



*North York Moors National Park Authority*

*Bat*

*Species action plan*

# North York Moors National Park

## Bat Species Action Plan

2008–2012

### **Bats**

#### **Our objectives for bats are:**

1. To maintain existing bat populations within the National Park, especially by protecting known roosts and hibernation sites.
2. To enhance bat habitats by developing a network of wildlife corridors and semi-natural habitats that allows bats to move freely through the landscape.
3. To enhance bat populations by encouraging potential roost sites through the planning process and through woodland and wood pasture management.
4. To increase knowledge of the distribution and status of bats in the North York Moors.

### **Introduction**

Bats are vulnerable and often misunderstood creatures. All British bats are insect-eaters, but each species has different food requirements and behaviour. Because of the scarcity of insects during the winter, bats hibernate.

In summer, female bats return to traditional and secure breeding sites where significant numbers may gather. Males, by contrast, tend to be found individually or in small groups. A species may use a number of sites in an area, but the loss of a single site can threaten the local survival of a species. Roosts can be found in a wide range of locations including bridges, trees and buildings of all ages – in fact, anywhere with a hole of about 15mm or greater.

Bats normally hibernate in places where the temperature is cool and stable. Suitable places in the National Park include caves, disused mine adits and tunnels. Several thousand bats are known to use the North York Moors' 'windypits' for swarming during the breeding season and possibly for hibernation. These are vertical fissures which occur where fractured rock sits on a lubricating bed by a deep valley side.

Despite the preponderance of underground sites within the National Park, Pipistrelle bats are often found hibernating in small numbers in buildings. Noctule bats, by contrast, generally hibernate in hollows in trees over winter. They will usually move into larger trees than they might use in summer as these give them greater insulation against the cold. There are generally still quite a few large species of moth (the preferred food of the Noctule) flying about over winter. It is thought that Noctules can cope better than other bats with the fluctuating temperatures in tree holes, because there are still opportunities to feed outside.

# North York Moors National Park

## Bat Species Action Plan

2008–2012

### **National status**

Seventeen species of bat are known to occur in the UK, sixteen of which breed here. The greatest range of species occurs in the south of England. During the 20th century most species are thought to have declined, although in more recent years populations of some species have stabilised or increased slightly.

Despite lots of anecdotal information that bats in general are not as common as they used to be, bat detectors enabling surveyors clearly to identify bat species only came into use in the 1980s, so there is not much reliable data on species distribution before this date. There are, however, lots of probable reasons for the decline in bats, including fragmentation of semi-natural habitats due to agricultural 'improvement', the use of pesticides reducing insect numbers and variety, and possibly climate change. Experts believe that one of the main reasons for the significant decline in bat populations has been the loss of roosts. Roosts are now protected by law, but building works and timber treatment chemicals are believed to have killed off many old roosts before the legislation was introduced in 1981. Bats were often deliberately excluded by householders who regarded them as vermin. Although this practice is now illegal, human actions are still the main cause of roost loss.

Because bats are creatures of habit and are particular in their roosting requirements, they seem to disappear slowly from an area rather than find an alternative to their favoured roosting site, should it be lost.

### **Local status**

Nine species of bat are currently known to occur in the North York Moors National Park and all are covered by this plan. UK BAP species present include the soprano pipistrelle, the noctule and the brown long-eared. The other species recently recorded are the common pipistrelle, Nathusius' pipistrelle, whiskered, Brandt's, Daubenton's and Natterer's bats. Lesser horseshoe and barbastelle bats are both UK BAP species that were once recorded in the Moors, but have not been seen for more than fifty years.

The most frequently seen species is the common pipistrelle, which probably occurs in almost every village. Soprano pipistrelles can be locally common near water. Brown long-eared bats also occur frequently, especially close to woodland; along with Natterer's bats, they often roost in old buildings. Daubenton's bat feeds almost entirely over water, so it tends to roost in bridges and waterside trees. Although whiskered, Brandt's and noctule bats are regularly encountered in flight, few of their roosts have been located. The only known roost of Nathusius' pipistrelle was found in 2007.

# North York Moors National Park Bat Species Action Plan 2008–2012

## Legal status

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects bats and their roosts in England. Some parts have been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW).

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (better known as the Habitats Regulations) implement the EU Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (better known as the Habitats Directive). All bats are listed as 'European protected species of animals'. Amendments to this legislation came into force in August 2007.

Protection of roosts applies at all times, even when bats are seasonally absent.

## Links to other action plans

Habitat Action Plans:	Species Action Plans:
Rivers and streams*#	N/A
Woodland*#	
Wood pasture, parkland and veteran trees*#	* = Local Species Action Plan
Farmland*#	# = UK Species Action Plan(s)
Species-rich grassland*#	
Lowland wetland*#	

## Threats

- Loss of roost sites and hibernacula due to inappropriate methods and timings for building works, putting grills over mines and windypits, felling trees etc. This loss can be incidental or constitute deliberate exclusion.
- Habitat fragmentation, caused by changes in land management such as the removal of hedgerows, leading to disruption of commuting routes.
- Reduction in insect prey due to changes in farming practices such as inappropriate riparian management, infilling of ponds and the use of insecticides.
- Disturbance to underground sites such as caves and disused tunnels, by fly-tipping, the dumping of farm waste or by potholers etc.

## Requirements

- A range of summer roosting sites and winter hibernation sites including houses, bridges, hollow trees, caves and tunnels.
- A mosaic of habitats, especially trees, hedges, unimproved grassland and freshwater to provide sources of food.

# North York Moors National Park Bat Species Action Plan 2008–2012

- A network of wildlife corridors and habitats to allow bats to move freely through the landscape.

## Local action

North Yorkshire Bat Group holds records of all known bat roosts in the county and organises bat surveys and conservation-related activities. The group also organises walks, talks and exhibitions to promote bats and their conservation.

Natural England operates a helpline to provide advice and support to householders with bats roosting in their property. A team of volunteers is available to respond to enquiries.

The Bat Conservation Trust organises the National Bat Monitoring Programme which uses volunteers to monitor changes to the populations of various species.

The North York Moors National Park Authority is required to take bats into consideration when determining planning applications. Where a development could have an adverse impact on bats, the Authority may require the applicant to commission a bat survey. If bats are present, applicants may also require a licence from Natural England before starting works.

North Yorkshire County Council surveys all bridges for bats prior to undertaking maintenance work.

## Opportunities

- Developing a network of wildlife corridors and semi-natural habitats that allow bats to move freely through the landscape, using Environment Agency funding and Defra's Environmental Stewardship Scheme.
- Partnership working between the National Park, bat conservation groups, academics and the public to enable the planning process to create and enhance available bat roosting sites and habitats.

## What can you do to help

- Join the North Yorkshire Bat Group, a group of enthusiasts interested in conserving bats in the county and in teaching others about these interesting and intelligent mammals. For further details, take a look at their website on [www.nyorkbats.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.nyorkbats.freeserve.co.uk)
- Get good advice about all issues relating to bats from the Bat Conservation Trust's national bat helpline on 0845 1300228 or see their website at [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) (Topics covered may include living with bats in your home, advice about developments, help with teaching aids, emergency help for injured bats etc.)

North York Moors National Park  
Bat Species Action Plan  
2008–2012

- Report the location of roosts, including the date and the location (grid reference) of sightings to the National Park using the online recording form on the National Park's website: [www.moors.uk.net/recording](http://www.moors.uk.net/recording)  
Alternatively, phone John Drewett from the Yorkshire Bat Conservation Trust on 01325 718133.
- Consider bats when planning alterations and repairs to or demolition of buildings. If you suspect that bats might be present, seek advice from your local ecologist on 01439 770 657.