

Bat Conservation Trust

Natterer's bat



Myotis nattereri



Introduction

Natterer's bat is a medium-sized species. The ears are narrow, fairly long and slightly curved backwards at the tip. The inner lobe of the ear (the tragus) is long, narrow and sharply pointed. A characteristic feature of this species is a fringe of very stiff bristles along the trailing edge of its broad tail membrane. Its rather pinkish limbs give rise to its old name of 'red-armed bat'.

Vital statistics

Head & body length:	40mm - 50mm
Forearm length:	36mm - 43mm
Wingspan:	245mm - 300mm
Weight:	7g - 12g
Colour:	Fur light buff brown on black, white underneath. Bare pink face.

General

Natterer's bats have a slow to medium flight, sometimes over water, but more often amongst trees, where their broad wings and tail membrane give them great manoeuvrability at slow speed. They normally fly at heights of less than 5m, but occasionally may reach 15m in the tree canopy. Much of the prey is taken from foliage and includes many flightless or day-flying insects. Sometimes larger prey is taken to a feeding perch.

Habitats

Relatively few summer roost sites are known. However, most known summer colonies are in old stone buildings with large timber beams, such as castles, manor houses and churches, or large old timbered barns. Crevices in beams or gaps in beam joints are common roost sites. One colony is known to roost in a stone garden wall and two in entrances to mines. They also roost under bridges.

Although colonies are rare in houses, they occur occasionally in the roof space or directly under ridge tiles, where they are often hidden amongst timber or tiles. Access to roost sites is often by direct uninterrupted flight through a permanently open aperture, or at the eaves but is sometimes via tortuous routes through hollow walls or behind tiles. There are usually a few droppings below the access point.

The emergence of Natterer's bats from their roost reaches a peak about one hour after sunset. There is then a lull in activity before the bats begin to return. They have been observed returning an hour or two before sunrise, but when young are present they may do so soon after emergence.

Natterer's bats start to arrive at their hibernation sites in December with peak numbers in January or early February. Most leave by early March. They show a preference for the cool entrance areas of caves and mines but will hibernate in any underground shelter. Natterer's bats are one of the species most frequently found in any small cave-like site or even exposed rock crevices. They are usually solitary, but small groups are not uncommon and may include other species. An exceptional cluster of about 150 bats is regularly found at one site.

In their efforts to lodge in small crevices they can be found in almost any position, including lying on their back or sides,

or even resting on their heads. Individual Natterer's bats are occasionally found hibernating in churches, in crevices between beams.

Diet

Flies (mainly midges), small moths, caddis flies, lacewings, beetles, small wasps, spiders.

Reproduction & life cycle

Mating occurs mainly in the autumn, but has been observed in all winter months. Maternity colonies of adult females are formed from May-June through to July and sometimes until September-October. They may change roost sites frequently. The female gives birth to a single young at the end of June or in early July. For the first 3 weeks the young bat feeds only on its mother's milk and is left in a crèche inside the roost when its mother goes out at night to feed. During this time the juvenile may make its first flight inside the roost, and within 6 weeks it is fully weaned and able to forage for itself.

Echolocation

The echolocation calls of the Natterer's bat are very quiet. Their frequency range is 35 to 80kHz with a peak at about 50kHz. On a bat detector the calls are heard as irregular rapid clicks, with a sound similar to cellophane being crumpled.

Distribution & conservation

Natterer's bats are found throughout most of the British Isles. Recent records have extended its range in Scotland north to the Great Glen fault. Generally it is a scarce and poorly known species.

The UK population of Natterer's bats is of international importance. To conserve its summer roosts, the conversion of barns should be discouraged and the maintenance and remedial timber treatment of other older buildings need to be carefully monitored. Important wintering sites should be protected. Feeding habitat requirements are poorly known.

