

Attract More Bats to Your Garden With a Bat House

You know those lovely warm summer evenings when you're sitting in the garden enjoying a cool drink and everything's perfect except for those pesky midges that keep biting. That's the time you wish you'd put up one of two of these bat boxes around the garden. Bats are the perfect midge exterminators. They catch and consume thousands of the things every evening. Watching them in action can be quite entertaining too.

Declining Numbers

Sadly, bats are not as common as they used to be in Britain. Loss of roosting sites, feeding sites, and the overuse of chemical pesticides which poison and destroy their food source have all contributed to their decline. We can all do something to help stop this decline by making our gardens more bat-friendly.

Bats are warm blooded mammals, just like us, and they need different places to sleep at different times of the year. When the weather is warm in summer, they



Brown Long-Eared Bat



Natterer's Bat

need cool daytime roosts. During autumn and winter they need a roost with more insulation to keep the cold out. You can help the bats in your area by making a simple wooden bat house - instructions are over the page.



Pipistrelle Bat

It's basically a weather-proof box with grooved inner surfaces. The bats enter the house through a narrow slot at the bottom of the house, then hang from the grooves inside.

Location, Location...

If you mount your bat house on a tree, put it as high as possible. Five metres from the ground is the

ideal height, as this allows the bats to glide down out of the bat house without hitting the ground. It also keeps them safer from predators. Bats also need a clear flight path in and out of the house, so remove any branches or twigs which are in the way.

Bat houses can also be fixed to buildings. If you mount them under the eaves, they will be protected from bad weather. Bat houses hung on a shed, house or a garage will probably get more use than a house hung on a tree.

It's unlikely any bats will move in straight away, so you'll need to be patient. Sometimes it takes months

or even years for bats to find a man-made house. Bats take their time to locate and investigate new roosting sites.

Origin of the Faeces

You'll know if your bat house is being used, because there will be tiny black droppings on the ground below the house. They're about 5 to 8mms long. If you squeeze them between your fingers they crumble to a fine dust, unlike mouse droppings which remain in one piece.



Bat droppings crumble to dust

If you wait below your bat house just after sunset there's usually just enough light to see the bats coming out to feed.

If your box hasn't been occupied within three years, try moving it to a different location.

If bats do take up residence tell your local bat group. You can find their details at: www.uksafari.com/bats.htm

BAT FACTS

- Bats are more closely related to humans than mice
- No British bats feed on blood. They all eat insects.
- Most female bats produce only one baby each year
- One bat can eat between 600 and 1,000 mosquitoes an hour
- Bats have good eyesight and they can also see in total darkness by using echolocation



Bat Detector

Hi-Tech Help

Another way to check if your bat house is being used is with a bat detector. Although bats have relatively good eyesight, most depend on their highly developed echolocation system to navigate and capture insects in the dark. They do this by emitting very high-frequency sound at a rate of up to 200 pulses per second. By listening to the echoes which bounce back from objects around them they can build up a mental picture of their environment. This echolocation ability is so precise they can detect objects as small as a piece of thread.

Bat detectors are able to hear the calls made by bats, which are normally beyond the range of human hearing. The bat detector converts these calls into a series of clicks, squeaks and crackles which we can hear. You can buy bat detectors at:

www.uksafari.com/shop

Each one of the 16 species of bat found in Britain has its own dis-

tinct sound. The bat detector has a frequency dial which can be tuned into the bat, just as you would tune a radio into your favourite station.

By reading off the frequency on the dial when you hear the bat you can identify the species. For example the Common Pipistrelle bat echo locates at a frequency of around 45 to 50 kHz.

Grounded Bats

British bats are rarely seen after dark, so if you find a bat on the ground during the daytime it's almost certainly in need of help. Although bats should only be handled by licensed bat workers, other people are allowed to handle them if the bat is in danger or needs help.

If you find a grounded bat you must take care not to be bitten, so as a precaution wear some gloves.

Place a cardboard box over the bat and use a sheet of cardboard to carefully slide the bat into the box.

An old shoe box makes an ideal container. Put a piece of cloth, like an old tea-cloth, at one end of the box for the bat to crawl into. This makes them feel more secure. At the other end of the box put a shallow container of water to prevent

dehydration. An old jam jar lid is good for this. Use a ball point pen to make some air holes in the lid, and then place the lid on the box securely.

If you think the bat could be a baby, get some expert help by calling the National Bat Helpline on: 0845 1300 228.

If there are no obvious signs of injury, the bat could just be exhausted and in need of some rest.

When it gets dark outside, place the box on its side, on a surface at least five feet from the ground. If the bat doesn't fly away within 15 minutes, again call the number above.

If you are bitten by a bat, the wound should be immediately and thoroughly cleaned with soap and water for at least five minutes. Additional cleansing of the wound site with an alcohol base or other disinfectant is also recommended and immediate medical advice must be sought.

Bats in the House

Bats sometimes accidentally fly into a room through an open window or door. This usually happens in the summer months when baby bats are learning to fly. The best thing to do is to close the door to the room, so it doesn't move to another part of the house, then fully open the windows to the outside and turn off the lights. The bat will normally find its own way out using echolocation. Never try to catch a bat while it is flying.



The delicate wing bones of a bat

They are extremely fragile and you could easily injure it. It could also bite in self-defence.

Sometimes young bats become exhausted before they can find their way out. They will usually look for somewhere to sleep in the room and re-appear the following evening. The best places to look are in the folds of curtains or behind picture frames

When you find it carefully put a box over the bat as described earlier.

Bats and Rabies

Some bats in Europe do carry a rabies virus called European Bat Lyssavirus (EBLV). This is different from classical rabies, which has never been found in a bat in Europe. Over the last 18 years, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency have tested in excess of 4,000 bat carcasses submitted by conservation group members as part of a passive surveillance programme. To date, EBLV has been isolated from only 3 UK bats in Sussex, Lancashire and Surrey.

Bat Protection

Bats are protected by law, and it is illegal to disturb any bat when it is roosting, or to kill, injure or handle a bat without a licence.

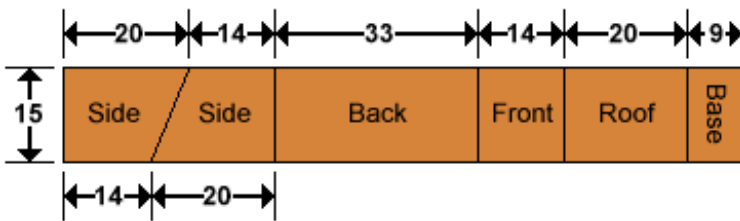


Photo: Helen Adsett

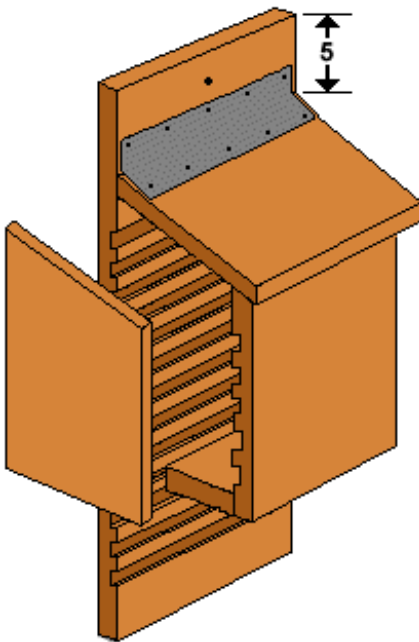
Grounded Bat



How to Build a Bat House



Remember to use untreated wood as the chemicals in some wood preservatives can kill bats.



To build your bat house you need a plank 15cms wide, 2cms thick and 110cms long.

You can use rough sawn timber. It's cheaper, and the rough surface makes it easier for the bats to hang on.

With a pencil and rule, measure and mark out the plank as shown in the diagram above, then cut the sections with a saw.

If you want to make the inside surfaces extra grippy for the bats, use a saw to cut some grooves in the

wood, but be careful not to cut too deep.

Nail or screw the sections together and mount the lid using a hinge or a piece of rubber. A piece of an old bicycle inner tube is ideal as it also helps to make the box waterproof.

Drill a hole in the back panel, above the lid, ready for mounting the bat house to a tree.

The entrance slit at the base of the box only needs to be between 1.5 and 2cms wide.

This factsheet is one of a series written and published by UK Safari - a website for anyone interested in the wildlife and countryside of Britain. UK Safari also publish a free nature newsletter. Visit: www.uksafari.com

THE UK SAFARI NATURE SHOP



Batbox Bat Detector Mk III

A high quality, low noise ultrasonic bat detector used thousands of naturalists throughout the world. Simple to use - ideal for beginners



Bat Detective CD

The first ever compilation of British bat call recordings on CD. An essential reference for anyone who wishes to identify the sounds made by British bats



British Bats Fold-Out Identification Guide

Popular with experts and amateurs of all ages,. Superb illustrations plus all the essential facts you need to make accurate identifications

Visit: www.uksafari.com/shop