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BATS AND BUILDINGS

SUMMARY

- **Where work is likely to affect bats and/or roosts in a house or other buildings or structures e.g. loft conversions, any demolition (including houses), building maintenance, barn conversions, works to churches, schools etc., Natural England will need to be informed, as an European Protected Species (EPS) licence may be required.**
- **Before any repair, maintenance, demolition and alteration work to any building is started (including re-roofing, timber treatment, pest control), a bat survey must be undertaken by a suitably qualified person.**
- **If bats are discovered when work has already started, work must stop immediately and Natural England or the Natural Environment Team contacted.**

Background

Increasingly bats use buildings for roosting, as natural roosting places in tree holes and caves become more scarce or disturbed.

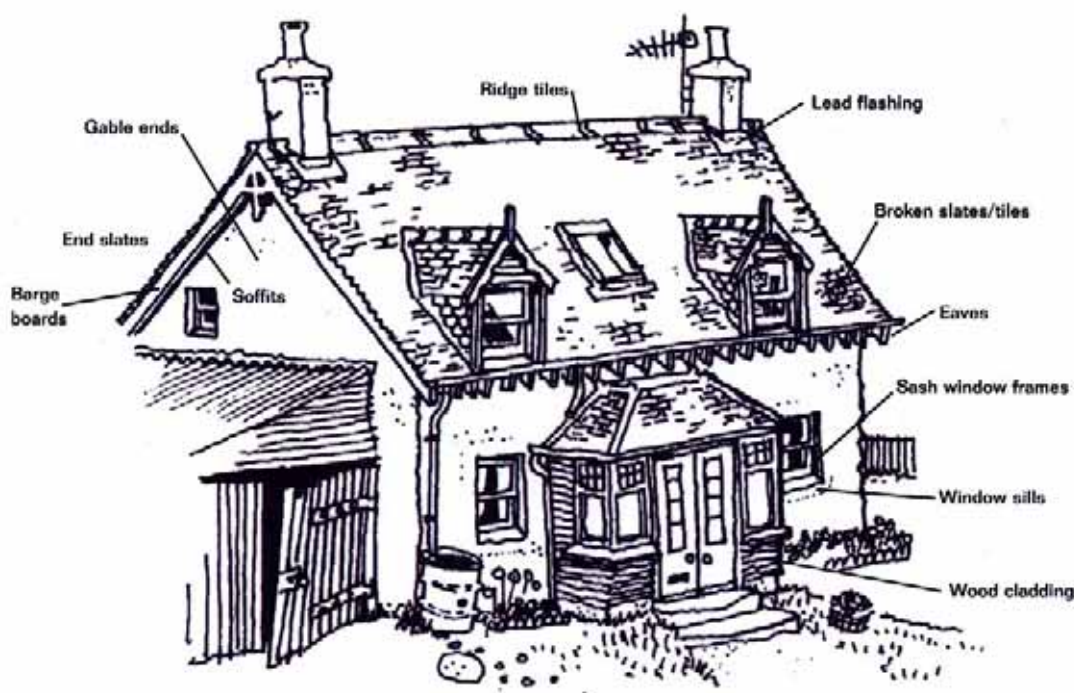
Bats are usually seasonal visitors to houses and are typically present for four to five months a year. They tend to form maternity roosts during May and June and then leave during August and early September once the young bats are independent and can fly. Bats can also be found in buildings during the winter, but these tend to be alone or in small scattered groups, hidden in crevices or under slates and away from heat sources, e.g. chimneys.

All buildings, in particular walls, eaves and roofs, are potential roost sites for bats. Inside roof spaces you may find bats: along the ridge beam, around the gable end and chimney breast. Outside a building you may find bats: under weather boarding or hanging tiles, above soffits, behind fascia and barge boarding, between window frames and wall brickwork, in gaps behind cladding tiles or wood, between underfelt and boards or tiles, inside cavity walls (Figure 1).

All bats found in the UK have been recorded in houses, but some very rarely. Pipistrelle and long-eared bats are the species most usually found. Pipistrelles prefer to roost in quite small spaces, in accessible parts of the roof structure and around its edges and rarely enter the loft space. They can colonise new buildings quite readily and frequently roost in houses built in the last 50 years. Brown long-eared bats, on the other hand, prefer older buildings with large roof spaces and often hang from the roof ridge inside the loft.

Bats causing damage to a house is almost unknown. They don't bring in material to build nests, like birds, nor do they gnaw wood, electric cables or make entrance holes like mice. Bats merely take advantage of existing gaps and holes. With the exception of horseshoe bats, they can enter buildings through gaps as small as 2.5cm (1 inch) wide.

Figure 1: Possible roosts sites in houses



Evidence of bat presence – what to look for:

The most obvious sign of bat presence in a building is their droppings.

- Bat droppings consist largely of insect remains and crumble easily between your fingers to a powder of semi-shiny fragments.
- Rodent droppings are smooth and plastic, quickly becoming hard. They cannot be crumbled.
- Bat droppings do not present any known health hazards.
- Droppings may not always be readily visible in a loft.
- Large accumulations may reflect use over a number of years rather than large numbers of bats at any one time.

Timber treatment in bat roosts

The use of pesticides in buildings, particularly for timber treatment, may unintentionally affect bats or their roosts, if carried out with the wrong sorts of chemicals or at the wrong time of year. Certain chemicals are recommended as safer to use near bats. Please contact Natural England (Dorset Team) or the Natural Environment Team for advice, before any such work is undertaken.

This advice note should be read in conjunction with 2. Bats General Advice Note.

For more information please contact the Natural Environment Team: 01305 224290 Email: net@dorsetcc.gov.uk or Natural England: 0300 060 2570