

Bat Conservation Trust



National Bat Helpline Annual Report

2019



Photo by Peter Crome

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1. The National Bat Helpline

In 2019 the Helpline had...

13,479 enquiries
Including...
2,345 through the Out of Hours Service

The National Bat Helpline is managed by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) and is a national service available to anyone who is interested in or concerned about bats. The Helpline can be reached on 0345 1300 228 or via email at enquiries@bats.org.uk between 9.30am and 4.30pm on weekdays all year round, with an Out Of Hours (OOH) service provided during evenings and weekends over the summer by trained volunteers. The figures contained within this report include all enquiries received through the Helpline and OOH Helpline, unless stated otherwise.

1.1 Meet the Team



Hannah Van Hesteren – Helpline Manager

Joined the Helpline: May 2015

Favourite bat species: Noctule

Having graduated with a degree in biology from the University of Sussex in 2013, Hannah began volunteering in nature reserves around London where she developed a passion for bats. Hannah still volunteers in her spare time, attending bat surveys as often as possible and is the joint chair of the London Bat group.



Becky Wilson – Helpline Manager

Joined the Helpline: August 2018 & May 2014 as a seasonal

Helpline Officer

Favourite bat species: Barbastelle

Becky has a degree in biology from the University of Southampton and has always been passionate about wildlife conservation. In 2013 she interned at Botanical Gardens Conservation International, where she took part in completing a Red List of the tree family *Betulaceae* as part of the Global Trees Campaign. Becky fell in love with bats whilst carrying out her dissertation on the effects of LED lighting on bat foraging behaviour. She is the chair of the London Bat Group and enjoys taking part in bat surveys, especially NBMP hibernation surveys.



Jennifer Pope – Senior Bat Advisor

Joined the Helpline: June 2007

Favourite bat species: Brown long-eared/Natterer's/Honduran White Bat

Jen lives in West Sussex and studied Marine Biology at the University of Plymouth followed by an MSc in Zoo Conservation Biology. She has a background in wildlife rehabilitation and has an interest in island ecology, having travelled to Madagascar, Borneo, Cuba and Iceland. Jen enjoys live music and spends her spare time trying to coax her children out of trees and retrieving toys for her dog.



Laura Brown – Senior Bat Advisor

Joined the Helpline: May 2015

Favourite bat species: Bechstein's

Lot co-ordinator for East of England

Co-ordinator, UK Bat Care Network

After a decade in financial services, Laura changed careers to pursue her lifelong interest in nature and animal welfare. She became a permanent member of Helpline staff after working for two summers as a Seasonal Helpline Officer. Outside of work, she has published poems, short stories and classical music reviews.



Grace Johnson – Senior Bat Advisor

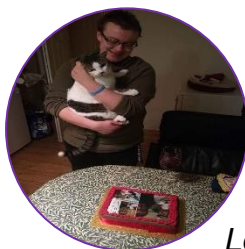
Joined the Helpline: May 2017 – August 2019

Favourite bat species: Brown long-eared

Out of Hours Project Co-ordinator

Lot co-ordinator for Cheshire and Lancashire, North East and Cumbria

Grace is originally from Newcastle and studied Zoology at the University of Leeds. She then worked in Australia for over 2 years and has travelled around Asia, New Zealand, the South Pacific and South America. Whilst travelling she undertook various volunteer conservation projects in Borneo and Australia. In her spare time, she likes running, cooking and travel.



Tristan Evans – Senior Bat Advisor

Joined the Helpline: May 2018

Favourite bat species: Daubenton's bat

Lot co-ordinator for Yorkshire, East Midlands and South East

Tristan studied for Film at the University of West London and, before joining BCT as a Seasonal Helpline Officer, had various jobs in the film industry. Outside of work Tristan is a

keen artist, fencer and enjoys walking in search of nature. Tristan has previously taken on the Three Peaks Challenge and has climbed Mount Kilimanjaro.



Ele Johnstone – Senior Bat Advisor

Joined the Helpline: May 2018

Favourite bat species: Natterer's/Daubenton's

Lot co-ordinator for South West, South East and West Midlands

Out of Hours Project Co-ordinator (after Grace Johnson left in August)

Before joining the Helpline Ele gained an integrated Master's degree in Biology from the University of Sheffield. She is originally from Dorset and has volunteered for a range of conservation organisations. Outside of work she enjoys writing and blogging about conservation issues and the natural world, wildlife photography and running.



Marie Canny – Bat Advisor

Joined the Helpline: May 2019

Favourite bat species: Daubenton's

*Lot co-ordinator for Cheshire and Lancashire, North East and Cumbria
(after Grace Johnson left in August)*

Out of Hours Project Assistant

Marie is Irish, has a Master's in marine conservation and worked in fisheries management in New Zealand before moving to east Africa for a few years to participate in social research. Before joining the Helpline Marie was growing and raising a tiny human here in London and volunteering with social justice groups.



Figure 1: Seasonal Bat Advisors employed for summer 2019. From left to right; Marie Canny, Sarah Hartley, Hannah Bottomley and Peter Selway. Inset: Imogen Chase.

1.2 The BCT Strategic Objectives - How the Helpline contributes

Discover: To establish the capacity of the landscape to support viable populations of bats.

For every Natural England volunteer roost visit that the Helpline coordinates, we gain a record of a bat roost. On behalf of Natural England, we share anonymised data from these visits with biological records centres, the National Biodiversity Network and local bat groups, helping these organisations gather the information they need to protect bats and their habitat.

We also urge roost owners and other members of the public to get personally involved in bat recording by promoting the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) wherever possible. NBMP is a citizen science initiative operating throughout the UK that produces official statistics on bat populations and trends. People can participate by counting the bats in their roosts or taking part in transect surveys.

- The Helpline answered 3,706 enquiries in 2019 from those who wanted more advice about a bat roost. These roosts were reported in residential properties, places of worship, commercial properties, trees and other structures.
- The Helpline distributed NBMP leaflets and survey information to 475 enquirers, promoting volunteering for the project and encouraging roost owners to count their colony. We provided general information about joining NBMP to many more. This contributes to the recruitment of new volunteers to the NBMP Roost Count each year.

Act: To secure and enhance bat populations to the full capacity of the landscape.

The Helpline does many different things, all with the same purpose: to save bats. We help individual bats by putting people who have found a grounded or injured bat in touch with volunteer bat care contacts throughout the UK, and we help the larger bat population by giving people the knowledge they need to protect their habitat.

In England, we help roost owners get the advice they need to undertake repairs or maintenance on their homes or a place of worship, without harming their bats. We organise visits by licensed Natural England Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors (VBRVs) throughout the whole of England and produce advice letters on Natural England's behalf. Throughout the UK, we also help to educate roost owners about the legal protection of bats, the fact that they pose no threat to buildings or their human occupants, and their importance to the UK's environment and economy.

We also helped people who were concerned about the impact of development on bats to make their voices heard in the planning process and ensure bats are taken into account. Where a member of the public thinks a wildlife crime has been committed, we guide them through the process of reporting this to the police.

- In 2019, the Helpline dealt with **3,275 roost enquiries** within England on behalf of Natural England, of these we organised 949 roost visits to provide further advice.

- The Helpline received 2,104 enquiries in 2019 from **outside of England**, of which **329** calls were **roost-related**. These enquirers were provided with relevant information and directed to their country's Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) for further advice where necessary.
- There were **660** enquiries to the Helpline in 2019 relating to **planning and developments** that may affect local bat populations and roosts. This represents 5% of the total enquiries received over the whole year. In order to increase the efficiency of the Helpline, in 2018 we began referring callers to a dedicated page on our website where an advice pack is available to download. This pack contains detailed advice on what to do if you are concerned a development may harm bats.
- There were **456** enquiries relating to **bat crime** or bat roosts disturbed during building work in 2019.
- In 2019, the Helpline received a total of **7,636 bat care** enquiries, which included 5,278 enquiries regarding grounded, injured or baby bats found and **693** regarding **bats flying in buildings**. We provided immediate care advice and, when appropriate, we were able to pass on details of local bat care contacts in order to rehabilitate the bats and release healthy bats back into the breeding population.

We also make sure that the public are made aware and have the most up to date facts about bats and rabies, as well as providing general information on subjects such as bat biology and ecology.

- The Helpline provides advice about the small risk of a type of rabies to every enquirer who may come into contact with bats, and minimises the risk of them being bitten or scratched by advising enquirers against handling bats. In 2019, 67% of enquiries (8,549) to the Helpline were linked to instances where the enquirers could have or had come into contact with bats.
- We ask every caller who has found a bat whether they have been bitten or scratched. If they have, we provide the person bitten with accurate information so that they know to seek medical advice and inform the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) where required. The Helpline dealt with 40 bat bite incidents in 2019. We also provide information and reassurance to people who are generally concerned about the rabies risk from bats.
- The Helpline supports the APHA passive testing system for the EBLV viruses by providing enquirers who find dead bats with appropriate information and test tube packs to enable them to send the dead bat to the APHA testing laboratories. In 2019, the Helpline sent out 610 rabies test tubes to 451 individuals.

Inspire: To win the level of support required to achieve and maintain these bat populations.

One of the major threats to bats' survival is their undeserved bad reputation. Our conversations with the public give us the perfect opportunity to combat myths and spread the word that bats are a vital part of our ecosystem. We reassure roost owners who are worried about having bats in their houses.

We also give support and encouragement to people who love bats and want to help them. We advise members of the public on how to encourage bats through wildlife-friendly gardening and creating new roosting space. We also inspire them to help bats further by getting involved with their local bat groups, taking part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme, and, of course, joining BCT.

- We wanted to find out if people's perceptions of bats changed after they had found a bat and contacted the National Bat Helpline for advice. In a 2019 survey of almost 170 bat finders we discovered that:
 - Among those that were initially "negative" or "very negative" towards bats, 71% changed to "positive" or "very positive" and 14% changed to "neutral"
 - Of those that started out as "neutral" towards bats, 83% changed to "positive" or "very positive" towards bats and 14% remained at "neutral".
 - 31% of bat finders took part in further bat-related activities or sought out further information after the rescue.
- Attitudes to bats before and after helpline advice is recorded in roost related enquiries in England. Of the callers that started off as "negative" towards bats, 73% changed to "neutral" or "positive" after getting advice from the helpline team.
- The Helpline also acts as a link between BCT, bat groups and Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors. At least 607 enquiries were bat group-related; either enquiries or leaflet requests from bat groups, or enquiries passed on to bat groups.
- The Helpline team directs some of its enquiries to specialist BCT staff to ensure they are answered appropriately. The Helpline team passed on 347 enquiries to other members of BCT staff in 2019, accounting for 3% of our enquiries.
- The Helpline provides resources (e.g. information leaflets and posters) to enquirers. In 2019 this amounted to information being sent to over 5,200 people.
- We promote BCT membership wherever possible in all communication.
- The Helpline is a resource for professionals who may encounter bats during their day-to-day work. We provide advice, reassurance and information to inspire a greater appreciation of bats.
 - The Helpline provided 594 vets and 19 wildlife hospitals with information and advice on how to care for bats brought into their clinics in 2019. This included a specific guide to bat care for rehabilitators which will ensure the best outcome for the bats in their care.
 - 342 members of the building, pest control and tree surgery industries contacted the Helpline for advice on what to do if/when bats are encountered during their work.

Strengthen: To achieve financial stability and sustainable staff workloads. Staff and volunteers are motivated and well led.

The Helpline is committed to supporting both staff and volunteers; their hard work and drive to protect bats is instrumental to the continued conservation of these wonderful animals. Managing staff and volunteer workloads is crucial in the effective organisation of the Helpline, and this has particular precedence during the busy season (April – September) when bats are most active. During this busy summer season, the Helpline hires seasonal staff, who provide additional support for the team.

Staff work on a rota basis, allowing them to manage their time efficiently. Sharing of different tasks amongst the team on this basis with the addition of larger scale project work creates a varied workload for staff, leading to them feeling motivated and stimulated in their work.

Volunteers are crucial to the success of the free advice service and we are incredibly grateful for all the hard work they do. We continuously work on the Helpline to create and foster good relationships with volunteers. We also work closely with Natural England in the implementation of the free roost visit service and aim to continue this contract into the future.

- Staff are encouraged to increase their bat knowledge through training to aid their work on the Helpline. In 2019, training courses about bat ecology, bat care, bat identification and white nose syndrome were attended by advisors. The knowledge gained from attending training courses is disseminated to the Helpline team by the officer who attended and where appropriate, standard emails and information documents are produced which can be shared with enquirers.
- Hiring seasonal staff increases the Helpline's capabilities, a larger team allows the Helpline to manage daily increase in enquiries during the summer. Consequently, more enquiries are answered, more roost visits arranged, and more bats saved on a daily basis whilst maintaining a careful allocation of Helpline resources. Four Seasonal Bat Advisors were employed in May 2019 and one in August 2019.
- A new contract with Natural England began in November 2019 to continue the implementation of the free roost visit service.
- As part of this new contract a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor feedback survey was initiated. Of the 21 responses gathered from our survey between November and December 2019, **75%** of VBRVs reported their relationship with the National Bat Helpline to be **“excellent”** and a further **20%** reported it to be **“good”**.
- Out of hours (OOH) volunteers were invited to provide feedback mid-way through the season and again once the season has finished. **100%** of volunteers who responded during the mid-season feedback opportunity indicated that they enjoyed being an OOH volunteer. And **95%** of respondents provided **positive feedback** regarding the quality of support offered to them by the OOH Project Coordinator and back-up staff at the end of the season. **87%** of respondents would consider **volunteering** for OOH **again**.

1.3 Overview of 2019

1.3.1 Enquiry statistics

In 2019 the Helpline received a total of 11,134 Helpline-related enquiries (not including OOH). These enquiries consisted of calls, emails and letters. The OOH service received a further 2,345 enquiries on top of this, which was a 9.6% increase from the previous year (2,119).

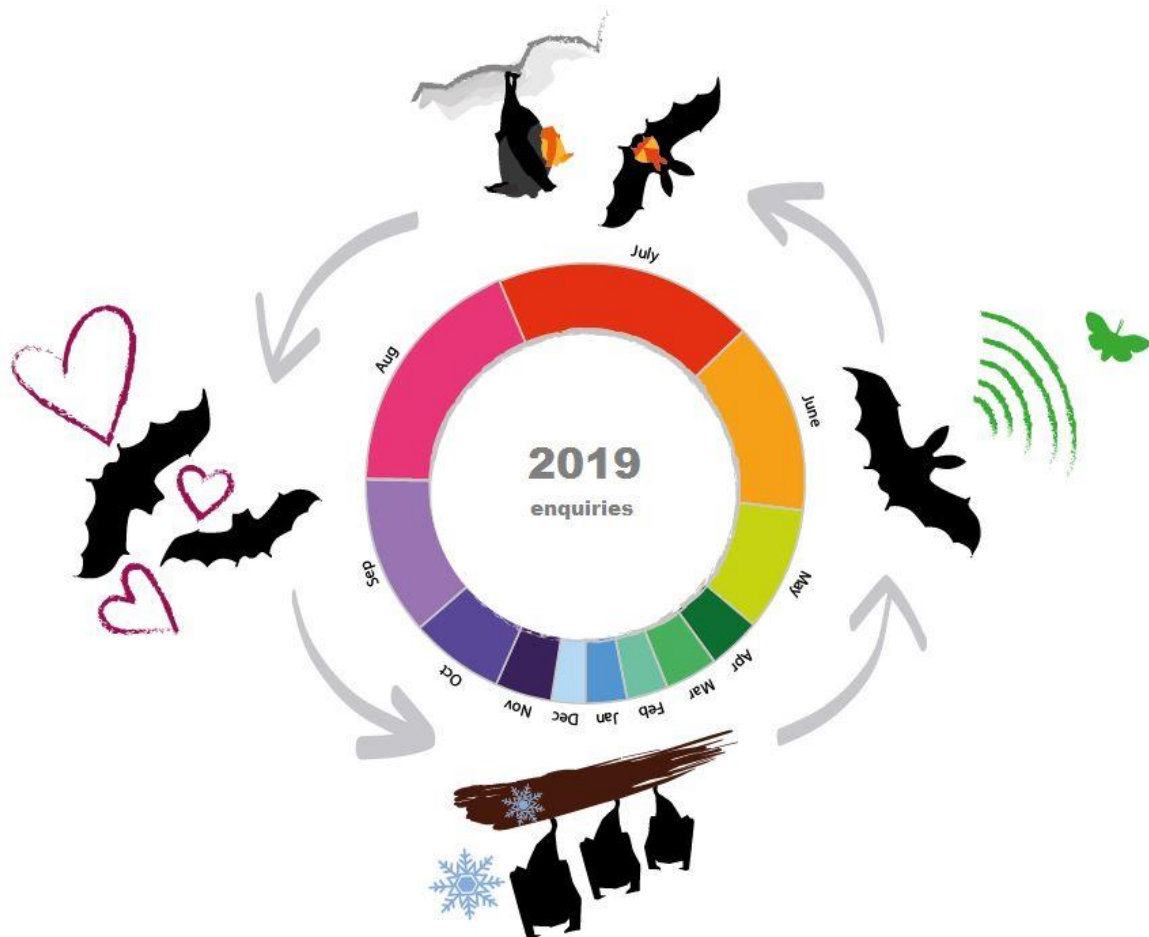


Figure 2: The proportion of enquiries received on the Helpline across the year. January - March accounts for 10%, April - June 22.3%, July - September 55% and October - December 12.7%.

Over the winter period (January to March), we took a relatively low number of calls – just 10% of our yearly total. During this time, bats were mainly hibernating and people were less likely to encounter them. Many of our queries at this time of year related to hibernating bats being found during building work. We also had calls from roost owners (including place of worship) seeking advice on proposed works. Bat care calls were mainly about malnourished bats that came out of hibernation too early.

Between April and June, the number of enquiries more than doubled, accounting for 22.3% of the total for the year. This period included the start of the maternity season. Our OOH service started on 24 May and had the busiest July in its 16-year history, which may have resulted from the very high temperatures we experienced during the summer, causing an early start to the maternity season. The first documented wild bat pup was a juvenile serotine found in

Dorset on 22 May. When the bat carer examined the pup's wing joints, she found that it was already a month old.

During the summer period (July to September) enquiries skyrocketed, accounting for 55% of our annual total. With the maternity season in full swing, we received many phone calls and e-mails from members of the public who had found a bat or baby bat. We gave them advice on how to safely contain the bat and put them in touch with local volunteer care contacts whenever possible (when no volunteer was available, we referred callers to their local vets). We also heard from many people who had just discovered they had a bat roost, who wanted to do work in a roost, or who were having issues. For roost owners in England, we arranged volunteer bat roost visits whenever appropriate through Natural England's free advice service.

Things quietened down from October to December – with just 12.7% of enquiries received during this period. Although this period saw the start of the winter hibernation season, the mild weather meant that many bats stayed active and we continued to receive bat care enquiries. This allowed us more time to complete the large workload we had accumulated over the busy summer.

1.3.2 Financial support

The free Bat Advice Service we deliver on behalf of Natural England is partially funded by Natural England. During the summer peak we began including additional information during Natural England type 1 calls, where appropriate, explaining how to donate via our JustGiving page.

The Out of Hours project was kindly supported by The Daniell Trust.

A marketing email was sent to bat finders who indicated they were happy to receive one. This led to £1229 in donations.

We would like to thank everyone who donated to the Helpline in 2019, particularly the generous bat groups. We are very grateful for the support.

If you would like to make a donation to the Bat Conservation Trust or get involved in fundraising more details can be found on our [website](#).

1.4 Breakdown of Helpline enquiries

The National Bat Helpline fields a wide range of enquiries, from simple leaflet send-outs to complex roost visits. For the purposes of reporting for 2019, all enquiries have been grouped together into these 10 categories, although the individual enquiries were often recorded in much more detail.

Table 1: Helpline enquiry categories.

Category	Includes
General Information / Education	Information about bat boxes, roost creation, encouraging bats, bat detectors, the NBMP, education, bat sightings during the day and other general queries.
Crime Related	Cases where an offence or probable offence may have taken place.
Bat Welfare	Grounded and exposed bats, baby bats, bats caught by cats and illegal landings.
Planning & Development (non-NE)	Planning and development cases that are not located within England such as planning applications, licences, wind turbines, lighting and ecological consultancy.
Bats in Buildings	Bats in houses and other buildings, and bats setting off alarms outside of England; this includes grounded and flying bats found inside buildings.
Roosts	Information about enquirers' roosts, visits and potential roosts outside of England.
Bat Groups	Enquiries from bat group contacts e.g. leaflet requests and enquirers looking for bat group information.
Pest Control	Information about pest control including rodent control, cluster flies and timber treatment outside of England.
Rabies/Bat Bites	Requests for tubes for passive testing of dead bats, questions about rabies, bat bites and possible exposures.
NE Casework	Enquiries within England regarding enquirers' roosts, potential roosts and arrangement of roost visits in addition to information on consultants and planning/development.

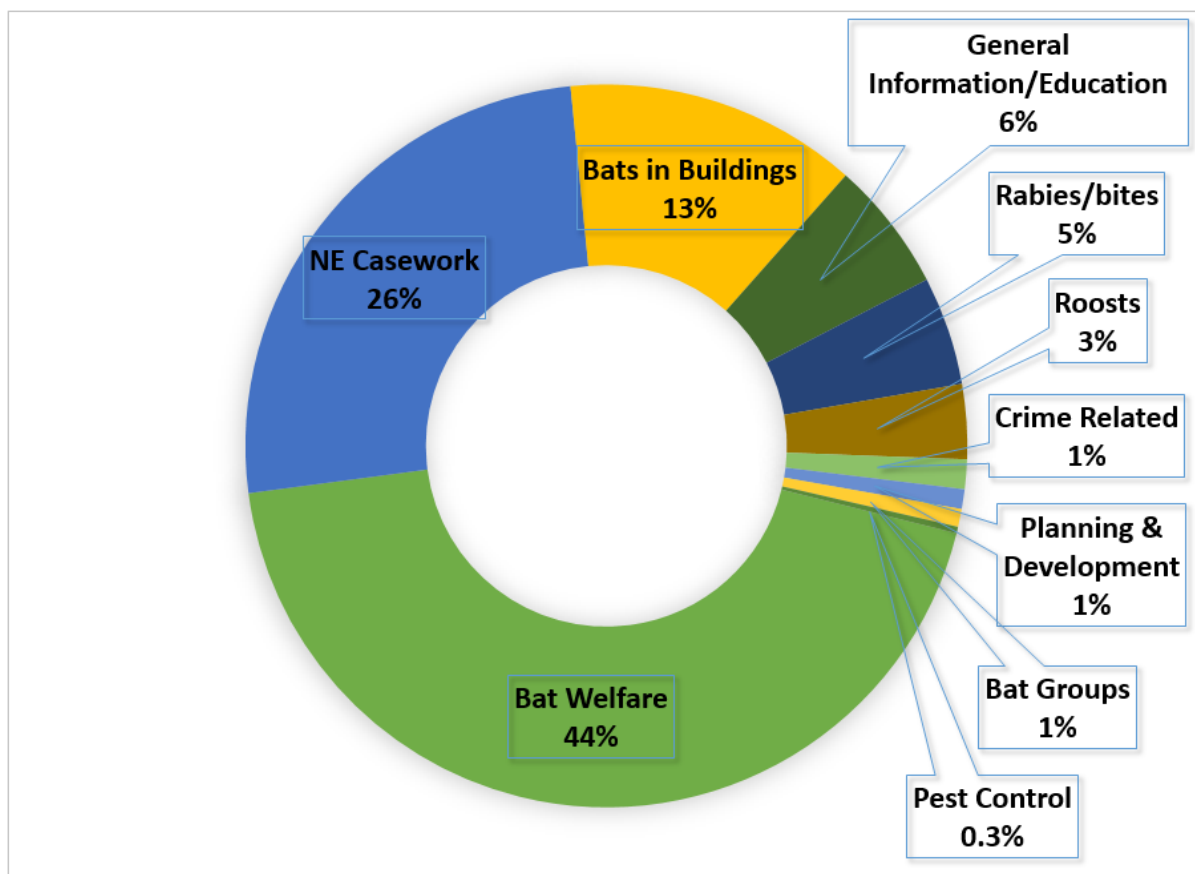


Figure 3: The proportion of enquiries associated with each category (outlined in Table 1) that the Helpline received in 2019

The pie chart in figure 3 illustrates the variety of enquiries that the Helpline deals with over the year. As shown in the chart, Natural England casework and Bat Welfare are important parts of the work that the Helpline does. 26% of enquiries taken were regarding a roost in England for which BCT organises visits on behalf of Natural England and 44% of enquiries were regarding bat welfare and 13% regarding bats in buildings.

2. Bat Care Project

In the UK we are very fortunate to have a network of bat care contacts (carers, ambulance drivers, hospitals and regional Helplines). These are experienced volunteers who give their free time and resources to help bats and are willing to have bat care cases referred to them. In addition to the enquiries that they receive through the BCT Helpline, many also receive enquiries directly, for example through their local bat group and regional bat helplines.

The Helpline coordinates these volunteers via the UK Bat Care Network. All volunteers who register with the Network are vaccinated against rabies and must provide up to date proof of rabies vaccination status as required. Contacts who have additional help outside those we know (Regional Helplines and Wildlife Hospitals) are provided with declarations to sign, ensuring that those assisting with a referred BCT call have the relevant experience and vaccinations to deal with the situation at that time.

Volunteers dedicate significant time to driving around to pick up bats, giving training in bat care to other group members, talking to members of the public, collecting supplies and feeding very young bats throughout the day and night. As well as being bat care contacts, some volunteers are also Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors and/or OOH volunteers.

Helpline staff advise anyone who finds a bat not to handle it with bare hands. We explain how to contain a bat without touching it at all, making them aware of the small risk of a type of rabies and emphasising that they should be wearing gloves as a precaution.

2.1 Bat Care Enquiries

Bat care calls include bat bites, illegal landings (bats entering from abroad) and bats flying inside buildings as well as grounded and injured bats and bats exposed on walls. An overall breakdown of the bat care enquiries received in 2019 is illustrated in figure 4 below.

7,377 Helpline enquires were bat welfare related, compared with 7,122 in 2018.

This made up **57.5%** of all enquiries received on the Helpline in 2019.

5.3% of these enquiries related to baby bats, compared with 3.2% in 2018.

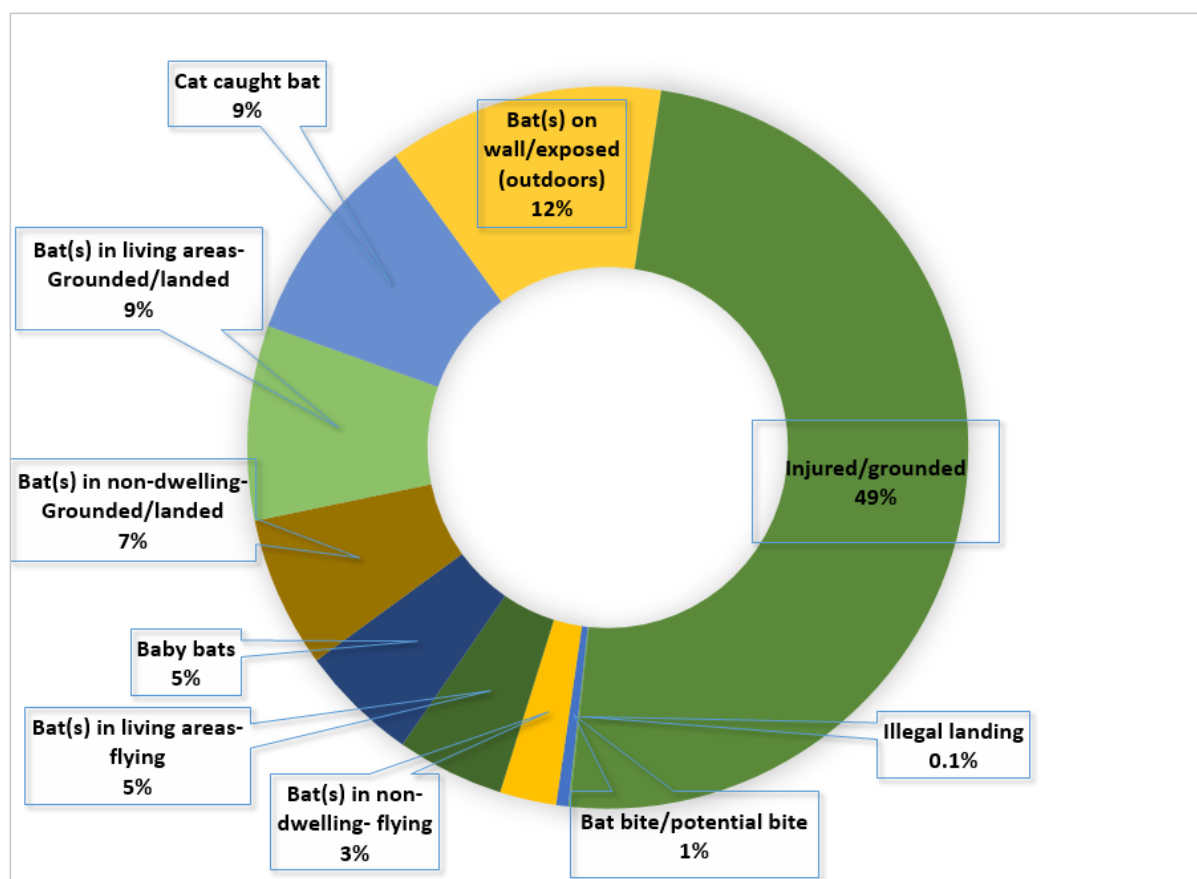


Figure 4: A breakdown of the types of bat care enquiries received by the Helpline in 2019.

The majority of bat care enquiries taken were in England (see figure 5). Bat care enquiries from non-UK countries included Mexico, Panama and Kenya, as well as receiving two from the North Sea; one from an oil rig and another from an offshore support vessel.

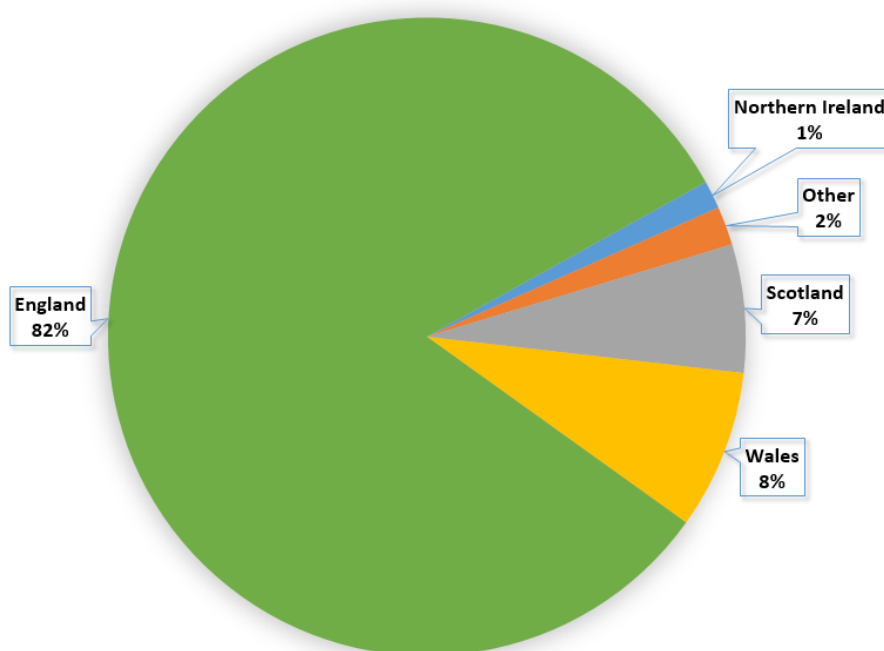


Figure 5: Breakdown of 2019 bat care enquiries by country.

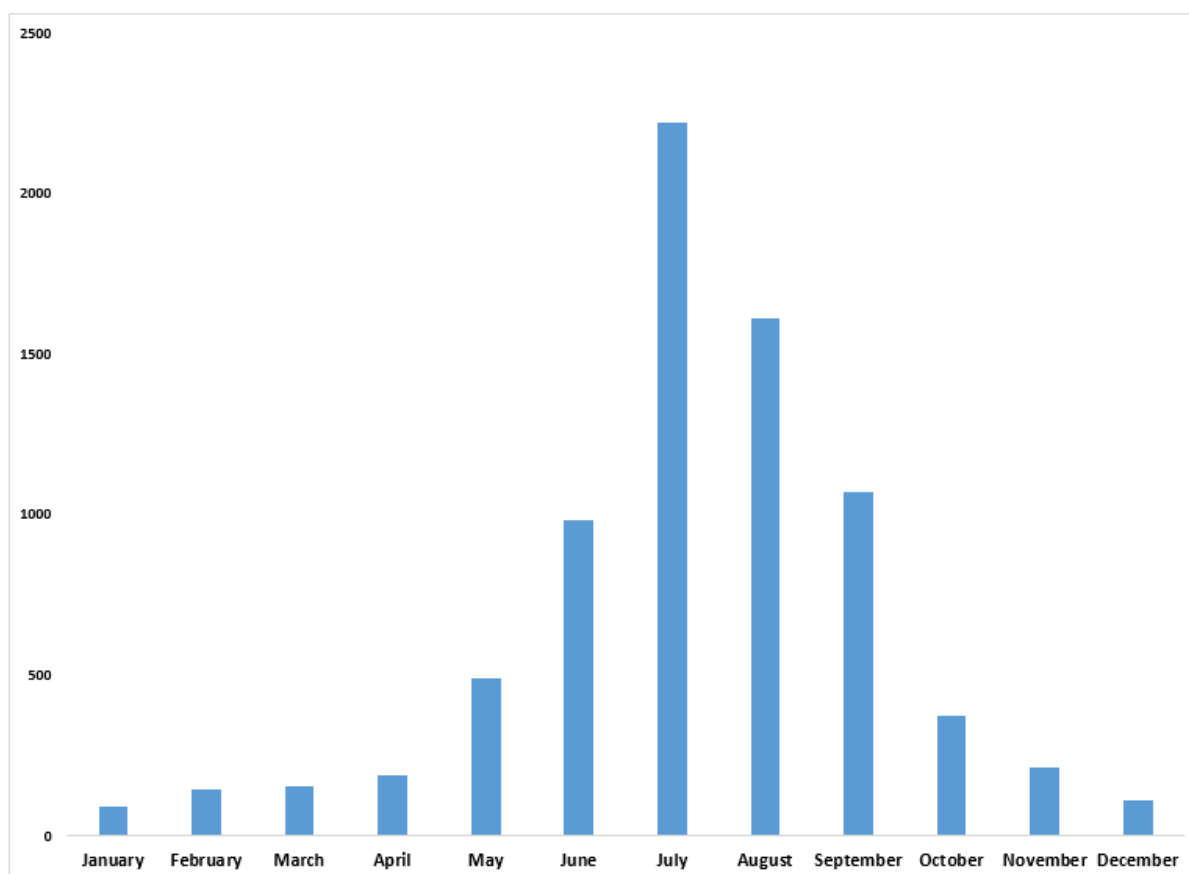


Figure 6: 2019 bat care enquiry numbers by month.

As demonstrated in figure 6, the number of bat care enquiries peaked in July, the height of the maternity/active season.

2.1.1 Bat care highlights

In 2019 the Bat Care Network added 52 new carers and 14 new ambulance drivers. As of December 2019, the UK Bat Care Network consisted of **208** carers, **37** ambulance drivers, **11** regional helplines and **8** wildlife hospitals, for a total of 264 contacts.

Our UK Bat Care Network Co-Ordinator launched a major new survey of members of the public who has found a bat and contacted the Helpline for advice. The survey had had over 160 responses as of December 2019. The results showed that bat finders' perception of bats had changed significantly after their experience. Among those that were initially **"negative"** or **"very negative"** towards bats, **71% changed to "positive"** or **"very positive"** and **14%** changed to **"neutral"**. Of those that started out as **"neutral"** towards bats, **83% changed to "positive"** or **"very positive"** towards bats and 14% remained at **"neutral"**. And 31% of bat finders took part in further bat-related activities or sought out further information after the rescue.

Additional comments from respondents:

"At first I was scared as I didn't know what to do with it, then proud I had saved it."

"After rescuing a bat I am hoping to become a bat volunteer myself"

“I would not hesitate to help another bat if I found one”

“It was an amazing thing to be able to do, and I feel very privileged to have been able to help the pipistrelle bat that I found”

The Bat Care Co-Ordinator published an article on bat care in *Veterinary Practice Today*, which explained the initial steps vets should take when a bat is brought to them. The Bat Care Bulletin continues to be sent every month with regular features on rabies prevention and recent research.

New guidance for bat carers was prepared and distributed after Defra funding was withdrawn.

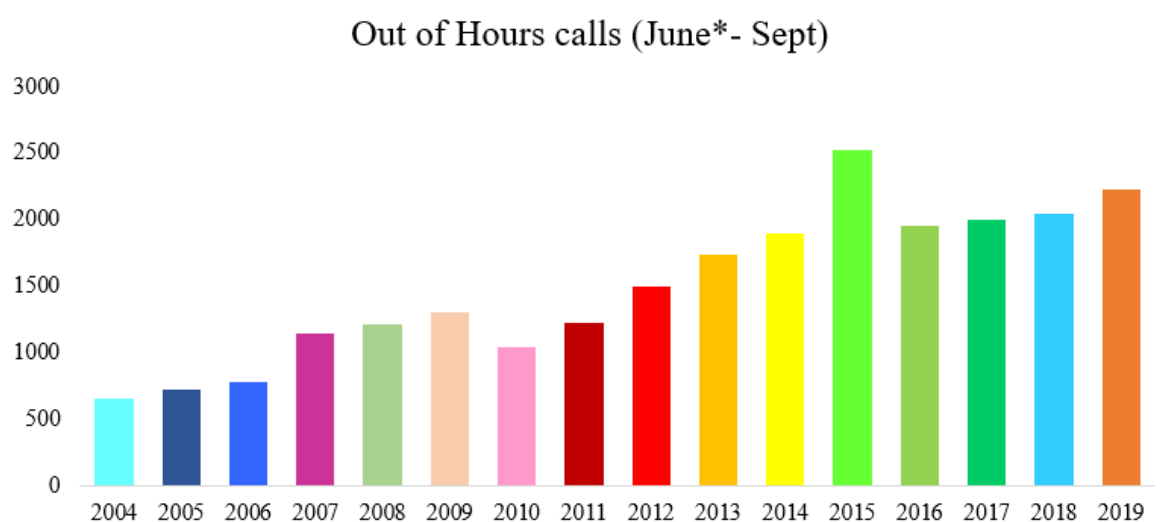
A major re-registration exercise was carried out, ensuring that all Network members have accurate details and are up to date on current policy.

If you would like to register with the BCT UK Bat Care Network, or would like a bit more information about the current service, please contact the Network Co-ordinator Laura Brown, at batcare@bats.org.uk or on 0345 1300 228.

3. The Out of Hours Service

Through the generosity and dedication of volunteers, BCT is able to run an OOH Helpline at evenings and weekends from May until the end of September. This provides a vital service to the public over the summer period when bats are most active. 2019 year was the project's 16th year of service.

Every evening and weekend during the summer, the BCT Helpline's phone line for bat care and crime is diverted to two dedicated volunteers. In the auto-attendant message we stress that this is a voluntary service for emergency enquiries only and give examples of what this means.



*May has been omitted from the graph for an accurate comparison of years, due to the later start of the service for the past two years.

Figure 7: Comparison of enquiries taken through the OOH service, by year.

In 2019, 47 volunteers participated in the OOH Helpline project, compared to 48 in 2018. Volunteers donated a total of 2,072 hours of their time and answered a total of 2,345 enquiries. In previous years, the OOH service has started on 1 May however, in 2018 and 2019 the service began in the last week of May. A comparison of full months of the service (removing May due to the late start) indicates that 2019 was the second busiest OOH season on record (see figure 7). Our OOH volunteers were able to provide enquirers with advice on handling and containing bats and pass on volunteer bat care contact numbers where possible.

Being able to run an evening and weekend service which provides support to concerned and interested members of the public is an invaluable tool. As such BCT would once again like to thank all our volunteers for making the OOH service possible.

If you have any questions regarding the OOH Service please contact OOH Project Coordinator Ele Johnstone at outofhours@bats.org.uk or on 0345 1300 228. A report detailing the OOH Helpline project highlights for 2019 is available on the BCT website at: www.bats.org.uk/support-bats/volunteer/helpline

4. Rabies and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) testing packs

Since 1987 over 15,000 bats have been tested via the APHA passive surveillance programme, and through active surveillance work. The Helpline's rabies procedures and policy was updated in April 2019 to reflect the change in service following the loss of funding from Defra for rabies disease risk management work. However, we continue to work with NE, other SNCOs, Defra, Public Health England (PHE) and APHA to maintain rabies best practice guidance for bat carers and bat workers.

In 2019 four new rabies cases were reported to BCT by APHA. Three of these cases were serotines (which had all died and been submitted through the passive testing programme run by APHA) and had tested positive for European Bat Lyssavirus type 1 (EBLV-1). This is a type of rabies that has been found in only a small number of serotines (<5) in the UK. One positive case detected in 2019 was a Daubenton's bat which tested positive for European Bat Lyssavirus type 2 (EBLV-2), also identified through APHA's passive testing programme.

As of 2019, a total of only 28 bats have tested positive for EBLV (24 bats have tested positive for EBLV-2 and four bats have tested positive for EBLV-1), in three decades of monitoring and with over 15,000 tests carried out.

The new cases did not trigger any change in procedures and have not affected the UK's rabies-free status. The Helpline continues to reiterate best practice procedures to anyone coming into contact with bats. Helpline's involvement in these cases highlights BCT's role on the front line of rabies monitoring and prevention.

Test tubes, submission forms and freepost envelopes for submitting dead bats to APHA can be obtained by contacting the BCT Helpline (0345 1300 228). 610 APHA testing packs were distributed to 451 individuals during 2019.

Part of our work on the Helpline is to ensure that all bat bite incidents are dealt with quickly and that the correct procedure is followed. In 2019, 40 bat bite incidents were recorded. There were also many rabies-related enquiries, such as the public needing reassurance about the rabies risk.

Up-to-date information on rabies and diseases can be found on our [website](#).

5. Bat Crime

BCT's Investigations Project has been working to prevent bat crime since its inception in 2001 as a two-year collaboration with the RSPB. The Project was re-launched in 2004 and has been running ever since with Peter Charleston leading the project as part-time Investigations Officer since 2010. In November 2016, BCT's successful application to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) for funding allowed for an expansion of Pete's role and the project. Pete was BCT's Conservation Wildlife Crime Officer for the Bearing Witness for Wildlife: Conservation Wildlife Crime Project in 2019. The key priorities of the project include preventing criminal offences, providing advice to people dealing with such offences, as well as accurately recording cases of bat related crime.

The BCT Helpline is often the first point of contact for members of the public and bat workers reporting allegations of criminal offences involving bats. When receiving crime related enquiries, the Helpline gathers as much information about the situation as possible, assess whether or not the report is likely to relate to a genuine crime and quickly decide on the most appropriate action to take.

There are several different types of crime-related incidents involving bats that may be reported to BCT. After gathering some more information about the situation, Helpline can ascertain if a report relates to the disturbance of bats or damage of a roost, or a breach of licence conditions for example. Calls reporting the unexpected finding of bats during building works are not usually responded to in the same way as a call reporting a bat crime, with Helpline always aiming to ensure the welfare of the bat(s) involved and providing advice about how the caller should proceed with regard to the works.

4.3% of all enquiries to the Helpline in 2019 were members of the public reporting a crime, crime-related or reports of bat(s) disturbed during works. Of the 363 calls reporting bats disturbed during works, it was possible to arrange a Natural England roost visit for 105 (30%) of these. The remaining 258 (70%) callers were advised to contact a consultant or their SNCO, advised on work by Natural England without a visit, refused to provide contact details for the arrangement of a visit, or were reports from concerned members of the public who were advised on how to respond appropriately.

All crime related calls and reports of bat(s) disturbed during building works were referred onto Conservation Wildlife Crime Officer Pete Charleston for recording and further investigation if necessary.

BCT's bat crime reports can be viewed on our [website](#).

6. Natural England Casework

From 2013, BCT has been contracted by Natural England to organise and oversee the bat casework in all 10 of its lots (divided into 28 regions). Natural England casework refers to all enquiries specifically about a bat roost in England. This chapter gives an overview of the Natural England casework and the following chapter provides specific information about our contract work in each of the lots.

Natural England bat casework is broken down into two types of enquiry; those which require a roost visit (Type 2) and those which do not (Type 1).

6.1 No-visit enquiries (Type 1)

Many of our Natural England enquiries can be dealt with over the phone or by email, and with follow-up leaflets. A roost visit by a Natural England Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor is therefore not required. Examples of these enquiries include information or reassurance needed about a newly discovered bat roost and requests for consultant details for works that fall outside of our visit remit, such as barn or loft conversions. In addition to the above methods of providing advice without a visit, in 2018 the launch of the new website enabled us to direct all planning and development calls to a dedicated page on the website which allows individuals to download a detailed advice pack.

Type 1 enquiries also include providing roost owners with standard Natural England advice leaflets or letters without the need for a visit, where appropriate. These include enquiries regarding rodent pest control (where no holes are to be blocked), loft insulation (for roll-down insulation only) and non-chemical cluster fly treatment. In 2019 the Helpline dealt with 2,326 roost enquiries in England that did not require a visit. See breakdown of Type 1 enquiries for 2019 in figure 8 below.

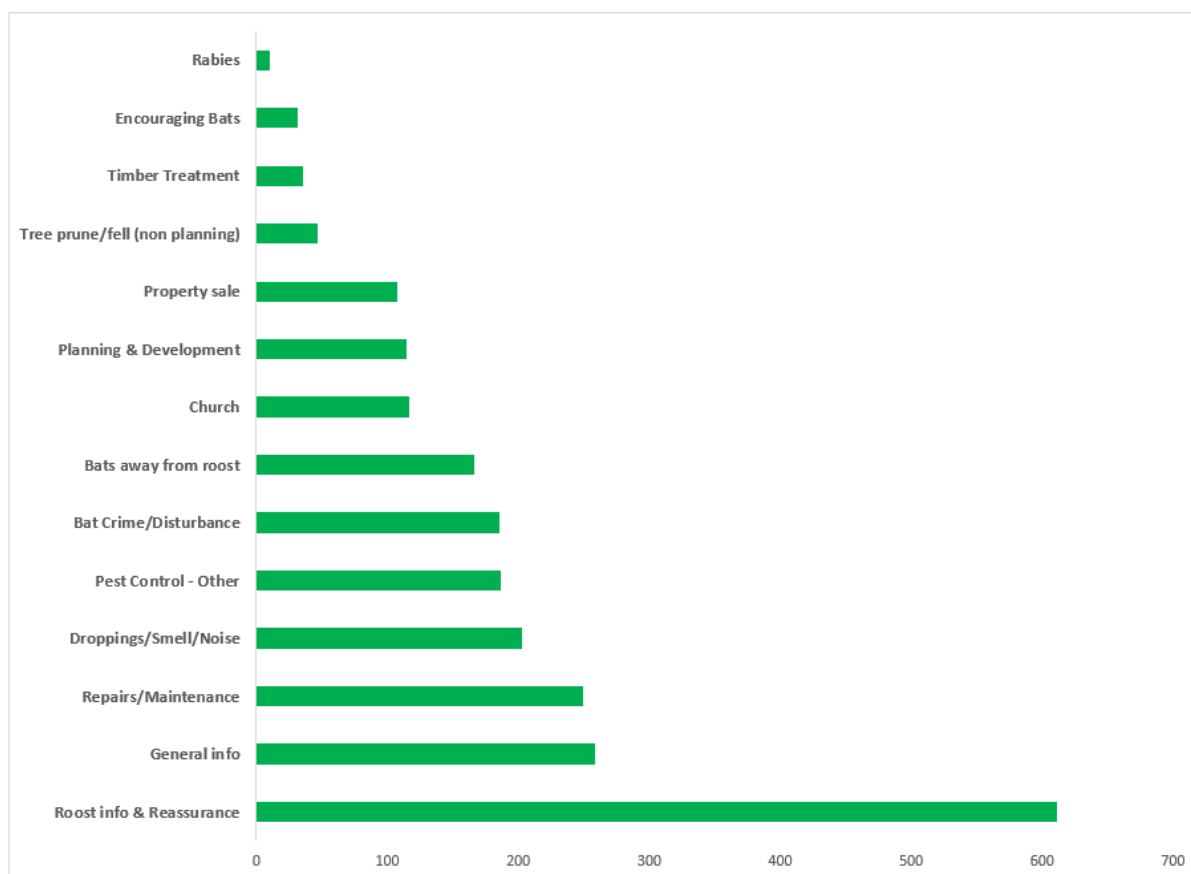


Figure 8: Breakdown of enquiries not requiring a roost visit (Type 1) in 2019.

6.2 Roost visit enquiries (Type 2)

These are enquiries which require a roost visit by a Natural England Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor. There is a range of reasons why members of the public who contact The Bat Conservation Trust may require one of these visits. Type 2 enquiries include advice for roost owners who are experiencing an issue related to their roost such as bats entering the living areas, noise or droppings. In addition to this, the Helpline arrange roost visits for individuals requiring advice on planned building work or pest control that could affect bat roosts at the property. Table 2 gives a description of the subject categories under which roost visits were organised in 2019 and figure 9 provides a breakdown of type 2 enquiries for 2019.

Under the Natural England contract, roost visits can only be undertaken at a dwelling place or a place of worship, however, sometimes they can be organised to look at roosts in public buildings such as schools and hospitals where there are bat issues. Occasionally, Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors may assess the bat potential of trees in gardens and church yards.

Being able to provide a service whereby enquirers can get help and advice about bats is an invaluable tool in promoting conservation and protecting bats and their roosts. We encourage Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors to send in their roost report forms as soon after the visit as they can, as this enables Helpline staff to write and send a Natural England advice letter to the roost owner as promptly as possible. The Helpline aims to send these letters within 2 weeks of receiving the roost report form and we will always send a copy to Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors for their reference.

We work closely with Natural England and Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors to ensure that our advice is up-to-date and pragmatic. The Helpline and Natural England continue to have regular meetings with NE's Contract Manager to review our advice and processes to improve the efficiency of the free advice service.

Table 2: Descriptions of the 12 subject categories of roost visits which can be organised.

Category	Includes
Building work	Different types of building repairs and maintenance, for example, loft and cavity wall insulation, soffit or gutter replacement, roof repairs and the discovery of a roost during work.
Timber treatment	Treating wood in the loft space for prevention of rot or to eradicate wood worm and other wood-related invertebrates.
Information /reassurance	Visits for individuals who need further reassurance or information about sharing their property or place of worship with a bat roost, beyond what is provided by Helpline staff over the phone or via leaflets.
Droppings / urine / smell	Visits for individuals who are concerned about the quantity or location of droppings. This category also includes urine staining and issues with smell.
Bat(s) found outside their roost	Visits, predominantly carried out during the peak summer months, when baby bats may be found and could indicate the presence of a roost. This also includes help with bats trapped in the living area or indoor area on a regular basis and where it is not possible to prevent this from happening by following advice from the appropriate advice leaflet.
Noise	Visits for individuals who are concerned about noise from a bat roost. This is occasionally a problem when a large maternity roost is located near to a bedroom and thus the bats are keeping the home owner awake during the night.
Rodent control	Situations where the roost owner has a problem with rodents such as mice, rats and occasionally squirrels or edible dormice where there is a bat roost, and the issue cannot be solved by following the advice from the appropriate advice leaflet.
Cluster flies	Situations where chemical treatment is needed where the bats roost, as the issue cannot be solved by following advice from the appropriate advice leaflet.
Wasps / bees / hornets	Situations where wasps, bees or hornets are nesting where the bats roost and advice is needed as to how treatment may be undertaken.
Exclusion	Very rare circumstances where a licence for an exclusion of bats may be granted by NE. This is for when all other solutions to issues have been exhausted and these cases usually require multiple visits.
Trees	Used when there is potential for bats to be roosting in a tree and situations where a bat roost is disturbed during felling or pruning activities. Trees can only be surveyed from the ground in these visits and the visit can only provide information on the potential.
Other	Any other reason for a visit not mentioned in the other categories.

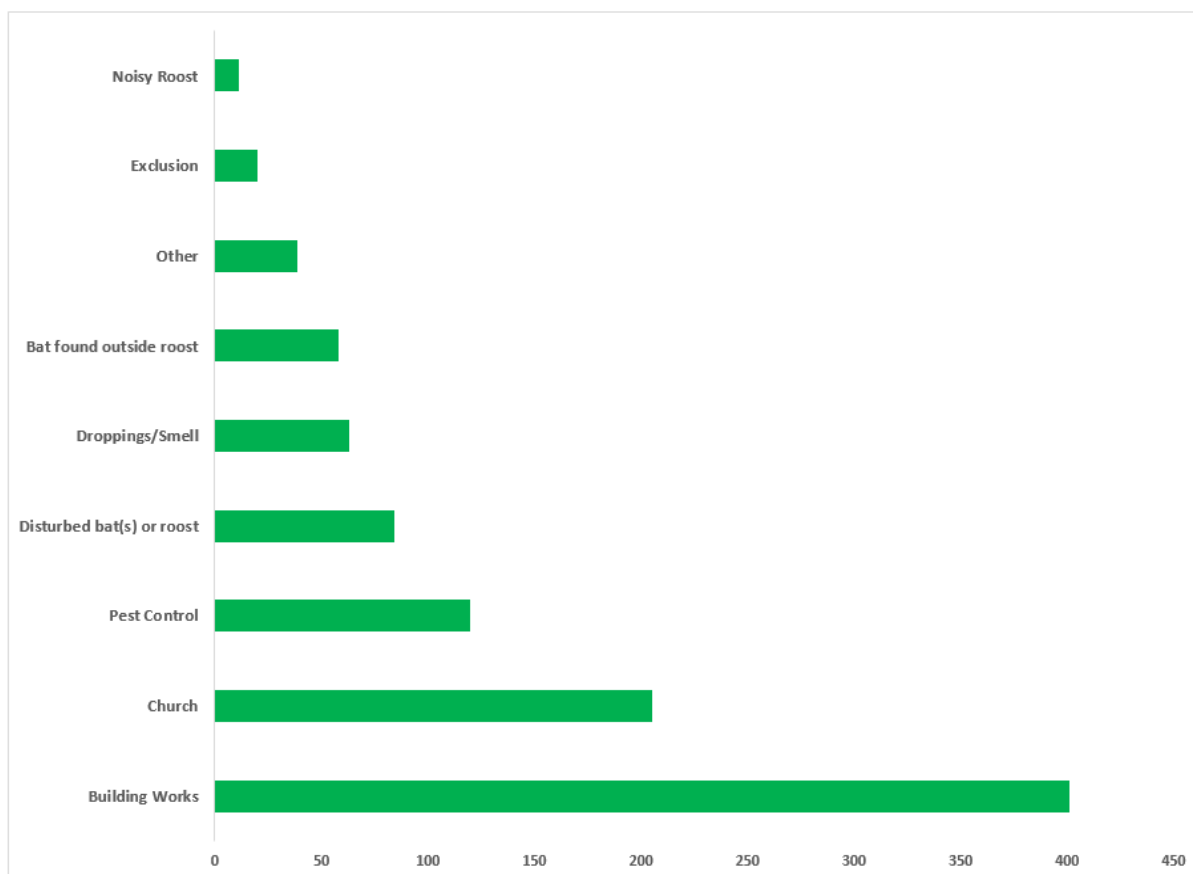


Figure 9: Roost visit (Type 2) breakdown for all regions in 2019.

In 2019...

22% of visits were conducted in a place of worship.

76% of visits were conducted in dwellings.

1% of visits were conducted in other buildings or structures.

6.3 Volunteers and Lot Coordinators

The Natural England casework is an extremely important part of our work, which would not be possible without the dedication of Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors. The help and advice given by those who take part in this service is extremely valuable and we believe the system is vital to the conservation of British bats.

BCT is contracted by Natural England to organise roost visits in all 28 of its regions. The regions are grouped by lot and in 2019 were overseen by permanent members of the Helpline team who acted as Lot Co-ordinators (as seen in figure 10 below).

In 2019 we were able to organise 949 roost visits – a decrease of 5.2% from the previous year due to changes in our Natural England contract. We would like to thank the many volunteers who completed training and dedicated many hours to travelling to and carrying out roost visits across the England.

Our staff helped to manage roost visit requests by identifying cases where advice could be issued without a visit, such as for rodent control, loft insulation and non-chemical cluster fly treatment. We encourage roost owners with issues, such as bats in living areas, to take some simple steps to resolve them at home before proceeding to the visit stage.



Figure 10: Map showing which Helpline staff member was the lot coordinator for each area in 2019

6.3.1 Feedback

We actively seek feedback from roost owners as part of the Natural England advice service. In 2019, **85%** of respondents rated the overall service as “**excellent**” or “**good**.” This reflects

not only our own work, but the work of Natural England's Volunteer Bat Roost visitors, as well as the Natural England staff who approve letters and verbal advice.

Additional comments from respondents:

"I'd like to express my appreciation of the assistance I was given and the helpfulness of those involved."

"Altogether a most interesting exercise: outstanding service given."

"Yes. I'm organising a repair and refurbishment project for our church on a very limited budget. To have free and prompt advice and survey was a great help and much appreciated. The information I received, I used to put an article about bats in our church magazine for our congregation to read. The magazine goes to a number of other churches in Birmingham and also elsewhere in the UK and even abroad to members who have moved. I hope this will spread the word about bat conservation and the work done by your organisation."

"Very grateful for the advice and help."

"All the people that I spoke to were very knowledgeable and helpful."

As part of our new contract with Natural England which began on 1 November 2019, a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor feedback survey was initiated. Of the 21 responses gathered from our survey between November and December 2019, **75%** of VBRVs reported their relationship with the National Bat Helpline to be "**excellent**" and a further **20%** reported it as "**good**".

Additional comments from respondents:

"They [helpline staff] are always polite, enquiring about problems and issues and supportive. "

"My relationship with them is good, built over years of being a volunteer."

"I can think of no improvements necessary."

7. Natural England Lot Statistics

This part of the report will present the information and statistics for Natural England lots.

In 2019, BCT organised 949 roost visits in England. We also answered a further 2,326 Natural England enquiries (18%) which did not require a visit. We extend our huge thanks to all of the Volunteer Bat Roost Visitors who helped us deliver this service during 2019.

7.1 Cumbria Lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract for the Cumbria lot since 1 January 2013.

Table 3: Breakdown of enquiries from Cumbria in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	46
Type 2	8
Non-NE Other	15
Non-NE Bat Care	144

BCT Lot co-ordinator	Marie Canny	mcanny@bats.org.uk
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100% of visits conducted in Cumbria were in dwellings

7.2 North East Lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract for the North East lot since 2004. Counties in the North East lot include Cleveland, County Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

Table 4: Breakdown of enquiries from the North East in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	80
Type 2	27
Non-NE Other	51
Non-NE Bat Care	310

BCT Lot co-ordinator	Marie Canny	mcanny@bats.org.uk
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93% of visits conducted in dwellings and the remaining **4%** conducted in other buildings.

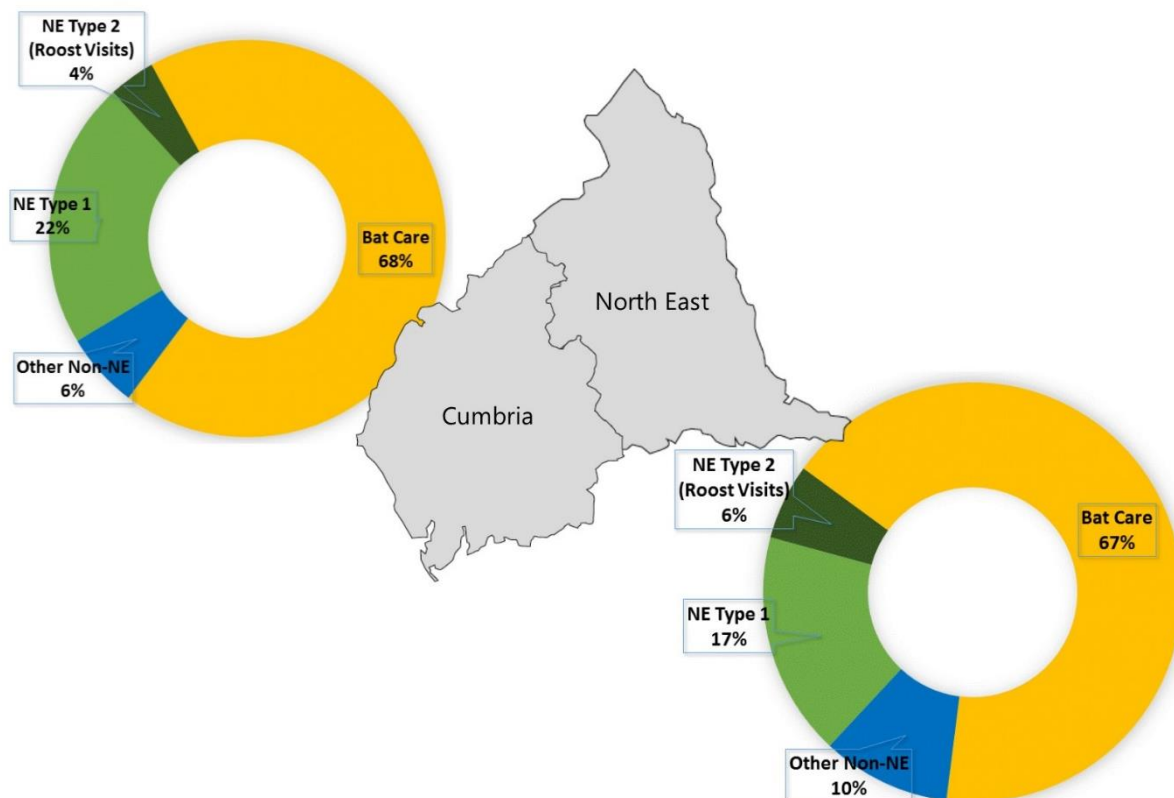


Figure 11: Breakdown of enquiries from Cumbria and the North East in 2019.

7.3 Cheshire and Lancashire Lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract for the Cheshire and Lancashire lot (previously known as the Northwest) since 2004. Counties in the Cheshire and Lancashire lot include Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside.

Table 5: Breakdown of enquiries from Cheshire and Lancashire in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	155
Type 2	73
Non-NE Other	90
Non-NE Bat Care	692

BCT Lot co-ordinator	Marie Canny	mcanny@bats.org.uk
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1% of visits conducted in a place of worship and **99%** conducted in dwellings.

7.4 Yorkshire Lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract for the Yorkshire lot (formerly Yorkshire and Humberside) since 1 October 2008. Counties in the Yorkshire lot include East Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire.

Table 6: Breakdown of enquiries from Yorkshire in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	121
Type 2	55
Non-NE Other	92
Non-NE Bat Care	594

BCT Lot co-ordinator	Tristan Evans	tevans@bats.org.uk
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With **13%** of visits conducted in a place of worship and **87%** conducted in dwellings.

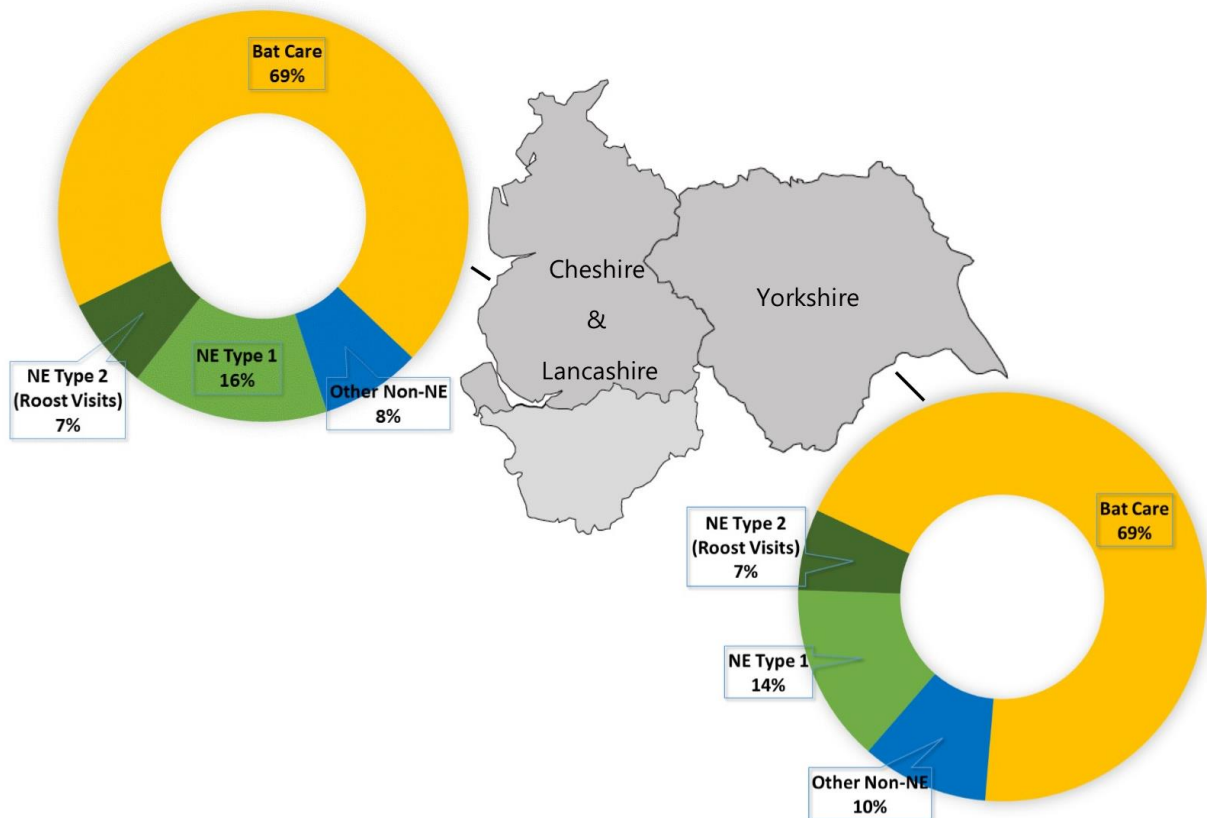


Figure 12: Breakdown of enquiries from Cheshire & Lancashire and Yorkshire lots in 2019.

7.5 East Midlands lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract for the East Midlands lot since 1 January 2013. Counties in the East Midlands lot include Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

Table 7: Breakdown of enquiries from East Midlands in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	241
Type 2	118
Non-NE Other	108
Non-NE Bat Care	664

BCT Lot co-ordinator

Tristan Evans

tevens@bats.org.uk

With **42%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, **57%** conducted in dwellings and **1%** conducted in other buildings.

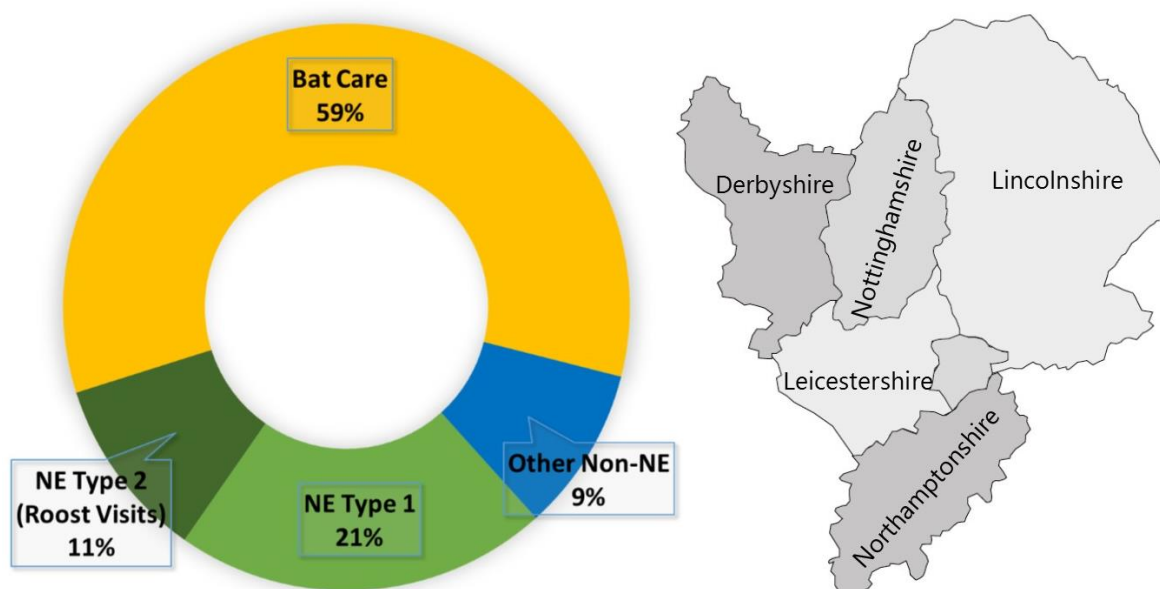


Figure 13: Breakdown of enquiries from East Midlands in 2019.

7.6 East of England lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract in the East of England lot since 2004, beginning with Norfolk. Then taking over Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, Essex and Suffolk on 1 October 2008, and Hertfordshire and Middlesex in 2012. Counties in the East of England lot include Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Table 8: Breakdown of enquiries from East of England in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	318
Type 2	192
Non-NE Other	174
Non-NE Bat Care	709

BCT Lot co-ordinator

Laura Brown

lbrown@bats.org.uk

With **44%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, **54%** conducted in dwellings, and **2%** conducted in other buildings.

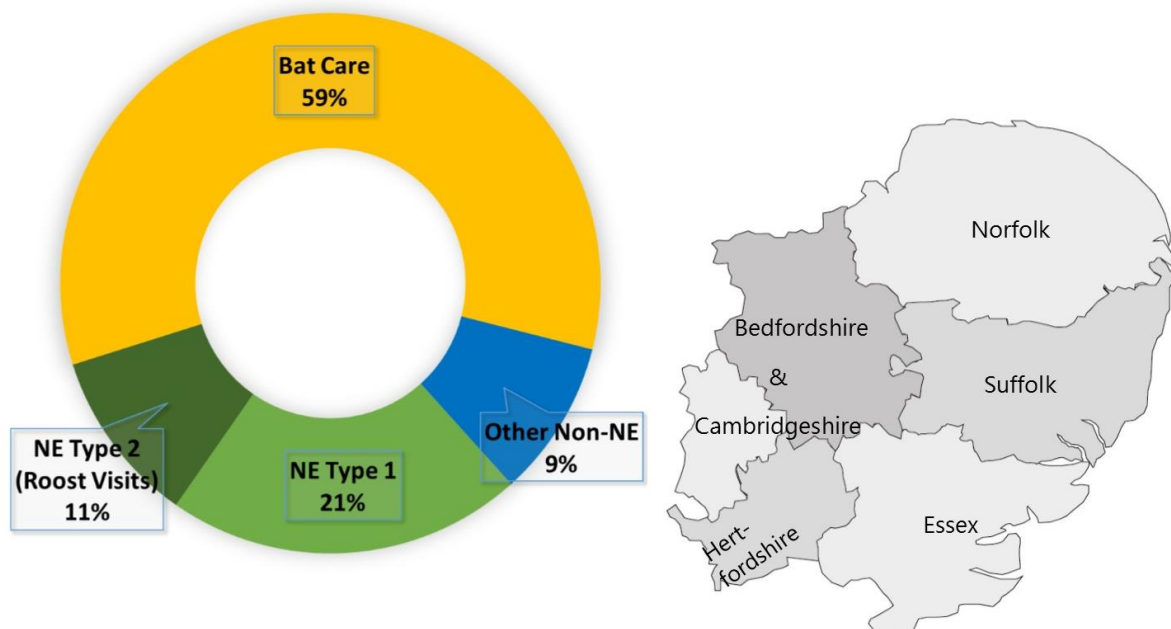


Figure 14: Breakdown of enquiries from East of England in 2019.

7.7 South East lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract in the South East lot since 2004, beginning with Kent. BCT then took over in Hampshire and Isle of Wight, Sussex and Surrey, and Thames and Chilterns in 2005, and Greater London on 1 January 2013. Counties in the South East lot include Greater London, Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Isle of Wight.

Table 9: Breakdown of enquiries from the South East lot in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	527
Type 2	179
Non-NE Other	272
Non-NE Bat Care	1062

BCT Lot co-ordinators	Tristan Evans & Ele Johnstone	tevens@bats.org.uk ejohnstone@bats.org.uk
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With **15%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, **83%** conducted in dwellings, **1%** conducted in other buildings and **1%** conducted in trees.

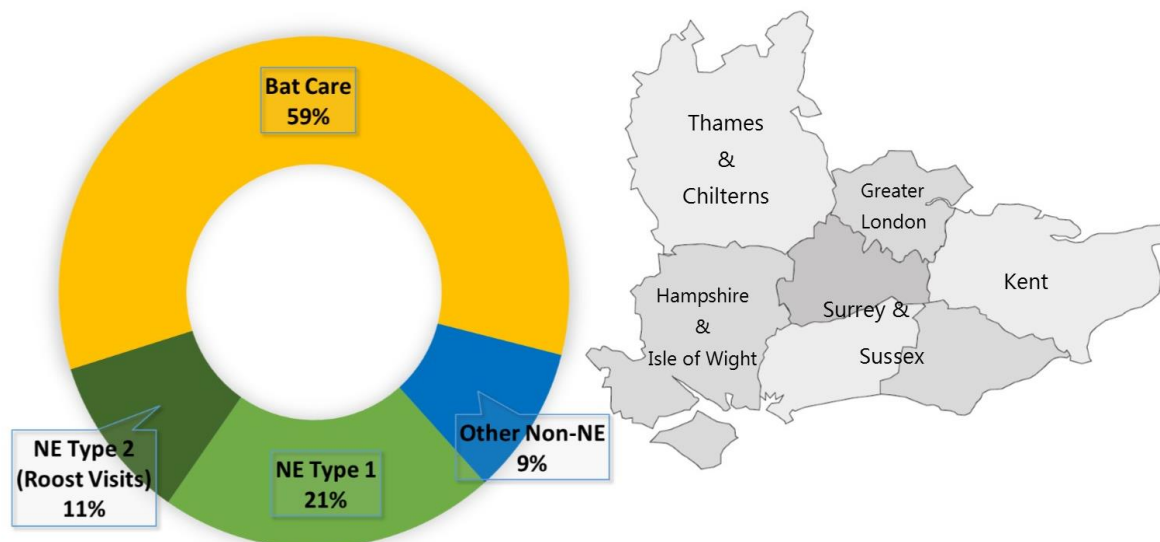


Figure 15: Breakdown of enquiries from Cumbria and the North East in 2019.

7.8 Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract in the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly lot since 1 October 2008.

Table 10: Breakdown of enquiries from the Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly lot in 2019

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	65
Type 2	31
Non-NE Other	32
Non-NE Bat Care	155

BCT Lot co-ordinators	Ele Johnstone	ejohnstone@bats.org.uk
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With **3%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, and **97%** conducted in dwellings.

7.9 South West lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract in the South West lot beginning with Devon, Gloucestershire, Somerset, West of England and Wiltshire in 2007, and Dorset since 1 October 2008. Counties in the South West lot include Devon, Avon, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset and Gloucestershire.

Table 11: Breakdown of enquiries from the South West lot in 2019.

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	387
Type 2	178
Non-NE Other	212
Non-NE Bat Care	893

BCT Lot co-ordinators	Ele Johnstone	ejohnstone@bats.org.uk
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With **16%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, **82%** conducted in dwellings and **1%** conducted in other buildings.

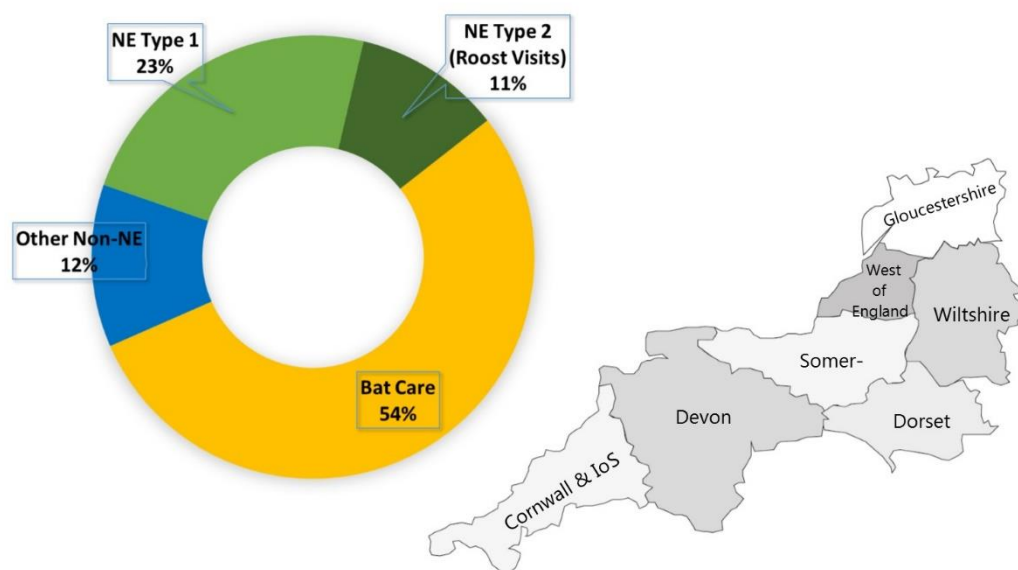


Figure 16: Breakdown of enquiries from Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and South West in 2019.

7.10 West Midlands lot

BCT has been carrying out the Natural England bat casework contract in the West Midlands lot since 2007. Counties in the West Midlands lot include West Midlands, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Table 12: Breakdown of enquiries from the West Midlands lot in 2019.

Enquiry Type	Total
Type 1	183
Type 2	84
Non-NE Other	122
Non-NE Bat Care	654

BCT Lot co-ordinators	Ele Johnstone	ejohnstone@bats.org.uk
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With **8%** of visits conducted in a place of worship, and **92%** conducted in dwellings.

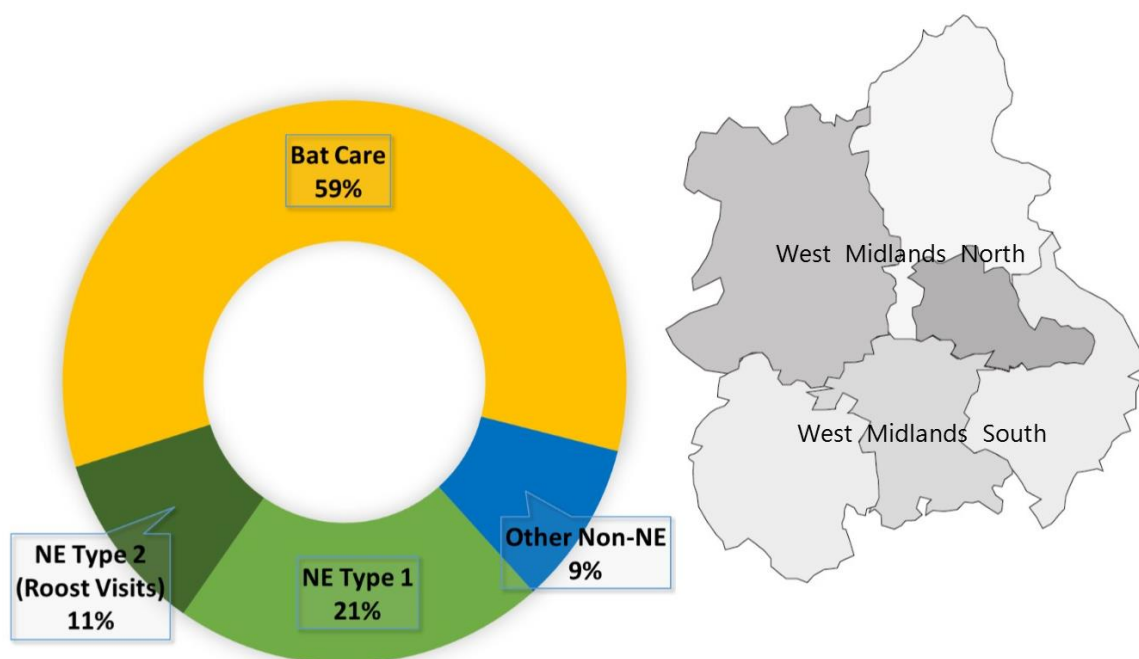


Figure 17: Breakdown of enquiries from West Midlands in 2019.

If you have any questions regarding the Natural England casework statistics please contact Marie Canny at mcanny@bats.org.uk or on 0345 1300 228.


8. The Helpline Awards 2019

“The Batties”

We would like to thank everyone for their hard work in 2019 but we would also like to mention and acknowledge a few people who went the extra mile and deserve special recognition.



Roost Visitor of the Year (based on number of roost report forms sent in)

 We would like to give special thanks to the roost visitors who undertook the most visits (based on number of roost report forms sent in).


The award for Roost Visitor of the Year 2019 goes to **Roger and Sylvia Jiggins**, who sent in a total of 18 roost report forms throughout the year! In second place was **Chris Smith**.

Annette Faulkner, Jane Harris, Nik Knight and Ross Baker all came in third with 14 visits each. Notable mentions go to **Ella Barnett and Peter Gulliver** who carried out 13 roost visits each and Steve Parker and Colin Faulkner who carried out 12 and 11 visits, respectively.

Last but not least, we would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all of the Natural England volunteers that put so much hard work and spare time into carrying out bat surveys and providing advice to members of the public. We very much look forward to working with you all again in 2020.



OOH Volunteer of the Year

 The OOH service is an extremely important part of BCT's work; one which we could not provide without the help and hard work of volunteers. We would like to give a special thank you to **Gwynevere Kipling and Melissa Young**, who covered the most bat watches this season. Gwynevere and Melissa covered an astonishing 21 and 20 bat watches, respectively. The project would not have been as successful this year without their contribution.

Another special mention goes to **Liam Q and Karen B**, who undertook 13 bat watches each. Thanks also to **Kirsty W, Linda M, Rebekah N, and Colleen J** who all took on **more than 10** shifts each this season, which is a huge contribution!



Last but not least we would like to say a huge thank you to all of the volunteers who work with us and who we haven't been able to mention.

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Author: Marie Canny 2020