

# Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group

NEWSLETTER



SUMMER 2024



ISSUE 2

The UK hosts 18 species of bats. All are protected in law.

## Bat Crime PDG Chairman



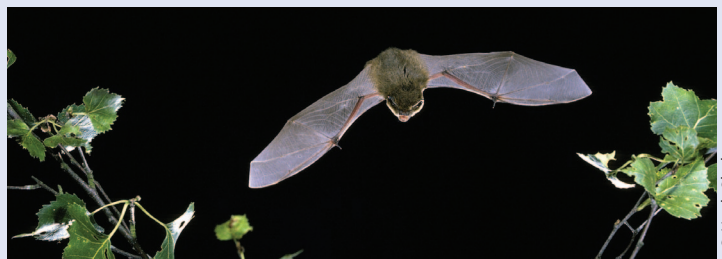
I would like to welcome you all to read the latest edition of the Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group Newsletter. My name is PC Alun Bradshaw from Cambridgeshire Constabulary, and I have recently taken up the chair role. I have been with Cambridgeshire Constabulary for 20 years and have been the force wildlife crime officer for 13 of those years. I work in the Rural Crime Action Team.

Nationally the investigation of bat crime continues to face challenges. In recent months we have seen issues of resourcing with the temporary removal of police officers from rural crime teams and permanent removal of detectives from bespoke wildlife crime units, to focus on mainstream offending.

We must remind ourselves that bats predate on insect species that impact food crops and human health, the decline of our natural predators such as bats to keep in balance our biodiversity has the capacity to impact those generations that follow us. Jan Collins provides further insight in her Q&A. The Bat Crime PDG will continue its strategic focus in reducing offences against these species and their habitats, to educate and inform not only the public but our own organisations for the wellbeing of us all.

### Bat Facts

- A British pipistrelle can eat up to 3,000 insects in a night.
- Bats usually only have one baby a year and can live for up to 30 years



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## Urban exploring and bats



There is a rising trend known as 'urban exploring' in abandoned buildings and underground hideaways which can illegally impact on bats.

Many bats live in the sorts of places that are now attracting a surge in hobby 'explorers', who go into old buildings and then share videos of their explorations on social media.

Many online sites show this activity is happening in various places including mines, caves, abandoned properties, disused military bunkers, and quarries to name but a few.

This is a concern for the safety of those involved and protected species. Roosting bats are often hidden away in such places, but their presence may not be obvious. Such places are often entered illegally and may be dangerous and unstable, and health-wise may contain dangerous substances or other hazards.

Whilst it is good to get out and safely and legally explore whilst finding solace in 'wilder' places, breaking the law and, potentially damaging important sites or disturbing our vulnerable wildlife is not acceptable.

BCT's Wildlife Crime Officer, Mark Goulding, who leads on the Wildlife Crime Project was recently awarded partner of the year 2024 by the WWF, and is the secretariat for the PDG said bat disturbance and activity at such sites is on the rise: "Evidence shows that some of these activities by a minority of individuals are unlawful"

These locations can be of heritage and or archaeological significance or Sites of Special Scientific Interest which may be protected in law from damage.

"Many of these locations have protected species of flora and fauna within them, all of our UK bat species and their roosts are protected".

"Unfortunately, there has been cause for the police to investigate individuals involved in unlawful anti-social behaviour and criminality linked to 'urban exploring'. A police caution has already been issued for one bat related offence linked to Urban exploring.

For the health and safety of people, as well as the protection of features within these locations, we urge that permission is obtained from the appropriate authority or owner, and advice is sought on the site before any such activity takes place. This should also include finding out if there are bat roosts, and making sure they are not disturbed.

First published in May 2021 (BCT)

## Q&A with Bat Conservation Trust – Jan Collins



Jan is 'Head of Biodiversity' at the Bat Conservation Trust and is a full member of CIEEM, a Chartered Ecologist, a member of CIEEM's Professional Standards Committee, a member of the British Standards Biodiversity Committee and holds a Natural England bat survey licence. Among Jan's myriad of responsibilities, she provides 'Conservation Impact Statements' relating to bats their roosts and habitats when subject of criminal investigations.

### 1. How did you first become interested in bats and bat conservation?

I have been interested in being outdoors in nature since a very young age, my mum taught me the names of wildflowers and birds when I was a child, and I spent a lot of time hiking in the Peak District as a teenager. My degrees were in Environmental Sciences and Ecology and Management of the Natural Environment. However, my first encounters with bats came when I travelled to northern Vietnam in the late 1990s on an expedition to carry out biodiversity surveys. This included trapping and identifying bats and a new passion was born!! I travelled onto Australia, visited some great bat sites and went to the Australasian Bat Conference, where I met a bat scientist with a gold bat embedded in one of his front teeth! When I returned to the UK I was lucky enough to land a job with a consultancy specialising in bat conservation and my career took off from there.

### 2. If you are asked why bats are protected. What would you say?

Bats are legally protected because of significant historic declines in their populations as a result of agricultural intensification, loss of habitat and roosts through development and exclusion from buildings. One recent paper, using genetic techniques, identified a decline in British populations of the barbastelle bat of 99%! This very significant decline was connected with widespread tree-felling to supply wood for shipbuilding in colonial times.

Some GB bat species have shown signs of initial recovery from these significant historic declines over the time that our National Bat Monitoring Programme has been running (since 1996). This is likely to be at least partially due to their legal protection. However, analysis of shorter-term (five years) and country-specific trends shows a more worrying picture. This extract is from the BCT website, giving a couple of examples: 'Over this shorter time scale, data from summer roosts show the brown long-eared bat has declined by 11.2% at the GB scale, while the lesser horseshoe bat has declined by 12.3% in England in contrast to a continued increase in Wales.'

Bats are important as indicators of a healthy environment and predators of pest insect species and should be protected and their populations given opportunities for recovery. Various reviews have identified that the legal protection afforded to bats is fit-for-purpose but implementation could be improved. This includes both regulatory mechanisms and enforcement.

### 3. What do you think is the most challenging issue(s) for bats?

The main threats to bats today arise from land-use practices, climate change, pollution, development and infrastructure and human disturbance.

*continued over*

#### 4. How can ecologists assist in preventing bat crime?

Some content was added to the 4th edition of the bat survey guidelines (published in September 2023) recommending that ecological consultants ask their clients if there are any previous survey reports for the site they are being commissioned to survey and keep a date / time stamped record of their response. Through BCT's Wildlife Crime Project we have seen cases where one ecological consultant has been commissioned to carry out a survey and produce a report and then dropped for another ecological consultant, potentially in the hope that the results will be different, without the second ecological consultant's awareness of the first. In some cases, sites can be altered between surveys, such as by cleaning (which could remove bat droppings) or even removal of bat habitats.

Ecologists are often the first to spot when a bat crime is occurring or has occurred (e.g. because they spot works going ahead on a site with a known bat roosts) so should develop their understanding of when and how to report this and to whom. This is relevant if an ecologist is involved in a case as the project's consultant and also when they are not. Most ecological consultants will be a member of a professional body, with a professional code of conduct to guide them.

Finally, ecological consultants can assist in preventing bat crime by producing high quality work. Executive Summaries in reports should be clear about the requirement for further surveys and a European Protected Species licence from the Statutory Nature Conservation Body for work to go ahead legally. Bat reports should be clear about where and how many bat roosts there are, what species is involved (using a reliable means of identification such as handling a bat or DNA analysis of the droppings) and the conservation status of the roost (e.g. day roost, maternity roost, hibernation roost). Other communications should be clear, prompt and helpful for the client, their agent and any contractors working at a site to ensure the project runs smoothly.

#### 5. What would you tell a new ecologist today, to ensure they can support a police investigation?

The answer to question 4 would be useful guidance initially.

After a bat crime is reported and an ecologist is involved in a police investigation they may be asked to carry out a site visit with the police and to produce a witness statement. Clarity and consistency in reports and statements are critical. Photos are very useful as evidence.

#### 6. What have been some of the highs/positives of your career?

My career continues to develop and become ever more interesting!

I work with an amazingly talented and motivated group of people in the Biodiversity Team at BCT, engaging with decision-makers and industries/sectors that impact on bat conservation such as Wildlife Crime, Built Environment, Trees and Woodland and Agriculture. We work with the wider BCT team and fantastic partners such as Natural England, CIEEM, ALGE, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and many more. Working with such inspiring people is a real high!

Besides that, my special interest is raising professional standards. I feel very privileged that during my time at BCT I:

- have been the editor for two editions of the Bat Survey Guidelines,
- have represented BCT on the Advisory Group for CIEEM's Bat Mitigation Guidelines,
- have led on the production of the Wildlife Assessment Check, an online interactive trigger list to encourage developers to identify ecological constraints and opportunities early in the development process,
- have represented BCT as a partner on the Earned Recognition Project to streamline the bat mitigation licensing process, improve professional standards and provide better outcomes for bats,
- sit on CIEEMs Professional Standards Committee,

- sit on the British Standards Biodiversity Committee,
- and much more!

### Any last thoughts or words of wisdom for the readers?

The work of the wildlife crime sector is crucial in protecting valuable habitats and species for future generations. Biodiversity provides a wealth of ecosystem services for humans, such as clean water, clean air and healthy soils/pollinators to grow food. In providing for biodiversity, we also provide for humans through access to green space, which has been evidenced as vital for health and wellbeing. Bats in particular are bioindicators of a healthy environment and keep insect pest species under control, reducing the need for pesticides. We are currently in a biodiversity crisis so please keep up the good work!

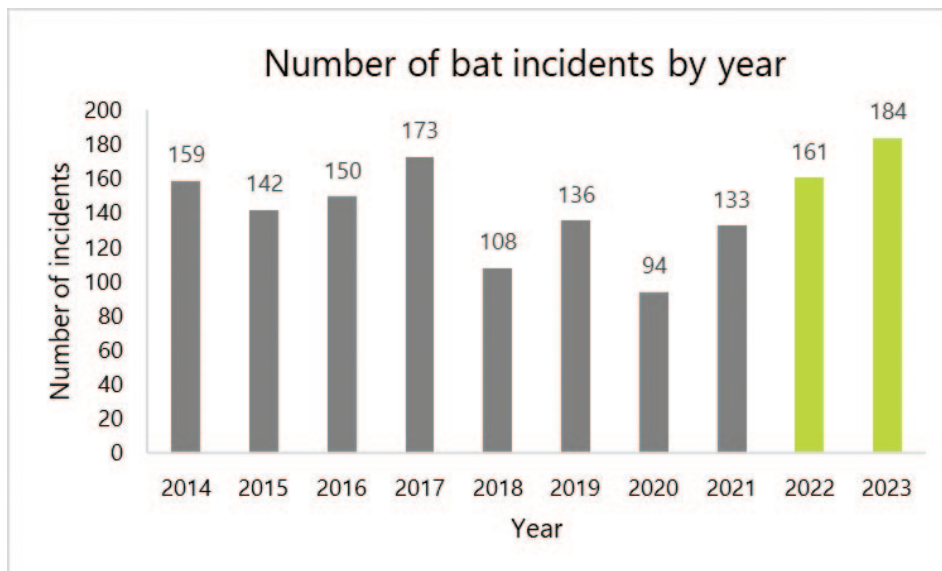
## Allegations of bat crime 2023

Wildlife crime is not recordable or notifiable under Home Office direction therefore it is difficult for UK police services to accurately identify numbers of wildlife crime incidents for a particular species; charitable organisations try to fill that gap.

Annual bat police incident figures are collated by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT). As an NGO the Bat Conservation Trust rely on the police service to notify them of new cases so that they can record incidents on their case management system. The National Wildlife Crime Unit on behalf of the Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group have now agreed to carry out annual comparative analysis with BCT data, requesting directly from UK police services their incidents. Both data sets are then examined.

The green bars show both BCT and police incident data and are therefore the most accurate record of bat incidents.

In 2023, there were 93 incidents recorded by BCT. NWCU comparative analysis showed there were a further 91 incidents a total of 184 bat incidents, in fact this figure is likely to be higher as not all police services were able to supply their figures.



**\*\*2022 / 2023 implemented new data capture methodology.**

The combined data gives a different incident picture compared to the BCT data alone. This analysis can assist UK police services to identify locations and prioritise resources to address such incidents and implement engagement and crime prevention work.

The primary causation factors for such offending remain the same, development and tree felling, motivated by the need to save money and or time.

## Awards

### A/PS Martin Beck of Devon and Cornwall Police

This officer has done some significant work with the Wildlife Crime Project (BCT) in addition to providing support to officers involved in Devon and Cornwall Police on strategic matters and investigative incidents involving bats, and other protected species.

Cases involving protected breeding sites/ resting places are complex, this complexity often puts officers off, A/PS Martin Beck's work simplified such issues.

During the height of the Pandemic, the officer co-ordinated with the Bat Conservation Trust on a 'Urban exploring' video placed on a social media platform, showing a trespasser stroking a hibernating bat in a well-known Devonshire Cave.

The offence of disturbing this bat was therefore evidenced.

The police investigation identified the suspect from the footage, who was homeless, the individual appeared fit, well and was therefore interviewed for the offence and following admissions was issued a Police Caution. This is the first known disposal outcome for an Urban Exploring protected species offence.

A/PS Martin Beck's willingness to engage with others demonstrates effective partner agency collaboration and represents a gold standard when co-ordinating and supporting wildlife crime investigations. The officer upon retirement in 2023 received a National Lifetime achievement award for his work by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).



A/PS Martin Beck receiving BCT Certificate of Merit and Challenge coin from Superintendent Emma Butler-Jones (Head of Prevention and Local Policing)

### Pc Mark Powell Gwent Police

Pc Powell was the 2023 WWF National Wildlife Crime Enforcer of the year award winner.

The officer had some thirty-seven wildlife and waste cases of note against his name during 2023 in this role seconded to Natural Resources Wales, either completed or ongoing at the time! Several of which related to offences against, bats, badgers, great crested newts, and dormice.

Of note:

A specialist prosecutor for wildlife crime for South-East Wales stated.

*I have just completed a prosecution in relation to the Primary school development where the developers ignored the provisions of their bat licence.*

*PC Powell's work on this case was exemplary, I just wanted to commend him.*

*The summary provided by the officer was very helpful both to me and the barrister at court and was praised by the District Judge on the day of hearing.*

Pc Powell's investigation and presented case file of evidence resulted in the CPS successful prosecution against the developers resulting in fines of more than £7,400.



Mark Powell receiving his award from Paul DeOrnellas; DCC Ford & Ch Insp Kevin Kelly

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**If you need to report a crime against Bats or any other wildlife crime, please contact your local Police Force on 101.**

You can also email the BCT trust regarding a police report at [investigations@bats.org.uk](mailto:investigations@bats.org.uk)

Please find more information on bats at the Bat Conservation Trust website. [www.bats.org.uk/](http://www.bats.org.uk/)