



21st November 2020 South East England Bat Conference Online

Priorities in South East England

This session was chaired by Annika Binet, BCT Trustee.

Annika introduced this session as an opportunity to:

- Share views on the current priorities for bat conservation in South East England; and
- Feedback ideas and thoughts on what BCT should be focusing its resources on; and
- Raise any issues or concerns.

Annika highlighted this was not intended as a Q&A session. However, BCT staff were available to respond, where appropriate.

Additionally, this year delegates were able to submit priorities ahead of the session and via the BCT Events app during the day.

Discussion points were:

- Effectiveness of bat tubes
- District Level Licensing and bats
- Lack of evidence on impact of woodland management regimes on bats

Effectiveness of bat tubes

Priority raised: *Quite a lot has been published in recent months about mitigation and success or otherwise of it. As yet I don't think there is anything specifically looking at whether bat tubes fitted into new builds have been a successful form of mitigation. It is something I see proposed an awful lot, and generally welcome it, but always with a certain amount of trepidation in knowing whether they are truly effective, and it would be nice to have some confirmation that they work.*

Response from BCT's Chief Executive Officer, Kit Stoner at the conference: I can't remember details of which mitigation covered by report that went into Conservation Evidence. Integrated bat boxes are something we are talking to various developers about. We could potentially get funding from developers to test the effectiveness of these live on development sites. I am not aware of anything specific on bat tubes having been already published though.

Update since the conference from BCT's Built Environment Officer Jo Ferguson:

I'm not aware of any specific studies looking at only bat tubes / integrated bat box success rates, they are included in the Bearing Witness for Wildlife mitigation project report (which can be found at: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/bearing-witness-for-wildlife/bat-roost-mitigation>) but in low numbers and alongside other bat box comparisons e.g.:

“(page 6) *Efficacy – Bat Boxes* Bat boxes were the most frequently deployed provision, being installed at 45 of the 71 sites. From a total of 270 boxes, 20% were occupied by bats. External wall-mounted boxes had the highest presence rates (36%) in comparison to tree-mounted (17%), wall integrated (15%) or internal wall-mounted (13%) boxes. Common pipistrelle was most frequently recorded in external wall-mounted boxes or integrated boxes compared to soprano pipistrelle, which more frequently occurred in tree-mounted boxes. The four most popular models of bat box used by consultants were all Schwegler; bat presence was highest for bats (all species combined) in the 1FF and lowest for birds. Birds were not found in bat box designs where the apertures were less than 17mm wide. No relationships were found between height and presence/absence or numbers of bats or between orientation and presence/absence (not enough count data to test relationship with orientation and numbers of bats).

(page 20) *Use of alternative bat box models was the most frequent cause of bat box deviation-rates (35%, n = 66). This was followed by wall-integrated designs being hung or mounted instead of integrated into wall elevations (26%). Additional deviations included different aspects (11%), slightly different positioning (14%) and boxes intended to be wall-mounted being hung on trees (6%).*”

It would be great to get more information on their efficacy, to that end we are working with Arup on a bat box sensor which could help with this data collection for integrated bat boxes (work is ongoing pending funding at their end) and also we’re discussing monitoring with Green&Blue one of our Roost Partners (see: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/roost-replacement-and-enhancement/partnerships>) who would like to know their integrated bat box works and to what extent.

District Level Licensing and bats

Priority raised: *Have BCT been liaising with Natural England about their proposals for District Level Licensing for bats? If so, are BCT able to advise us of their position on this?*

Response from BCT’s Chief Executive Officer, Kit Stoner at the conference: BCT’s view is that essentially, we don’t think this can work for bats. We can see advantages of strategic approaches to bats as they are landscape animals, but we can’t replace site surveys. DLL as exists for great crested newts is absolutely not appropriate for bats. We have been liaising with Natural England and our understanding is that at this point DLL for bats is not on the horizon. However, we know we need to remain ever vigilant to the potential for this or similar approaches to be tabled in the future.

The previous statement BCT made on DLL is available here:

<https://www.bats.org.uk/news/2020/07/natural-england-district-level-licensing-and-bats>

Lack of evidence on impact of woodland management regimes on bats

Priority raised: *Bat groups often get asked to advise people about woodland management. The local Wildlife Trust will consult in advance if planning work on a reserve, and we’ll have a site meeting. Invariably what they want to do is open up rides and resume coppicing. Often*

this is problematic for bats, and we try to make the case for no management or for scaling back what is planned. Often, we have to accept a compromise as other taxa are involved with other priorities. But we still do not feel well enough armed to put a strong case forward and know exactly where we can compromise, especially with certain species such as Bechstein's bat. For instance, we may go along to a site and agree that a certain amount of coppicing is reinstated, but then the question is of what the rotation will be. They may also want to take out some of the stands to create more light. We'll push for as long as possible, but it would be nice to have some scientific evidence to back us up. Likewise with rides, what is acceptable and not acceptable? We just don't feel we have enough evidence to make the necessary case for bats.

Response from various delegates at the conference: Some of the papers from the Woodland Symposium over last two days highlighted just how much we don't know. Therefore, giving any sort of guidelines is difficult. Lot of working being done but still more to do.

Two woodland bat box schemes in Kent, which took six years for Natterer's bats to use, from onset of the scheme. Studying bats in woodlands and their response to management is a very long-term project. Talking two decades really, ask Dani Linton as her work in Oxfordshire and elsewhere has been going a long time.

Response from BCT's Head of Conservation Services, Lisa Worledge at the conference: We will raise this with Carol Williams (BCT's Director of Conservation) and Sonia Reveley (BCT's Woodland Officer).

Update since the conference from Carol Williams and Sonia Reveley: We have identified that woodland use and management are research priorities, including the question of 'How are bats affected by common woodland management techniques?' Alongside this is the related question of 'What are the fine-scale habitat associations of woodland bats?'. As mentioned at the conference, to answer these questions takes relatively long-term study but there is already work to address these underway. You can see some examples of this in the abstracts from day 2 of the Woodland Symposium (see: <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/pdf/Woodland-Symposium-programme-and-talk-abstracts.docx.pdf?1608231528>) including BCT's work with Forestry England (see: <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/pdf/Our Work/NBMP/British-Bat-Survey/Forestry-England-Bat-Survey-Summary-of-2019-Pilot-Project.pdf?1604592242>) where large amounts of data gathered hold great promise for improving our understanding over time. In addition the Swanton Novers HLF project gave us an insight into how bats are affected by forest management practices and how they use the woods. The project summary and recommendations can be found at: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-for-bats/bats-and-woodland/swanton-novers-woodland-bat-project>. Guidance and recommendations including recordings of online landowner workshops can be found on the Back from the Brink website (<https://naturebftb.co.uk/>) and lastly keep an eye on work currently being carried out for a PTES funded project looking at the impact of woodland coppicing on bats, see: <https://ptes.org/grants/uk-mammal-projects/impact-of-woodland-coppicing-on-bats/>.

Seven bat species (including Bechstein's bat) are covered by the Woodland Wildlife Toolkit that was launched in 2019 with the aim of providing information on the needs of rare or declining woodland dependant species. See: <https://woodlandwildlifetoolkit.sylva.org.uk/home> for more details. In addition there are two case studies on the BCT website of woodland sites that have successfully altered their management activities to support bats, see: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-for-bats/bats-and-woodland/woodland-management-case-studies>. Finally, there is some general reading about considering bats as part of woodland management on the BCT website at: <https://www.bats.org.uk/our-work/landscapes-for-bats/bats-and-woodland/further-reading>

As we get more information from ongoing research projects, we will update our information and guidance. We will also relevant share papers via the Bat Group Bulletin where these are open access (see <https://www.bats.org.uk/resources/resources-for-bat-groups/bat-group-bulletin> for a rolling 12-months of bulletins). There will hopefully be future Woodland Symposiums to share developments as well.