



Cluster flies

This leaflet is designed for those who need to carry out cluster fly pest control in dwellings where bats roost, or are suspected to roost. It is specific to these works only and to no other works. If you require further information after reading this leaflet, please contact the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT).

Do I have bats?

Where a bat roost is suspected, it may be practical to undertake some initial investigations. You must take great care when seeking to identify a bat roost, firstly because of the safety issues of accessing lofts and other high spaces, and also because it is important not to disturb the bats when in their roost. When they are hibernating, if you do wake bats they will use up valuable energy stores, and through the maternity season, you can disturb bats with their babies.



Bat droppings are usually dry and crumble easily between your fingers to a powder.

Rodent droppings do not crumble. They quickly become hard.

You may see droppings on or around the property, particularly around possible bat access points. A bat dropping looks very similar to a rodent dropping, but will usually be very dry, and crumble to dust under very little pressure. If you notice any droppings, a quick crumble test (with gloves or a tissue) is a good way to get an indication of bat presence. You could also check the loft, but do be wary of the presence of any bats and stop immediately if you suspect any are there.

Another way to identify bats is to perform what we call emergence and/or re-entry surveys. During summer months (May-September) you should be able to see bats more frequently. You will find some tips on carrying out these surveys in our leaflet *Living with bats*.

Cluster flies in loft spaces

Cluster flies usually arrive at properties in late autumn. They gather on wall surfaces, and then move into cool loft areas for winter hibernation. Unlike other flies, they are not interested in searching for food during this time and so are not in any way attracted by the presence of bats or bat droppings. Their presence in lofts is therefore unrelated to the bats. If left alone, cluster flies lay dormant in the loft and then either die off in large numbers over the winter period or move out in the early spring. However once cluster flies have established the use of a building as a hibernation site, subsequent generations may return every year. The building is attractive to them either because of its location or colour. It is also suspected that the smell of pheromones may be left by previous infestations.

Cluster flies tend to become a nuisance to householders if they enter living areas, either on their natural route to the loft during autumn or when they disperse in spring, or as a result of being woken up during their hibernation period by disturbance (e.g. from light, vibrations etc.) within the roof space. However they do not present a health risk to householders.

Cluster fly infestations tend to be an annually recurring problem and although chemical treatment may solve the fly problem in the short term, it will not necessarily alleviate this. **Therefore, in the first instance we would recommend tackling the problem of the flies using non-chemical treatment.**

What can I do initially, without using chemicals within the loft void?

The most effective non-chemical treatment is to minimise the number of places where the flies can get in. As the flies generally land on the walls and run upwards into the roof; you may also wish to block the routes flies use to get from the roof into the living area.

- Place a fine mesh over ventilation slots in the soffits, **making sure that you avoid any access points used by bats.**
- Seal up any gaps around window frames, gaps around the loft hatch, pipes or beside beams and light-fittings.

Please note that bats may access gaps as small as 8mm by 20mm. **If you are unsure if blocking gaps would affect bat accesses, please do not undertake this work without seeking further advice from your SNCO or an ecological consultant.**

Within the living rooms:

- Use a traditional fly spray or fly paper. **Do not use these within the loft or anywhere that bats may come into contact with them.**
- Use a trap which can be fixed to the inside of a window. These are commercially available and consist of an enclosed box of granules, which attracts the flies into it and dispatches them. (Please see appendix).

Within the loft:

- Take care to minimise disturbance to bats when entering the loft, particularly during the critical hibernation period (November to February) and breeding season (May to September).
- Collect the flies carefully with a vacuum cleaner*, but first please ensure there is no chance a bat may get sucked up and injured.
- **Time vacuuming for between March and April, or late September to October, when any baby bats will have been weaned, and the bats will not have entered hibernation yet.**
- Place the vacuum cleaner bag in a deep freeze for several days to kill the flies.
- Take care not to inhale any loft insulation fibres.

**Please note this is not ideal where loft insulation is old & will quickly clog a vacuum cleaner.*

The flies do leave buildings in the spring so we would suggest that any necessary entering of the loft during the winter is kept to a minimum so not to warm them up by the lighting or by your presence.

Can I chemically treat the flies where there is a bat roost?

Since many bat species are so rare, the laws protecting them are strict (see 'Summary of law relating to bats' below) and chemicals used in the vicinity of bats and their roosting sites can be harmful to any bats present and detrimental to the roost.

If there is a bat roost at your property it will be necessary to organise the timings of any chemical treatment to fit in with the life-cycle of the bats, i.e. avoiding times when bats are present, as well as using precautionary methods and chemicals which have been approved as safe for use in the vicinity of a bat roost.

If you should choose to use a chemical solution to treat the cluster flies please seek advice from your local SNCO or an ecological consultant prior to undertaking any work so that the correct advice can be given on how to proceed in the most efficient way possible within the constraints of the law.

Sometimes bats remain within roof structures, cavity walls and other inaccessible crevices and in some cases it may not be possible to confirm that bats have vacated the roost for alternative hibernation locations. In these instances chemical treatment will not be possible since there is a high risk that chemical fumes could affect the bats. Non-chemical options would therefore be advised.

Longer term cluster fly solutions

Possible long-term solutions to help prevent future generations of flies from returning include changing the colour or reflectance of the building, and/or the use of a disinfectant solution around windows, eaves and soffits (to remove any pheromones which may be left by a previous cluster fly infestation). Please contact your SNCO should you wish to consider any of these options.

Electric fly killers should not be used without seeking advice from your SNCO beforehand since their operational hours must be monitored and tailored according to the time of year. Any servicing required at intervals must also be agreed with the SNCO.

Summary of the law relating to bats

As population numbers have fallen, all bats and their roosts are protected under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Bats use roosts on a seasonal basis and therefore bat roosts are protected whether the bats are in occupation or not.

Under these pieces of legislation it is illegal to:

- deliberately capture (or take), injure or kill a bat;
- intentionally, recklessly or deliberately disturb a bat (in relation to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) the offence applies whilst the species is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; in relation to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 it applies anywhere);
- damage or destroy the breeding or resting place (roost) of a bat;
- possess a bat (alive or dead), or any part of a bat;
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost;
- sell (or offer for sale) or exchange bats (alive or dead), or parts of bats.

Your Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO)

If you need to undertake any works that may affect your roost, it is recommended that you take the necessary precautions by seeking advice on how to do works lawfully. This advice can be provided by the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) for your country.

England:	Natural England (via BCT)	0345 1300 228
Northern Ireland:	Northern Ireland Environment Agency	028 9039 5264
Scotland:	Scottish Natural Heritage	01463 725 165 / batsinhouses@snh.gov.uk
Wales:	Natural Resources Wales	0300 065 3000 (ask for the species team)

Please note that not all building types / pest control work may be covered by the SNCO service for a free bat worker/roost visitor survey so it may be necessary to engage an ecological consultant.

The Bat Conservation Trust (known as BCT) is a registered charity in England and Wales (1012361) and in Scotland (SC040116).

Registered office: Quadrant House, 250 Kennington Lane, London SE11 5RD
Email: enquiries@bats.org.uk National Bat Helpline: 0345 1300 228

Appendix: Cluster buster



- **Non-toxic (no chemical) lure for flies**
- **Environmentally friendly**
- **Long lasting and economical**

Cluster buster fly control trap for use on windows. These traps can assist with capturing cluster flies and are available from a number of outlets.