionally and locally by organisations such as the London Bat Group, London Wildlife Trust, the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust at Barnes, and Local Authorities through a programme of guided walks, illustrated talks, training and written articles. The Bat Conservation Trust, Natural England and the London Bat Group have produced various publications, including a series of specifically targeted leaflets aimed at promoting best practice in relation to bats within the building, pest control and arboricultural professions.

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 (NBMP).

Climate Change:

Current predications are that the climate in London and the South East of the UK will change towards hotter drier summers, with warmer wetter winters and more frequent extreme events such as storms and flash-flooding. Bats are naturally thermophilic animals, thriving best in hotter, less seasonally varied climates. As evidence of this a comparison of species diversity just within the UK reveals 15 species along the south coast compared with just 5 in the north of Scotland. On

the face of it, our predicted future climate might be felt likely to favour bat populations by reducing the need to hibernate and all the risks to winter survival this entails. However, the growing unpredictability of the weather and frequency of storms may well negate this. Bats will be badly affected by extended periods of extreme drought or rainfall during maternity, for example. Roost longevity may also be increasingly threatened by storm damage to buildings and trees. Moreover, if reduced hibernation is not matched by a corresponding increase in prey availability, mass starvation could ensue.

We should acknowledge that the more easily identifiable threats to bats in London (as described in 4.1-4) are far more immediate than those potentially associated with future climate change. Here then, is where the focus of conservation action should remain for at least the foreseeable future.

Alignment with the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy:

The aims, targets and actions in this action plan directly part-implement and/or more broadly align with several of the proposals within *Connecting with Nature, the Mayor's Biodiversity Strategy* (GLA, 2002). These linkages are summarised in the following table.

Biodiversity Strategy Proposal No.	**SAP Target/Action No.**	**Notes**
Proposal 3*: Resistance of development impacts on protected or priority species* **Proposal 4***: Mitigation of development impacts on protected or priority species*	**Target 1***: Raise and maintain awareness of bat conservation issues within key sectors (specifically planners, land managers and tree and building contractors), by advancing a targeted programme of relevant best practice advice dissemination by 2012* **Action B1.3**	[*Borough planning departments have been sufficiently alerted to the need for implementing protected species legislation through the development control system. The requirement now is for a more efficient update system as new interpretation emerges*.]
Proposal 14*: Metropolitan Police Authority enforcement of wildlife crime in London*	**Target 4***: Increase Londoners' awareness of and involvement in bat conservation by 2015* **Action B4.5**	[*Effective wildlife crime enforcement relies on expert advice from licensed bat workers to WLOs*.]
Proposal 17*: Biodiversity surveys on public open land, and appropriate management to conserve and enhance biodiversity*	**Target 1** **Action B1.4**	*Involves habitat management tailored for bats within generic prescriptions benefiting biodiversity. Publically-owned sites especially important for their bats might be identified as one of '5 important sites'*
Proposal 18*: Promotion of monitoring of London's biodiversity and support for GiGL*	**Target 2***: Increase knowledge of bat distribution and population changes in Greater London by 2010* **Actions B2.1-4, B4.3**	

Proposal 19*: Protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the Thames corridor* **Proposal 20***: Restoration strategy for tributary rivers* **Proposal 21***: Encouragement for public land managers to take biodiversity into account in the management of their land.* **Proposal 23***: Provision of expert advice and training on the management of strategically important wildlife sites and important species and the creation and enhancement of wildlife habitat.* **Proposal 31***: Support and encouragement of agri-environment schemes to enhance London's farmland biodiversity.*	**Target 1** **Action B1.4**	*River Thames and tributaries well-recognised as extremely important to London's bat populations; commuting corridors, foraging and roosting.* *Again, involves habitat management tailored for bats within generic prescriptions benefiting biodiversity. Sites especially important for their bats might be identified as one of '5 important sites'*
Proposal 33*: Research and dissemination of good practice for designing or adapting buildings to enhance and maintain biodiversity.*	**Target 1** **Target 3***: Create/restore 15 artificial roosting sites by 2012* **Actions B3.1-2**	*Involves bats in the 'Design for Biodiversity' agenda. Opportunities here to work with BCT project officer engaging construction and regeneration sector.* *London Bat house project aims to provide an exemplar in this area*
Proposal 40*: Encouragement of environmental education and interpretation.* **Proposal 43***: Promotion of news about biodiversity and events where biodiversity can be enjoyed.*	**Target 4** **Actions B4.1-4**	