Bat Problem

Bats like warm, dark places so your loft could be their happy haven. Getting rid of them can be a tricky though as they're protected by law.

Choose from the following list to find the advice you're looking for:

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How do I identify a bat?

Bats are officially classified as mammals and are not strictly thought of as pests. UK bat species can vary in body size from 3.5cm to 7.5cm in length and weigh between 5-40g. Their fur colou varies from brown and black (usually paler underneath) to a pale orange, depending on the species. They generally either have no tail or an extremely short one - an exception is the mouse-t bat which has tail nearly as long as its body. Nearly all bats are nocturnal. Their eyesight is designed for low levels of light and to get around in the dark they rely on a form of sonar known as echolocation for navigating and finding prey.

Like all mammals, bats give birth to live young. They are born with fur and some will have their eyes open immediately after birth - those that don't usually open their eyes within two weeks. T young are generally weaned within four months.

Female bats don't reach maturity until they're about two years old, although they are actually capable of reproducing at 18 months. Bats exhibit huge variation in their mating and birth cycles according to the species.

Where do bats live?

Bats are found throughout the world, with 13 species of bat living in the UK alone.

Outdoors

They can be found in cities, farmland, trees, river valleys and grasslands. They will feed over water, along woodland edges and in gardens.

Indoors

Bats frequently roost in lofts and roof spaces. They can also be found under tiles, in beams and hanging from roofing timbers. Most bats roost in cracks and crevices, they're usually only pres roof spaces for part of the year. Some species are predominantly house-dwelling, although bats will inhabit almost any place that offers protection.

What do bats eat?

All British bat species (and 70 per cent of the world's bats) eat insects. Other bats follow a diet of fruit, flowers, pollen, or nectar.

What attracts bats?

Bats, like most animals, like areas abundant in food, warm shelter, and the absence of predators. They prefer to roost in dark, quiet, enclosed spaces where they're least likely to be disturbed their enemies or bad weather.

The natural habitat of bats are caves and other such secluded areas - this is why your barn, shed or attic can be so attractive to them.

How do I know if I have a bat problem?

A bat presence can easily be determined by their droppings. These are dark brown or black, 4-8mm long and easily crumble into a powder (unlike rodent droppings which are hard). Other sig include discarded moth wings, urine stains and dark 'polished' surfaces around access holes.

Are bats harmful?

Bats are associated with rabies but the risk of catching the virus from a bat is extremely low. In the UK only six bats have been found with the rabies virus called European Bat Lyssavirus (EB This type of rabies is genetically distinct from the classic rabies carried by foxes, dogs and cats.

Bat droppings don't present a health hazard to humans as they consist of the hard parts of insects that bats can't digest.

What is the law concerning bats?

In England and Wales bats and their roosts are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), and the Conservatic Regulations 1994. In Scotland the Countryside and Rights of Way Act does not apply.

A roost is defined in the Wildlife and Countryside Act as "any place that a wild bat uses for shelter or protection", and the roost is protected whether bats are present in it or not.

The law states that it is a criminal offence for anyone (without the permission of English Nature), to intentionally kill, injure, handle, or photograph a bat (except where flying outdoors). It's also to keep a bat (although sick or injured bats may be kept until ready for release). If convicted, you could be fined up to £1000 per bat.

What should I do if I am bitten by a bat?

While overall chances are very low, the odds of catching rabies from any wild animal are increased if no action is taken when you're bitten or scratched by them. Wash the wound immediatel soap and water for at least five minutes. Also add disinfectant to the wound site - alcohol will do if you're not close to a medicine kit. Seek immediate medical advice if the wound doesn't seem healing or you feel unwell after you've been bitten.

Contact the Bat Helpline on **0845 1300 228** so they can arrange for the nearest bat worker to collect and identify the bat. If there is no bat worker in your area, get in touch with your local vet f advice.

How can I prevent having bats in my home?

Take the following steps:

The most important step will usually be the elimination of any potential entry points. Examine the exterior of your home for openings 1.3cms or larger, and seal them with steel wool, hardwa cloth, screens, netting, plating, or silicone caulk. These can be found at most DIY stores.

If you have exterior openings that you just can't seal up, you can make it look less desirable to a bat by making the area appear bright, loud or busy. Ways to do this would be to hand lights aluminium foil, balloons, windsocks, wind chimes, or other highly visible and mobile objects.

Cat and dog repellent sprays can be used, but they're only temporary measures best used in small areas like overhangs and awnings where the occasional lone bat is encountered.

How do I get rid of bats?

Getting rid of bats from your home can be problematic because they're a protected species. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 means it is illegal to:

- Recklessly kill or injure any bat
- Disturb a bat at roost
- Damage a roost site or obstruct the entrance

Your best course of action would be to contact The Bat Conservation Trust, who can offer help and advice:

The Bat Conservation Trust
Unit 2, 15 Cloisters House
8 Battersea Park Road
London SW8 4BG
Tel: **020 7627 2629**
Fax: 020 7627 2628

Alternatively, if it's an emergency, the Trust also provides a special contact number. Call the Bat Helpline on **0845 1300 228**.

Does the council remove bats for free?

Local Councils are reluctant to offer any treatments for bats or their roosts because of their protective status. Your first port of call should be the Bat Helpline on **0845 1300 228**.

How much does it cost to remove bats professionally?

Professional bat removal services are a bit thin on the ground because of bat's protective status - there's a limit to the help they can provide. Once again, your first port of call to find out which services are legal should be the Bat Helpline on **0845 1300 228**.