



## How to Plan a Bat Walk (including virtual walks)

Foreword regarding virtual walks. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the 2020 bat season was greatly changed. Due to limitations on physical gatherings BCT looked to find other ways to engage and educate about bats. We had great success with virtual bat walks as the turnout was larger than a traditional walk would have been able to accommodate.

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### Step 1: Find a site

The first step to planning a bat walk is identifying a site. Some key areas for consideration are:

- Accessibility of the site.  
Give careful consideration to your audience. How will they travel to the site? Check for sufficient parking, or alternately look at public transport options. It's important the site isn't too difficult to find. Also consider whether you have anyone coming in a wheelchair or who's partially sighted. If so, what special requirements they may require on site?
- Agreement with landowner.  
Check the owners and/or managers of the site agree to the event taking place. Also agree in writing which organisation is responsible for public health and safety, and for providing third party insurance cover.
- Size of the site.  
What scale event are you hoping to run? Consider what would be a maximum group size for the site in question.
- What species are present.  
An ideal site is one that has good numbers of more than one bat species that are ideally both visible and audible on detectors (although this may not always be possible). Or are there other interesting tree or bird species present to include habitat observation into your walk?

- Consider it virtually.  
Does the site have signal? Access the lighting and whether additional lighting will be required.

For physical walks, once you've identified a site start to plan the route. It is important to do a walkover survey before the event so that you can plan the best route, carry out a risk assessment and find the best areas to see bats. Make sure that bats can be seen at a location where people can stop and watch safely without being crowded.

### **Step 2: Set a time and date**

Bats are most active between April and September. The peak time of bat activity is around sunset and it is recommended that you factor in an extra half an hour before the start of the walk to allow time to gather and describe the evening's activities.

Which species you hope to see will also affect the timings of the walk. If you are in an area where noctules might be spotted it is a good idea to start your actual bat walk a good half an hour before sunset. If the earliest bats that you are likely to see are pipistrelles, then 15 minutes before sunset would be more appropriate. However, be mindful of starting too early to avoid the feeling of hanging around without much happening.

Also consider your audience when you are arranging dates and times for your bat walks. For example, in June and July it does not get dark until very late which may not be suitable for small children. If you are aiming for a family event organise the walk during school holidays or weekends. Events with later sunsets can start earlier if you have some bat sounds to play, an introductory talk or to enjoy the scenery.

Sunrise/sunset times can be found through online search engines, search for your specific location as timings are affected by longitude and latitude. Alternately, BCT produces a table of sunset times for June, July and August, and you can request a copy of this from the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) team via [nbmp@bats.org.uk](mailto:nbmp@bats.org.uk) however this won't be as region accurate as google.

This all needs to be considered for a live virtual walk also, unless you plan to record it and play it back at a later event.

### **Step 3: Carry out a risk assessment**

Always undertake a risk assessment in advance of your event and re-visit the site a few days before to check that nothing has changed. Remember, if you do not undertake a risk assessment, your (or the lead organizations) third party liability insurance will not be valid. A Bat Walk Health and Safety Policy and sample Risk Assessment are provided in Appendices 1 and 2. If the bat group is covered by BCT's insurance, you must also follow the safeguarding policy regarding children and vulnerable adults (available in the partner area of the website shortly).

*NB although the rabies risk is low in the UK, we recommend that gloves are always worn when handling bats in public; that members of the public are not allowed to touch the bats; and that Daubenton's bats are not taken to public events. Go to the BCT website [www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/bats-and-rabies](http://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bats-and-disease/bats-and-disease-in-the-uk/bats-and-rabies) for more information about bats and rabies in the UK.*

#### **Step 4: Organise help for the walk**

If the site is normally locked, particularly after dark, ensure that someone will be attending who has a key and make arrangements to enable participants to leave safely. Make sure that at least two other people (ideally with bat detectors) will be available to help you run the bat walk on the night. Ensure that you and those assisting on the walk have mobile phones (or know where the nearest phone is). Identify any potential hazards and alert your helpers to them.

If conducting a virtual (or hybrid) walk ensure someone is in charge of filming and managing the virtual meeting room. Someone with IT skills would be beneficial to be able to address an issues that arise during the walk.

#### **Step 5: Plan an introductory talk**

An introductory talk is a must on any bat walk. It provides an ideal opportunity to:

- Introduce yourself, and any helpers.
- Talk about bats, their biology and conservation. Whether this is brief or more in depth depends on what style event you have decided on.
- Outline what you will be doing on the walk, where you will be going and which species you hope to see.
- Cover health and safety issues. For example, notify attendees of any significant hazards and advise what precautions they should take. Ask parents to ensure their children are supervised at all times.
- Remind participants that they are free to leave at any time, and make sure you point out the exits. If gates are locked then inform them of alternative arrangements.
- Encourage membership and hand out bat leaflets as appropriate.

If a virtual walk:

- Advise attendees to put themselves on mute.
- Explain about the 'raise a hand' function to ask questions.

Further ideas for the talk are provided in appendix 3.

#### **Step 6: Publicising the bat walk**

As well as advertising through your group's own website, social media and newsletters, it's worth approaching your Local Wildlife Trust, libraries, local papers and radio stations, as they may be willing to help promote your event. Even neighbouring bat groups if you are putting on a large walk, many people are interested in their surrounding area which may include multiple counties. Posters put up around the site of the walk a couple of days before the event can also be successful but do consider your paper usage.

Don't forget to contact BCT about any bat walks occurring around European Bat Night, so that these can be included on the events page of the BCT website.

When publicising your event, always include:

**What:** Bat walk and does it include talks, workshop, NBMP surveys etc.

**Where:** Name of the site with postcode and a map/directions if possible.

**When:** Day, date and time, including the likely finishing time. 24hr format avoids confusion.

**How to join:** Consider asking people to book in advance, via website or email to control the numbers who can attend. Maximum capacity will help prepare appropriate assistance for the event and suitable risk assessments. If numbers aren't limited it could be very daunting to have 200 people turn up, especially if you only have two helpers and three bat detectors!

**How to attend:** Advise what is suitable clothing and footwear, and to bring a torch. State that unaccompanied children will not be permitted on the walk, and that you recommend a maximum of two children per responsible adult for bat walks. State whether dogs are permitted and whether it is wheelchair and pram accessible.

For virtual walks, either include the link in a confirmation email or advise it will be sent closer to the time.

### **Step 7: On the day**

Equipment checklist:

- Bat detector(s) with charged batteries
- Spotlight (wide beam) with charged battery
- Hand or head torch
- Spare batteries and spare torches
- Bright jackets/hi-vis - not essential but can be useful to identify the leader and helpers on the bat walk and as an aid to road safety.

For the virtual side

- Filming equipment that has recently been tested
- A backup option in case of issues
- Waterproof contains to protect equipment should the weather turn suddenly.

You may also want to take along some leaflets to hand out to the public after the bat walk or stickers to award as prizes during the walk. Useful handouts include: your contact details, upcoming meets, a range of [BCT leaflets](#) and membership information.

Keep checking the groups social media and email until the event begins to see any last minute communications.

### **Step 8: The walk**

On the night, arrive early and make sure that there are signs (or helpers) to direct people to the meeting point if necessary.

Make sure you know how many people are going with you at the start of the walk and count again at the end. Remind the group at the start that anyone leaving early needs to tell you when they are going. Arrange helpers throughout the group with one bringing up the rear. If you think you may have lost someone at the end of the walk, check with your helpers in case they saw anything or heard someone say that they were leaving. If more than 30 people are attending the walk, it is a good idea to split the participants into smaller groups led by helpers with bat detectors.

If the walk is cancelled due to bad weather, you must still turn up and apologise to anyone who does appear. Early or late in the season when the weather is less reliable it's an idea to have a contingency plan ready – perhaps book a nearby venue and have a portable stereo/laptop on hand to play bat sounds and give a more in-depth talk. You could even ask along a bat carer with some live bats or an expert on another type of wildlife, such as moths or birds.

Pass the bat detectors around, particularly letting children have a go. Make sure they use the wrist loops to avoid dropping them! Different types of detector create interest; have details available of how to purchase bat detectors. The deaf and hard of hearing may not hear the detector but will be able to feel the vibrations when holding a heterodyne detector. There is helpful information on detectors here: [www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bat-detectors-1](http://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/bat-detectors-1).

When talking to participants, avoid speaking only to the three or four people who cluster around you at the front; wait for everyone to catch up before starting. Repeat any questions that you are asked, speaking clearly and loudly so that everyone can hear the question and your answer. When broadcasting a walk consider wearing a microphone so you are not relying on the video recorder to capture your voice also.

As you walk around the site, scan the frequencies on the bat detector to hear any passing bats. If you're watching Daubenton's bats over water you can use a spotlight periodically to pick out flying bats – please exercise caution with this method, bearing in mind that excessive torchlight will disturb the bats and people may copy this at home.

Each time that you stop, talk to the group about the following:

- Habitat types and how they attract bats.
- How trees and buildings can be used for roosts at different times of year.
- How sheltered areas are those mostly used by bats, because this is where insect numbers can build up.
- Describe the bats that you see, what they are doing and where they probably roost.
- Describe their conservation status.
- Discuss the changes to habitat that affect them.

Just enjoy sharing your enthusiasm and knowledge with the group, this will give the most engaging experience.

Basic information about the UK species can be found on the BCT website [www.bats.org.uk/pages/uk\\_bats.html](http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/uk_bats.html). Further information about the life history, biology and conservation status of UK bat species are produced by the Bat Conservation Trust and available from the website [www.bats.org.uk/about-bats](http://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats).

At the end of the walk, lead everyone back to the start, thank them for coming and tell them how they can help bats further. Participants could donate to your local bat group and the Bat Conservation Trust, turn their [gardens](#) into a haven for bats or get involved in the [National Bat Monitoring Programme](#). Don't be afraid to ask for membership! For example: "if you have enjoyed the walk today you can become a member on our website. Membership is important to us and helps bat conservation". Public bat walks are an excellent way of raising public awareness of bats and increasing membership. A larger membership increases our political weight in conservation issues.

### **Step 9: Keep a record of participants and the event**

Another way of gaining public interest is to gather names and addresses of the participants at the event and send them an information pack afterwards, adhering to GDPR guidance. You might want to keep a record of the walk to help you plan for future events, take note of details such as:

- Which bat group members organized and ran the event
- How many people booked on and how many attended
- Peculiarities of the site (for example watch out for fishermen)
- How the event was publicised
- Any accidents

Not only can this be helpful when planning future walks it may be useful information to support grant applications or in situations where you need to show how you are promoting bat conservation.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Health and Safety Policy for public bat walks

*The following wording can be used by bat groups to produce a Health and Safety Policy Document.*

This policy applies to all bat walks organised and run by the X Bat Group. All public bat walks involving the X Bat Group are expected to conform to the following standards.

#### **Planning the Bat Walk**

- The X Bat Group will check any unknown site before agreeing to a proposed bat walk or will check with a reputable person who is familiar with the site, to ensure that the site is suitable as a location for a public bat walk.
- For all public bat walks the X Bat Group will ensure that it is reasonably confident that bats will be seen at a location where people can stop and watch safely without being crowded.
- The X Bat Group will ensure that at least two other people in addition to the leader will be available to help run any public bat walks for which it is responsible. These do not have to be X Bat Group members.
- The X Bat Group will check the access arrangements for a proposed public bat walk location and if any gates will need to be opened for the event. If the site is normally locked at night we shall ensure that someone will be attending who has a key and make arrangements so that participants can leave safely.
- If the X Bat Group is providing assistance to another organisation or authority that intends to organise and advertise a bat walk it must be agreed in writing when the walk is booked which organisation is responsible for public Health and Safety and for providing third party insurance cover. In general the principal organisers of the event should take this responsibility, but some smaller organisations such as "friends of" groups may not have the necessary insurance.

#### **Publicising the Bat Walk**

- The X Bat Group will try to ensure that any press or other local publicity recommends that people wear suitable clothing and shoes, and that they bring a torch.
- The X Bat Group will try to make it clear that unaccompanied children will not be permitted on the walk, and that we recommend a maximum of two children per responsible adult for night walks.

#### **Conducting the Bat Walk**

- A Risk Assessment Record will be completed at least annually for any proposed public bat walk location, and a brief recheck made shortly before the actual event.
- Before setting off on the walk the leader will remind people that it will be getting dark and that those with children should ensure that they know where these children are at all times. Also people should be informed that they are free to leave whenever they wish to, and the exit points pointed out to them.
- If any significant hazards have been identified, participants should be informed at the start and advised of what precautions they should take.

- All those people involved in assisting on the walk should be informed of the nearest phone and of any identified hazards.

**Insurance**

The X Bat Group is affiliated to the Bat Conservation Trust (*if applicable*), they will be covered by the BCT insurance policy for Third Party Cover (Public Liability), with a limit of indemnity of £5 million. This covers general damage to other people or their property caused by the negligence of the bat group or one of their members during the course of voluntary activities such as checking roosts in buildings or bat boxes and taking people on walks and talks. The policy does not cover personal accident or loss of or damage to personal equipment.

**Appendix 2**  
Sample risk assessment  
EXAMPLE ONLY

Hazard	Severity	Probability	Risk	Action to reduce risk	Revised probability	Revised risk
Cuts / abrasions / bruises from slips / trips / falls	2	4	8	Make a daytime planning visit to select route for walk to as far as possible avoid narrow paths and/or trip hazards such as tree roots. Advise participants to bring a torch, try to ensure that those that do are distributed among the participants.	2	4
Excited children may fail to notice hazards	4	3	12	Advise participants that a responsible adult should accompany children. No unaccompanied children under 14 will be permitted to go on the walk.	2	8
Bites from insects Poisonous plants	2	3	6	Advise use of insect repellent. This risk is highest at dusk when most bat walks take place. Ensure that walk avoids areas with poisonous plants (such as giant hogweed) or that these are pointed out to participants.	1	2
Drowning or hypothermia from falling into rivers or ponds and lakes	4	3	12	Ensure that participants are made aware of the position of banks etc. Try to route walk away from any particularly narrow or hazardous areas.	1	4
Toxocariasis	3	1	3	Risk from contact with dog faeces, particularly to small children. Try to ensure that walk avoids areas of contamination.	1	3
Weil's disease	3	1	3	Only a risk to those who accidentally come into contact with potentially contaminated water. Any such persons should be warned to watch for flu-like symptoms within a few weeks and visit their doctor immediately telling them of the contact with possibly contaminated water.	1	3
Problems with dogs	2	2	4	Advise any participants bringing a dog that it must be strictly kept on a lead. Consider a policy of discouraging dogs.	1	2
Physical assault	2	2	4	Advise participants not to become separated from the main body of participants. A group volunteer with a torch should act as back marker while group is on the move.	1	2

## Appendix 3

### Ideas for the introductory talk

Below is an example talk outline. You may find it useful to turn this page into small 'flash cards' listing some basic bullet points to use as a memory jogger, rather than reading from a piece of paper. Try asking the group questions to encourage audience participation. If you do, make sure everyone can hear the answers and repeat them back to the group before adding more detailed information. Always introduce yourself, your helpers and the bat group.

#### WHAT ARE BATS?

- Bats are mammals, just like us. In fact they are more closely related to us than they are to mice!
- Bats are warm-blooded, have fur and feed their young on milk.
- They are very clean animals and spend hours grooming themselves.
- Bats have just one baby a year, but can live up to 30 years.
- Bats are tiny. The pipistrelle weighs just 4g (that is just less than a one pound coin) and it's body is half the length of my thumb.

#### WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

In **roosts** - nooks and crannies in:

- Buildings - houses, barns and sheds. They live in the outside parts of houses, behind hanging tiles and boarding, in cavity walls or in roof spaces.
- Trees
- Caves
- Under bridges

#### WHAT DO THEY EAT?

- All British bats eat insects like midges, mosquitoes, moths and beetles.
- A pipistrelle bat, our smallest bat, can eat 3000 midges in one night!
- They need to eat one third of their body weight each night!
- In the tropics, bats also eat fruit, frogs and fish, and three species eat blood.

#### BATS NEED FRIENDS!

- To protect the places where they live and feed
- To spread the word that bats are brilliant – so tell others what you have learnt about bats

#### HOW DO THEY FIND THEIR FOOD IN THE DARK?

- Although bats can see just as well as you or I, because they feed in the dark they need another way of finding their food.
- They make high-pitched shouts that bounce back off insects and trees in their environment- a technique called echolocation.
- They can tell how far they are from the insects by the time it takes for their shout to bounce back to them.
- We can detect bat calls by using special bat detectors that transform the high-pitched sounds into something we can hear.

#### WHERE CAN I SEE BATS?

Different species like different areas.

- The best place to look is near water at dusk - a pond, lake, canal or reservoir
- Also look around hedges, trees, gardens, meadows and the edge of woods. Even under street lights as they can be attracted to the insects there.

#### WHAT PROBLEMS DO THEY FACE?

*Loss of roosts:*

- Timber treated with insecticides kills bats
- Disturbance
- Cutting down of old trees

*Loss of insects to feed on:*

- Fewer green spaces, rivers and trees
- Use of insecticides, reducing the number of insects
- Water pollution