

Six calls you'll get on the National Bat Helpline (and how to survive them)



Bat Conservation Trust



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As you know if you attended this morning's session, my name's Laura Brown and I'm the Co-Ordinator of the UK Bat Care Network, which is maintained by the Bat Conservation Trust. Many of you will be Network members already; for those who aren't, you can find out more about it at our stand (upstairs). I'd encourage you to join if you haven't already – it's a great way to make sure bats are referred to you, as well as to get support and make contact with other carers.

Most of today is dedicated to what happens to a bat after it gets to you, but I'm going to talk about what happens beforehand. At BCT our helpline takes calls about more than 7,000 grounded or injured bats per year, most of which get referred on to local Bat Care Network volunteers. Sometimes this is easy; other times not so much. I'd like to invite you all to place yourselves in our shoes and take a look at **six types of calls we get on the National Bat Helpline (and how we survive them).**

The caller who can't get the staff



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First, we have **the caller who can't get the staff**. Either this person has a strong sense of entitlement, or they've been in an alternative reality for the past 40 years and have missed the shrinking of the welfare state. Either way, they're shocked to learn that calling a bat helpline doesn't mean a bat rescuer will parachute out of the sky and take over.

To these callers, we explain that bat carers are all volunteers and don't have their expenses paid, so we can't risk sending them out to an uncontained bat that may have escaped by the time they arrived. Some callers are convinced by this argument, and some respond as in the illustration. For the second group, we simply give them an ultimatum: if they won't contain the bat, then we can't put them in touch with a volunteer. Usually this is persuasive; it's rare for us to be unable to help a bat because the caller refuses to contain it.

I should add that we take a different approach when a caller has a genuine reason they can't contain the bat, such as disability. In those cases, if no friends or neighbours are able to help, we call the carers themselves and ask if they can help.

The caller whose wife is terrified



The next type is a close cousin of the first: **The caller whose wife is terrified**. In general, we're able to help scared callers who admit they're scared. Often it's just a matter of reassurance and giving them the facts. Things are harder when the caller won't admit to their fear. This is more likely to be an issue with men, and we have to strike a balance between addressing the fear and not letting them know that we can tell they're scared. I had a breakthrough in one case like this when I started explaining to the caller how the *bat* might be feeling: "He's in a strange situation and all alone. You won't hurt him, but he doesn't know that. He must be terrified. Can you help?" That awakened his empathy, and while he still wasn't able to contain the bat himself, he was able to find a colleague who could.

The caller whose cat just wanted to help



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Next, we have **the caller whose cat just wanted to help**. As we all know, cats are one of the major threats to bats in the UK. Some cat owners know that the adorable creature curled up on their sofa is also a miniature killing machine, but some take more persuading. Often with these callers, rather than accusing their cat of murder, we will frame the situation in terms of the inconvenience to them: "You'll be less likely to have to deal with this in future if you can keep her in for a few hours around dusk."

The cat's name in this slide, by the way, comes from my days working in veterinary practices when I observed that the more neurotic a cat owner was, the more likely they were to have named their cat after alcohol. I don't think we actually had any Zubrowkas on our books, but I thought it would be too ironic to call the cat Bacardi.

The caller who's watched too much *Animal Rescue*



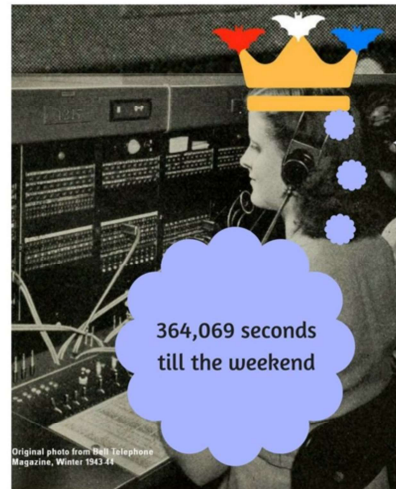
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The caller who's watched too much *Animal Rescue* isn't our commonest type of caller, but can be very worrisome. We do our best to explain what a huge commitment looking after the bat is. A description of beheading mealworms sometimes does it, or explaining that they can expect to be up all night with a baby bat. But sometimes that doesn't persuade people, and we end up suggesting that we can put them in touch with a carer "just so you can talk over the bat's care." Then we alert the local volunteers ourselves, rather than relying on the finder to call them.

It has to be said that finders looking after bats themselves isn't always a disaster. I once spoke to a woman who'd been raising a baby bat for several weeks. She had a young child of her own, and apparently the pup had been thriving on her breast milk. Sadly, she didn't want to become a carer

The caller who seems to have issues

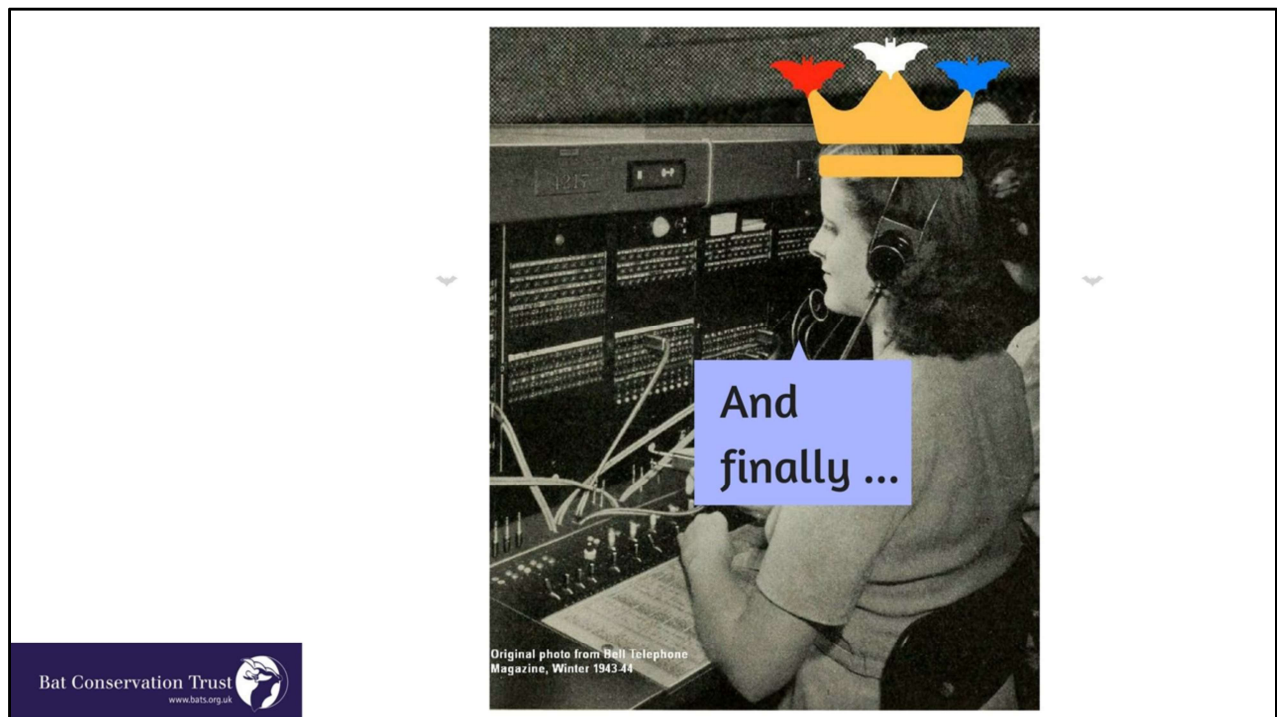


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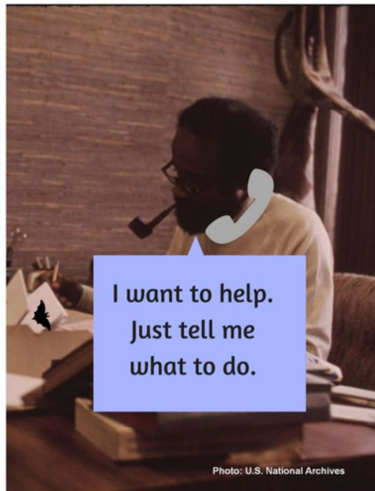


The caller who seems to have issues is also relatively rare, but can really ruin your day. We still try to help if we can, but we have two policies: We never give in to threats, and we won't tolerate personal abuse. The caller will be warned, and if they continue, we'll terminate the call. If they can't be civil to paid staff, we certainly won't pass them on to the volunteer!



Well, now you have an idea of the more difficult calls that we have to deal with. The good news is that there's a type of caller more common than any of these.

The caller we get most often



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The vast majority of our callers are able and willing to help, and these account for most of the bats that come to you.
Any questions?