

MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE:

Bat Havens

Bats are important

Bats play a vital role in our ecosystems and account for almost a third of the UK's mammal species. Since they occupy a variety of habitats and are very sensitive to environmental changes, their numbers can be used to predict values of biodiversity. All bats in the UK are insectivores; they are the top predators of common nocturnal insects. Bats are also important in pollinating flowers and dispersing seeds; their presence can sometimes be critical in helping regrowth after forest clearance.

All bat species in the U.K. are protected by law because their numbers have declined so dramatically. The decline is due to loss of feeding habitats and flight lines, loss of insects to feed on, and development affecting roosts. Bats are becoming more reliant on urban habitats, where they roost in buildings and forage in nearby wooded parks and gardens. By transforming your garden into a bat haven, you can provide a safe place for bats to roost.



Make your garden a bat haven

Bats live in close proximity to us. As their wild habitats become more scarce and disconnected, our gardens can be made into perfect havens to provide places for bats to roost or pass through on their night time adventures.

Important information: It is illegal to disturb any bat when it is roosting, and to kill, injure or handle a bat without a licence.

Plant night-scented flowers

Night-scented flowers will attract plenty of insects that bats prey upon. Here are some plants that you might think of growing:

- Cherry pie *Heliotropium arborescens*
- Evening primrose *Oenothera biennis*
- Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*
- Night-scented catchfly *Silene noctiflora*
- Night-scented stock *Matthiola bicornis*
- Nottingham catchfly *Silene nutans*
- Soapwort *Saponaria officinalis*
- Sweet rocket *Hesperis matronalis*
- Tobacco plant *Nicotiana glauca*
- White jasmine *Jasminum officinale*

Plant and protect trees

Trees provide a large variety of nooks and crannies for bats to roost or to hibernate in. They also provide shelter for bats in bad weather and can act as navigational guides, especially if the trees or hedges are planted in straight lines.

Build a wildlife pond

Ponds attract a large variety of wildlife, including many insects that bats prey upon. Visit our website, hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening to find out how to build a wildlife pond.



Bat-roosting boxes © Mike Read



Convulvus hawk moth on Nicotiana © Jamie Mogridge-Percy



Brown long eared bat © Tom Marshall



Daubenton's bat © Dale Sutton/2020vision

Keep cats indoors at night

Cat attacks are one of the leading causes of bat fatalities. Cats will find out where the bats roost and will attack them as they emerge. Even if you cannot see a bat's injuries, if a bat was ever caught by a cat, it will be at risk of internal infection from the cat's saliva.

Reduce artificial lighting

The impacts of artificial lighting and light pollution on bat behaviour had been extensively studied. Lighting can reduce bat foraging habitat directly by illuminating spaces that bats would usually forage at or indirectly by illuminating areas along their commuting routes which prevents the bat from continuing its journey. Turning off your lights at night, will encourage bats to come to your garden.

To read more about the impacts of lighting on bats behaviours, go to batsandlighting.co.uk.

Install a bat box

Bat boxes are artificial sites for bats to roost, especially in areas where development has reduced natural habitats. Bat boxes have entrance holes in the bottom rather than in the front like bird boxes. Inside the box the wood is grooved to provide the bats with something to cling to.

How to build a bat box

There are many pre-made bat boxes that you can purchase from wildlife charities and garden centres. However, if you wish to build your own bat box, here are a few things to consider:

- Make sure all joints are well sealed and do not attach a removable lid - bats hate draughts.

- Use untreated wood from sustainable sources.
- Use roughly sawn wood - bats need something to cling to.

Bat Conservation Trust and RSPB have great guides and templates to follow.

bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes

rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/buildabatbox/

Where should I put a bat box?

The best place to position a bat box is on a tree. If you have more than one, place them in groups round three sides of a tree - bats like to move from one box to another during the day and from season to season as temperatures change. Indeed, bat boxes are most successful if several of them are installed at once. Put the boxes as high as possible above the ground to avoid predators - some species of bat such as noctules prefer roosts at least 5 metres off the ground. Clear away surrounding branches to give them a clear flight path.

Boxes can also be located on buildings. A good position is under the eaves to protect them from bad weather. Bats can take a while to investigate new premises, but if your box is not occupied within three years, try moving it. You can check if the box is being used by looking for crumbly brown or black droppings on the ground.

For further reading

If you would like to find out more about how to make space for nature in your garden or outdoor area, please see the wildlife gardening pages on our website at: hiwwt.org.uk/wildlife-gardening.

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