The noctule is the largest bat in Scotland. It roosts in trees and emerges before sunset to hunt for moths and flying beetles.

Find out more about bats in Scotland.
Bats in Scotland

Battling for survival – it’s a hard life

A bat's life is not an easy one. Bats must eat huge numbers of insects to survive and find different, safe roosts for bringing up their babies and for hibernation. They are sometimes misunderstood and feared which makes life even more of a challenge.

Bats in Scotland

Scottish bats have to be particularly hardy. The short summer nights give little time to feed and if the summer night is cold, wet or windy it can be difficult to find insects. *If the weather is cold, wet and windy then it is not worth the effort of hunting.*
Bats across Scotland

There are 17 species of bat living and breeding in the UK but only 9 species are tough enough to survive in Scotland. They range from the plucky pipistrelle to the noisy noctule.

The number of species increases as you go south and west.

**Bats up north**
No bats live permanently in Shetland but occasional waifs and strays get blown in and turn up as surprise visitors on islands and oil rigs.

Orkney holds the record for having the most northerly (and hardest) bats.

**Sunny and Wet south west is best**
All 9 Scottish species occur in Dumfries and Galloway.

Threave Estate – owned by the National Trust for Scotland – is a special bat reserve where the public can visit at dusk and follow self-guided bat trails.

What to spot
1. Pipistrelles feeding over seaweed.
2. The most northerly Natterer’s bats near Tain.
3. Daubenton’s bats at Ness Islands (Inverness).
4. Pipistrelles at sunset.
5. Aristocratic brown long-eared bats at Crathes Castle.
6. Watch out for whiskered bats.
7. Noisy noctules over the river Tweed.
8. Look out for Leisler’s in Wood of Cree.

Add your sightings, find bat hotspots and events on the Big Bat Map at www.bigbatmap.org
Brown long-eared bats have aristocratic tastes, they like big old houses set in beautiful grounds. This makes them very vulnerable; if they lose a roost like this there is unlikely to be another in their ‘home territory’.

Brown long-eared

Noctule

The noctule is the biggest, noisiest and fastest bat in Scotland. It can fly at 30mph, shouts four times louder than the legal limit for a nightclub (but humans can’t hear most of the call) and is bold enough to emerge before sunset. These bats are rarely found in houses preferring to roost in trees.

The pipistrelle is the bat you are most likely to have sharing your house. They are the smallest British bat and can eat thousands of small insects on a warm summer’s night.

Natterer’s bat

The Natterer's bat can skim low over grass and grab caterpillers for a juicy bat snack.
The Daubenton’s bat occasionally roosts in houses but is more commonly found in bridges and trees. It feeds by skimming very low over the surface of freshwater where its flight path makes it easy to identify.

The bats that live in Scotland are: three types of pipistrelle*, brown long-eared, Daubenton’s, Natterer’s, whiskered, noctule and last but not least the Leisler’s bat.

*The soprano, common and Nathusius’ pipistrelles.
Summer and Winter roosts

The natural place for a bat to roost is in a tree, cave or rock face but many trees have been cut down so bats have adapted to using man-made structures like bridges and houses as roosts.

**Summer Roosts**

- Mothers need warm roosts while bringing up babies.
- Each mother usually has only one baby a year.
- A maternity roost may have over a hundred bats (depending on the species).
- Mothers return to favourite roosts year after year.

**Winter Roosts**

- During winter bats need cool, frost-free, humid and undisturbed sites for hibernation.
- Where they all hibernate is a bit of a mystery as we find only small numbers in winter, usually in underground sites, in thick stone walls or in trees.
Finding food

**How do bats hunt in the dark?**

Bats are not blind but at night their ears are more useful to them than their eyes. As they fly they ‘shout’ and then listen for an echo. The bats use the echoes to build a sound picture of what is ahead of them. They can tell the size and shape of objects this way and, if an object is moving, how fast it is going and in which direction.

This process is called echo-location. Most of the calls the bats make are too high-pitched for human ears. However we can tune in to bat calls by listening on a bat detector. Different bats have different calls and bat detector sounds range from dry clicks to wet slappy sounds.

*When bats ‘home in’ on an insect they make a series of very fast calls. This is described as a ‘feeding buzz.’*
Bat watching

When?
The best time to watch for bats is either just around sunset or just before dawn on a warm, calm summer’s night. Unfortunately in some parts of Scotland this is also the time when midge numbers are at their greatest. It also means staying up very late!

Where?
The best places to watch for bats are where there are lots of insects. Areas with trees and fresh water are especially good. If you live by the coast you may see bats feeding over piles of seaweed on the shore.

How you can help bats
The Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) wants a future where everyone, everywhere can enjoy seeing and hearing bats as part of their natural environment.

Your help can make a difference! Become a member of BCT today and help us to ensure these amazing mammals are protected for future generations to enjoy. You can join online or over the telephone. We can also provide details of your local bat group.

Bat Conservation Trust

National Bat Helpline: 0345 1300 228
www.bats.org.uk
enquiries@bats.org.uk

Produced with the support of Auritus Wildlife Consultancy and Scottish Natural Heritage

Photos courtesy of Hugh Clark, John Haddow, Anne Youngman, Martin Celuch and John Altringham. Artwork by Lyn Wells. The Bat Conservation Trust is a registered charity, number for Scotland SC040116. Company limited by guarantee number 2712823.

Printed August 2015