

# bats

## the quiet neighbours

Bats have lived alongside us for thousands of years in our villages, towns and cities; caves and trees have been substituted for cellars and lofts, and yet we are often unaware that our neighbourhood bats have moved in.

*Natterer's bats feeding on insects close to the water's surface.*

They are one of the most successful groups of mammals in the world and yet we are barely aware of their presence and most people know little of their lives. Our senses are dominated by what we can see, while bats have mastered a world of sound that is beyond our hearing.

The echoes from the calls bats produce with their voice-box allow them to build up a sound-based picture of the world around them. With specially shaped ears they listen to these echoes and gather detailed information, enabling them to fly, hunt, feed and socialise in the dark.

With their sophisticated use of sound, bats can identify and catch tiny prey, such as midges and mosquitoes, in the air and from surfaces, including the ground, foliage and even water.

As well as being rich in insect prey, a garden pond can also be an important watering-hole for bats. Bats need to drink, especially the females who need plenty of water to produce milk for their young 'pups' during the summer.

Feeding on insects, particularly flying ones at night, is an opportunity bats have been very successful at exploiting. Only a few other creatures have been able to take advantage of this late meal.

In winter the source of food for bats largely disappears so unlike our insect-eating birds, such as swallows and warblers, which head south in search of food, our local bats take a break and hibernate.

**Brown long-eared bat** - Possibly the cutest bat species. The magnificent ears and large eyes of the long-eared bats are the key to the way they hunt, very carefully! Looking and listening for the faintest movement of their prey, they pounce on moths, beetles and flies resting on foliage.



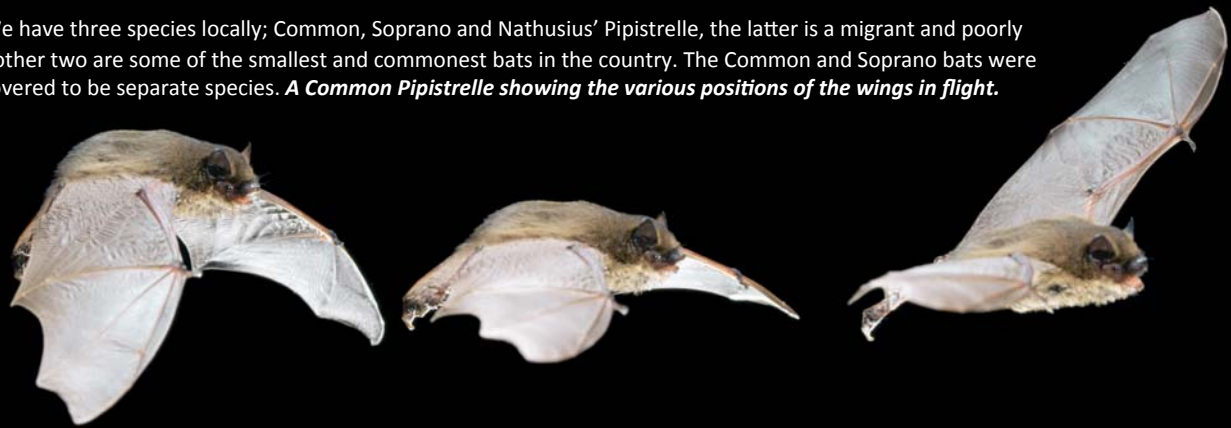
**Natterer's bat** - Tucked away from harm, hibernating in a man made cave, this long-lived animal uses an old railway tunnel as a roost during the winter months.

### **bat basics:**

- they are not blind, they can see very well
- some shout and some whisper
- sometimes they come out during the day
- you can see them in almost any month of the year
- we have 12 of the 18 species of UK bats in our area
- there are over 1000 species of bat in the world
- British bats feed mainly on insects
- they often use their tails to catch prey
- tawny owls eat bats
- in some species the males perform 'song flights'
- they roost together in 'maternity' colonies
- mothers usually give birth to one 'pup' a year
- some species can live for over 40 yrs

# introducing the locals

**Pipistrelles** - We have three species locally; Common, Soprano and Nathusius' Pipistrelle, the latter is a migrant and poorly known, while the other two are some of the smallest and commonest bats in the country. The Common and Soprano bats were only recently discovered to be separate species. **A Common Pipistrelle showing the various positions of the wings in flight.**



Kim Taylor



Peter Estok

**Leisler's bat** - With a lions mane of reddish-brown fur, this large bat is also known as the Lesser Noctule but unlike it's much larger relative, the Noctule, the fur on its back is dark at the roots. It is rare in Britain but common in Ireland. A fast flying woodland edge bat that feeds mainly on flies.



Peter Estok

**The Noctule (Great bat)** - Big and fast, it comes out to hunt early in the evening, often before sunset and can be seen flying high with the swifts and swallows. Long, narrow wings spanning 45cm.



Sandor Boldogh

**The Serotine** - It looks like a big Pipistrelle but it is a large, slow flying predator of beetles, its broad wings giving it great manoeuvrability. This warmth-loving southern species may be expanding range northwards? In roosts it hides away, crammed into corners, and can be overlooked.



Rob Strachan

**Daubenton's bat (Water bat)** - Flying low, within a few centimetres, over still and slow-moving water this bat feeds on insects on the surface of the water and sometimes small fish as well. As with other bats of its kind it has a pale underside, the fur being buff-grey in this case. It catches its prey with its very large feet or directly into the mouth. This species may well have benefitted from the increase in water-filled gravel pits and reservoirs. Look out for this species.



Rob Strachan

**Whiskered bat** - This little bat was only separated as a species from Brandt's bat in the 1970's. One of our smallest woodland bats, it has a wingspan of only 21cm. Easily confused with Daubenton's bat, it has a dark face and long, shaggy fur. With new species related to Whiskered bats being discovered in Europe, it is an exciting time, as we learn more an more about these species. Brandt's bat currently holds the lifespan record at 41 years!



Peter Estok

**Natterer's bat (Red-armed bat)** - In 'Life Of Mammals' David Attenborough narrates astonishing images of this bat plucking a spider from a web with its tail while in flight! Caves an mines are important as hibernation sites for these distinctively pink-faced bats. As with all of the Myotis genus of bats, such as Daubenton's, Whiskered, and Brandt's its fur is paler on its underside than on its head and back. Often feeds close to the surface of water or foliage.



Rob Strachan

**The Barbastelle** - Flying far on a dark night, in search of moths, this rare bat is internationally important. Volunteers are helping to reveal where it is and what it is doing in the three counties. Its dark, white-tipped fur and uniquely-shaped ears, which are joined at the front, make it unmistakable. With a wingspan of up to 28cm, this medium sized bat has been overlooked but now we know what to listen for, using ultrasound detectors.

**Bats and the landscape** - As the Wildlife trust extends and links its nature reserves, as part of its big ideas for 'landscape-scale' conservation, Ecology Group volunteers are at the forefront monitoring how successful our work to enhance the environment will be.

Teams of volunteers have existing and potential bat flight paths under surveillance to see how the bats change their behaviour as we reconnect the countryside.



**Make a discovery** - Bats migrate and species such as Nathusius' Pipstrelle has settled down to become a resident but knowledge of this species is still poor. Bigger than the Common and Soprano Pipstrelles, this shaggy, woodland bat visits our lakes and reservoirs and you could help us to us gather even more information about the exciting changes taking place in our area. **Nathusius' and Soprano Pipistrelle side by side.**



**Bat sounds** - Ultrasound or 'bat' detectors are as affordable as ever with more new models coming out as they become more popular with those keen to hear what is flying in their own back gardens. These detectors convert the high frequency calls of bats into sounds we can hear.

Some species can be identified using bat detectors more easily than if you could actually see them, opening up another part other their world for us to explore!



## Taking it further

### The occasion

It is **Big Wetlands Bat Weekend** on the last weekend of August every year so join staff and volunteers for an illuminating evening's experience as we survey several nature reserves during guided bat walks. To book your place contact 01954 713519, e-mail [ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org)

### Beginning with Bats

To start learning more about bats why not book on one of the three Wildlife Training Workshops on bats this year? Led by Henry Stanier and Chris Donnelly, they are designed for the complete beginner. For details contact Juliette Butler on 01604 405285, e-mail [trainingworkshops@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:trainingworkshops@wildlifebcn.org)

### The books

Richardson, P. W. (2000) **Bats**. Whittet Books. London. An entertaining and very informative book.  
Altringham, J.D. (2003) **British Bats**, New Naturalist series. HarperCollins. Good overview of British bats.  
Jones, K. & Walsh, A. (2006) **A Guide to British Bats**, 3rd Ed. Field Studies Council. Useful folding chart..

### The equipment

[www.alanaecology.com](http://www.alanaecology.com) is Alana Ecology, stocking a wide range of ecological equipment and publications.  
[www.batbox.com](http://www.batbox.com) is Batbox Ltd, continuing to develop new bat detectors for the budding bat detective.  
[www.batsound.com](http://www.batsound.com) is Pettersson Elektronik AB, a Swedish bat detector company with excellent products.

### The websites

[www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) is the official website of the Bat Conservation Trust, with details of your nearest local bat Group, as well plenty of information on British bats.  
[www.nathusius.org.uk](http://www.nathusius.org.uk) is a new website focused on this under-recorded species of Pipistrelle.

### Become a bat pathfinder or big wetlands bat surveyor

Volunteer for the Wildlife Trust by joining an Ecology Group and help to test how successful our ideas for woodland linkage are at enhancing the landscape for wildlife. Contact Henry Stanier on 01954 714519, e-mail [henry.stanier@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:henry.stanier@wildlifebcn.org)

### Bats abroad

If you want to support wildlife conservation abroad and learn more about bats and other wildlife, join us on a holiday to the limestone karst area of Hungary and Slovakia in July this year. In partnership with the Bedfordshire Bat Group, we will be joining local bat experts in their visits to local churches, caves, woods and meadows. Contact Wildlife Travel on 01954 713575, e-mail [wildlifetravel@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:wildlifetravel@wildlifebcn.org)

### Adopt a bat

Support the Wildlife Trusts work through the Adopt a Species scheme. The Barbastelle is just one of the animals you can choose. See our website for information, [www.wildlifebcn.org](http://www.wildlifebcn.org)