

Discovery awaits in the twilight: Take part in the National Bat Monitoring Programme by Chloe-Lea Longden

Bat numbers in the UK have declined dramatically over the last century. You can help to monitor how the UK's bats are currently faring by taking part in the Bat Conservation Trust's National Bat Monitoring Programme surveys which involve observing these fascinating mammals in your local area. Anyone can take part, from beginners to experts. From simple bat spotting surveys to bat detector surveys and counts at roosts, there is something for volunteers of all experience levels to get out and enjoy. The data our volunteers collect are used to help monitor the health of our environment, inform policy and improve the conservation of bats.

As well as being of great value to bat conservation, the surveys are fun and rewarding to carry out. The Sunset/Sunrise Survey is the simplest and is therefore a good starter survey for people with no previous experience. More experienced surveyors also take part in this survey as it is a good way of locating roosts in an area. No bat detector is needed, but if you have one then it's good to take it along to help you detect bats.

If you have experience using a bat detector then you can put your skills to good use by taking part in the Waterway Survey or the Field Survey, both of which involve surveying target species along mapped survey routes. If you know of a roost you can count then you can take part in the Roost Count which involves counting bats out of the roost as they emerge at dusk. The Hibernation Survey collects data from licensed surveyors who carry out winter counts of bats in their hibernacula.

We run introductory bat detector workshops which include a classroom session on bat species call identification, followed by an evening practical session in the field. Online training is also available for anyone wanting to brush up on their survey skills or learn new ones. As a member of the NBMP volunteer network you will gain access to the Bat Sound Library, where you can find audio clips from the UK's bat species, helping you to identify them in the field.

The records volunteers provide enable us to produce species population trends and therefore play a valuable part in revealing how our bat populations are faring. Records from the NBMP are also shared with local bat groups and Local Environmental Record Centres to help inform local conservation.

The sense of exploration and finding out where bats occur in your local area and which species might be present is a highly rewarding experience. Bat survey volunteers are also rewarded with sightings of other crepuscular animals such as foxes, badgers, owls and stag beetles, to name a few.

Information is needed from all areas and habitats. From urban areas to woodlands, the variety of spaces you could potentially explore is vast. You can also share the adventure and excitement with your friends and family and bring them along

to assist with your surveys. If you want to start your journey as a NBMP volunteer follow the link below, and we'll be happy to guide you along your way.

www.bats.org.uk/pages/nbmp.html