



The Bat Line

Volunteer newsletter

Issue 1

Welcome

To our first volunteer newsletter...

The past few months have been a busy time for Natural England; as staff settle into new teams following our reorganisation. This has affected the way in which we support our volunteers as well; with the previous regions merged into four delivery areas, each with a dedicated support adviser and technical advisers.

We appreciate that there has been some confusion and disquiet in the past around the lack of continuity in staff supporting you. We hope that the new arrangements will go some way to addressing this; with fewer Natural England staff involved and a more consistent approach to the way we deliver this work across the delivery areas. This newsletter is a new initiative intended to keep you up-to-date as volunteer support arrangements develop and to inform you on other issues which relate to your volunteering role.

As it's our first edition, it's rather long! However, we thought it was a good opportunity to cover some of the procedures necessary to make your role as safe as possible and to assist us in supporting you. Your support adviser should be your first contact and is available to answer any queries you may have about your role. You can find their contact details in the right hand column. We've included details of technical advisers on the next page for your information.

We would welcome feedback about any of the issues raised; as well as suggestions for topics you'd like covered in future newsletters.

Area Support Advisers

Your first contact for all volunteering enquiries:

[Andrew Dumbleton](#)

(London and South East)
0300 060 2130

[Jerry Sisican](#)

(South West)
0300 060 0986

[Sue Lockhart](#)

(East and West)
0300 060 1210

[Jennifer Yau](#)

(North)
0300 060 0835

Volunteer Lead Adviser

[Martin Rhodes](#)

0300 060 2676

Title photo

Brown Long-Eared. © Hugh Clark/ Bat Conservation Trust

Helping us support you

Delivering the bat advice service

The valuable service which you, our bat advice volunteers, provide is covered in more depth below. In order to carry out roost visits you must be registered as a Natural England volunteer and have initially trained for and obtained a current volunteer roost visitor/ bat conservation licence. You also need to have been vaccinated against rabies. Any roost visits you attend should be at the request of Natural England or your local bat advice contractor; and any return visits you need to make should be logged with them beforehand.

Licences

When you obtain your first licence, we'd appreciate it if you contacted your support adviser with your licence number and the expiry date. They will then inform the bat advice contractor in your area and issue you with your ID card.

If you could drop a quick email or phone call to your support adviser please when renewing your licence, that would be really helpful for keeping our records up to date. However, don't worry if you forget! We check volunteer licence expiration dates approximately every month so will be in touch to remind you to renew if we notice your licence has expired.

Vaccination

To protect yourself from the ongoing risk of contracting rabies it is essential that you have undergone an initial course of rabies vaccination, followed by booster vaccinations at the necessary intervals (initially after 12 months, then every 3-5 years). Your GP can obtain the vaccine free of charge from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) when you receive your initial vaccination or subsequent boosters please ask your Doctor to complete the GP declaration form. You should send this to your Natural England support adviser (who can provide you with copies of the form). If your immunisation has lapsed, you will not be able to undertake roost visits on our behalf until you have received a booster vaccination.

There has been some discussion recently regarding rabies antibody (titre) tests as an alternative to booster vaccinations. The NHS recommend that routine titre testing is only required for people working with live virus and for people who have experienced a severe reaction to a previous booster. Reactions are rare - in a recent study of vaccine recipients in the US less than 6% reported any adverse reaction (other than minor swelling at the vaccine site). If you have previously experienced an adverse reaction to the vaccine please contact the Volunteer Lead Adviser for advice. In other circumstances we advise volunteers to follow NHS guidance and obtain booster vaccinations at the stipulated intervals. If you encounter difficulty in obtaining the free vaccine from your GP please contact the Volunteer Lead Adviser.

Technical Advisers

South East

- *London:*
[Andrew Dumbleton](#) 0300 060 2130
- *Sussex, Surrey & Kent:*
[Claire Dowding](#) 0300 060 1924
- *Berks, Bucks, Hampshire & Oxon:*
[Karen Watson](#) 0300 060 1569

South West

- *Cornwall, Devon & Dorset:*
[David Trump](#) 0300 060 1836
- *Somerset, Wiltshire, Bristol, Bath & Avon:*
[Haney King](#) 0300 060 4587

West

- *Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire:*
[Jackie Giles](#) 0300 060 0598
- *Gloucestershire:*
[Haney King](#) 0300 060 4587

North

- *Cumbria, Cleveland, Durham, East Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear:*
[Sheena Horner](#) 0790 161 8168
- *Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire:*
[Karen Gribbin](#) 0300 060 0008

East

- *Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, North & Northeast Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland:*
[Jo Clarke](#) 0300 060 4060
- *Essex, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Norfolk, Suffolk:*
[John Black](#) 0300 060 0224

ID Cards

If you currently hold an ID card which has expired or is due to expire before April 2012 please contact your support adviser so that they can issue you with a new one.

Health and Safety Policy

Natural England's Health and Safety Policy has recently been reissued by the Chief Executive to take account of major organisational changes and it is a timely reminder to all Volunteers to be aware of your legal responsibilities whilst volunteering with us. A copy either by email or hard copy can be obtained from your area support adviser,

Accidents and incidents

Fortunately accidents and incidents involving volunteers are very rare; but it's worth reminding you that all accidents or incidents, including accidental damage to householder's property, must be reported as soon as possible to Natural England (however trivial, and regardless of whether the householder appears concerned at the time). Please contact the support advisers in the first instance who can explain how to do this. Serious accidents must be reported immediately to the Volunteer Lead Adviser.

Lone Working

Many volunteers carry out roost visits alone. If you are making a visit unaccompanied, even to an occupied property, you should operate a 'buddy' system. For volunteers a buddy is usually a close friend or family member; someone who will raise the alarm if you do not return. For a 'buddy' system to work effectively it is vital you give your buddy as much information as possible; the name, address and contact details of those you are visiting, your vehicle details, your mobile phone details and importantly what time you expect to return. Make sure you contact them with a revised time if you are delayed.

If you don't return at the expected time your buddy will need to take the following steps: For the 1st hour after your expected return attempt to contact you on your mobile. For the 2nd hour contact the person you visited and establish what time you were last seen; recalculate time of arrival and restart the clock if necessary. If they have been unable to contact you after 2 hours your buddy should contact the emergency services, giving as much detail as possible. Your buddy will also need the details of the Volunteer Lead Adviser to contact them as soon as possible in the event of an incident.

Expenses

As a volunteer you are entitled to claim expenses relating to visits you attend as part of your licence training, or when attending roost visits at the request of Natural England or the local bat advice contractor. We are keen that you should be reimbursed for these as soon as possible; so that you do not remain out-of-pocket and to help us accurately monitor our expenditure throughout the financial year.

Please keep in touch

Our support advisers are available to answer any questions you might have about your volunteering role. Please keep us informed of your current circumstances and any changes to your contact details; to help us to provide a better service to you.



“Please help us by submitting expenses claims regularly (at least once every three months).”

Please help us by submitting claims regularly (at least once every three months). These should be submitted using the Expenses Form which is downloadable from our website or available from your support adviser. Please send claims to the address at the bottom of the form.

Natural England employees who volunteer should also use the Volunteer Expenses Form when submitting claims relating to their voluntary role.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

We provide volunteers with PPE where this is identified as a factor in reducing the risks associated with the role they are performing. Your support adviser can provide you with a PPE checklist and order items on your behalf. We will contact you annually to establish whether any items require replacing; but you remain responsible for maintaining the PPE we issue to you and informing us if any items need replacing during the year.

Ladders

In the past Natural England has loaned a small number of ladders directly to volunteers. We have responsibility for ensuring that ladders issued to you are inspected/maintained/replaced as required. To enable us to achieve this please contact your support adviser if you are in possession of a ladder supplied by Natural England or our predecessors and let us know when (approximately) it was issued, where it is currently kept and confirm that it is in good repair.

Health and Safety Training

Last year we provided Health and Safety training to over 130 Volunteers. We are currently putting together a new training package to be delivered throughout the country later this year as part of a rolling programme of training. Alongside this we will be introducing an internet based H&S supplementary training programme that can be completed on-line. If you are identified as requiring training this financial year we will contact you as soon as we can to make arrangements for this.

Use it; don't lose it!

Whilst 'practice makes perfect', lack of practice can result in us forgetting what we've learned, particularly if that was some time ago! For this reason we encourage all licensed bat work volunteers who have not attended a roost visit in the past 12 months to consider shadowing a licence trainer, or more experienced licence holder, in order to get some more practice and maintain their skills. Please contact your support adviser if you need help with arranging this.

Taking a break?

We really appreciate the significant amount of time many of you devote to supporting us as volunteers. There may be periods when a change in circumstances means that you are too busy to attend



© Andrew Dumbleton

“We will be running H&S training courses and introducing an internet based training programme later this year.”

roost visits on our behalf. If this is the case, please contact your support adviser who can flag your record as temporarily inactive and will instruct our advice line contractors not to contact you. If your circumstances change permanently and you are no longer able to volunteer we also need to know; so that your details are permanently removed from our records.

Your vital role as volunteers

What our advice service entails and where you fit in

As issues such as habitat destruction continue to threaten natural bat roosting sites, residential properties have become strongholds for many bat species. Our roost owner advice line and team of over 1000 dedicated and experienced volunteers was formed in recognition of the importance of retaining roosts in houses and other residential buildings.

With the exception of London, which is still managed in-house, the roost owner advice line is contracted out to Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), Sally Phillips and FPCR. Sally Phillips covers Cumbria, FPCR cover the East Midlands and BCT cover the rest of the country. Their contact details can be found in the box to the right.

Volunteer visits ensure the protection of bats by advising on the timing and methods of works which would otherwise affect a roost, whilst reassuring people affected by them. These visits are key to reducing the likelihood of exclusions.

Unfortunately, recent cuts and the subsequent tightening of our budget mean that our service cannot cover purely Public Relations (PR) visits anymore. We realise that PR activities play a vital part in bat conservation though and are careful to pass any enquiries like these to local bat groups who are often able to engage the householder.

The last resort... Exclusions

Summer's here and throughout August, maternity colonies will start dispersing as the baby bats become more independent. The maternity season is often the busiest time of year for our volunteers so a big thank you for all your hard work over the past few months.

Maternity roosts can include hundreds of bats in relatively small confined spaces, which can make roost owners nervous of their presence or create problems such as urine staining on walls and a strong smell. Despite their cute appearance, soprano pipistrelles are particularly pungent!

Sometimes despite best efforts made by bat line advisers and volunteer undertaking visits to reassure roost owners, roost exclusions are the only option. We are careful to only issue



Contractor details

FPCR: 01509 672772

BCT: 0845 1300228

Sally Phillips: 01768 776911



exclusion licences where there are no other alternatives, such as a roost owner suffering a bat phobia or severe damage being caused to the property.

To ensure that all other possibilities are exhausted before considering exclusion, the application form for roost exclusion is not available on our website. This is to encourage roost owners to talk to a bat line adviser initially to help reassure them and explain that alternatives to exclusion are readily available in most cases.

Exclusion licensing – how it works

Once it's established that a roost exclusion is the only possible way forward, the volunteer bat worker will usually acquire an exclusion application form from the relevant contractor for their area and help the roost owner fill it in or leave it with them to complete. Naturally there is no obligation for volunteers to be involved in the exclusion process if they do not wish to!

The completed application is then sent by the roost owner to the contractors for initial processing and assessment whilst the volunteer bat worker sends their visitor report form back to the contractors independently.

If our contractors conclude that a licence is appropriate, a method statement and covering letter are prepared following consultation with Natural England Technical Advisers. It is then referred to the European Protected Species (EPS) Licensing Team who make the final decision on whether a licence should be issued. Where there's any uncertainty about the requirement for the licence, the applicant is asked to provide further evidence of the problem, such as a doctor's letter to confirm a phobia.

The official turnaround time to process these licences is 30 working days. If the licence application is granted then the roost owner has to submit a returns form to Natural England following the exclusion.

Roost owners don't have to provide suitable alternative roosts as part of the exclusion process. This is because the number of exclusions granted per year is relatively small (generally just over fifty a year throughout the whole country) and so it's assumed the 'favourable conservation status' of the bats is not affected. If you have any concerns about this assumption, then the following section will be of interest to you...

Batty research projects

Here's a brief summary of some pieces of current bat related research (please see attached note for further information). You may have already read about these projects in a recent Bat Group bulletin issued by BCT:

Exclusions project

Defra has commissioned the University of Bristol to undertake a project to test whether bats excluded from houses are able to find suitable alternative roosts and to determine the impacts on local populations in terms of their integrity and dynamics. BCT is acting as the subcontractor for the project.

The exclusion licensing process in a nutshell:

- Roost owner fills in the application form
- The application form and roost report form is sent to the contractors
- Method statement and covering letter are prepared - Natural England advise on these
- EPS Licensing Team determine the licence (requesting more information if necessary)

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If the licence application is granted then the roost owner has to submit a returns form to Natural England following the exclusion.”

The research focuses on the soprano pipistrelle, a species that is commonly the subject of domestic exclusion requests. The study aims to provide evidence that will lead to improvements in the implementation of the Habitats Directive, in particular the procedures and guidance associated with requests for domestic exclusions.

Churches research

Dwellings aren't the only buildings which can act as important roosts for bats. BCT's original Bats in Churches project (Sargent 1995) estimated that 60% of pre-16th Century churches contain bat roosts. Our contractors find that many of their advice line queries involve churches, particularly in eastern counties. As volunteers, you'll probably be aware of some of the issues which can crop up, including large quantities of droppings upsetting church users and urine damage to historic artefacts. Two new research projects in eastern England are investigating strategies to reduce the impact of bats on church users while providing for the needs of the bats:

i. Bats, churches and the landscape: sustainable conservation of bats in the East of England

SITA Trust and Natural England are funding BCT and University of Bristol for three years to study soprano pipistrelles in East Anglian churches. The research will include a regional survey of churches, the modelling of the occurrence of bats in relation to habitat data plus radio-tracking and microclimate studies of roost location.

ii. Mitigation of Natterer's bats in churches

Natterer's bats sometimes form large maternity colonies in churches, especially in East Anglia where they can cause problems for church users. Defra is funding research to address the issue, led by the University of Bristol, with BCT as a sub-contractor.

This three year research project will investigate the properties of churches and their immediate surrounding landscapes that attract bats. The project will involve manipulation of environmental conditions to encourage bats to relocate to alternative, less sensitive areas of churches and will involve the provision of alternative roosting areas both within and outside of churches.

If you want to hear more, updates on these projects will be linked to the conservation science area of the BCT website (www.bats.org.uk/pages/research.html) and the University of Bristol website (www.bristol.ac.uk/biology/research/behaviour/batlab/).

For specific queries about the projects...

Please contact Dr Karen Haysom:

karen.haysom@bats.org.uk

Thank you for reading!

We would love to hear from you about any of the issues raised in this edition; as well as suggestions for topics you'd like covered in future newsletters.

Please email your comments to batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk or contact your support adviser.

If you received this newsletter by post and would prefer to receive future copies by email please contact us so that we can update our records.