

Bat Surveys – NIEA Specific Requirements

- All species of bats (*Vespertilionidae*) are strictly protected under The Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) (known as the Habitats Regulations). They are known as a European protected species and under the Habitats Regulations it is a criminal offence to:
 - deliberately capture, injure or kill a wild animal of a European protected species;
 - deliberately disturb such an animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection;
 - deliberately disturb such an animal in such a way as to be likely to;
 - affect the local distribution or abundance of the species to which it belongs;
 - impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or care for its young; or
 - impair its ability to hibernate or migrate;
 - deliberately obstruct access to a breeding site or resting place of such an animal; or
 - damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.
- Upon assessment of your planning application, NIEA considers that there is reasonable likelihood of bats being affected by the proposed development. To ensure your development proposal complies with the Habitats Regulations and planning policy, NIEA has recommended to the Planning Authority that an appropriate bat survey should be carried out, prior to the determination of your application.
- **NIEA reserve the right to determine whether the survey is adequate or when additional information is required.**
- Survey work must be carried out according to the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists - Good Practice Guidelines*, fourth Edition (2023). These guidelines should be interpreted on a case-by-case basis according to site specific factors and the professional judgement of the experienced bat ecologist. There are two key changes from the 3rd Edition of this guidance: the increased requirement for Night Vision Aids (NVA) and the dropping of the Dawn or Re-entry survey.
- **Please note NIEA have published supplementary guidance on the use of NVA technology when undertaking and reporting on bat surveys - <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/external-guidance-bat-surveys-using-nvas-feb-2026>**
- Any survey method that may disturb bats requires an appropriate wildlife licence issued by the NIEA Wildlife Team. These licences are subject to seasonal constraints and must be factored into survey planning.
- Different types of bat surveys are required depending on the conditions on site and the type of proposal. Details of specific types of surveys and the required methodologies can be found at the following locations within the BCT Guidelines:
 - **Bat Roost Potential Surveys - Chapters 5 and 6**
 - **Emergence Surveys (Structures and trees) - Chapter 7**
 - **Bat Activity Surveys - Chapter 8**

When undertaking Bat Surveys for Onshore Wind Turbine Proposals please refer to the following NIEA guidance – <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/niea-natural-environment-division-guidance-bat-surveys-assessment-and-mitigation-onshore-wind>



- Surveying trees for bat roosts can be more challenging than surveying buildings because many species that roost in trees exhibit roost-switching behaviour, some tree-roosting bats emerge very late and return very early, bat droppings do not persist in trees in the same way they do in buildings, and the height of trees and/or presence of foliage can be a visual constraint. It should be noted that the classification of trees has been updated in the most recent BCT guidelines. NED would also highlight the need for ecologists to consider the Roost Resource Approach, as required. Please see Chapter 6 of the BCT, *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*, 4th Edn. (2023) for further detail on bats and trees.
- NED recommends that all works comply with British Standard 42020:2013, *Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development*. This provides recommendations and guidance for those engaged in planning and development, whose work might affect or have implications for conservation, or the enhancement of biodiversity.
- The survey information must be presented in a written report which meets the requirements outlined in Chapter 11 of the BCT, *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*, 4th Edn. (2023).
- The commissioned surveyor(s) must document within their written report that they have the necessary experience and qualifications to carry out this work. The report should also detail the names and experience of all assistants working on the survey, where relevant. NIEA recommends that the lead surveyor(s) is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Where trainee or inexperienced surveyor(s) are assisting the lead ecologist, the report must detail what levels of supervision are applied and how the survey mitigates for inexperienced field staff.
- Survey equipment must be sufficient to identify all species of bat. All surveys must be recorded for later analysis. **Ecologists should retain all bat detector raw data, NVA recordings and any unreported photographs as NIEA may ask for further clarification at a later date.** Details of appropriate survey equipment are provided in Appendix 1 of the BCT, *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*, 4th Edition (2023).
- The survey report must clearly identify all limitations and any areas which were unable to be inspected or surveyed.
- When bats are deemed to be impacted, the report should recommend ways in which bats can be protected from the proposed development and suggest appropriate mitigation and compensation measures. Mitigation measures should cover all phases of the development - before, during and post construction. NIEA recommends that mitigation measures are influenced by Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2023), *UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats*. Version 1.1. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield. <https://cieem.net/resource/uk-bat-mitigation-guidelines-2023/>
- Consideration on the impacts of lighting must be part of any assessment and mitigation, if required. The Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) has launched the latest practical guidance on considering the impact upon bats when designing lighting schemes. <https://www.bats.org.uk/news/2023/08/bats-and-artificial-lighting-at-night-ilp-guidance-note-update-released>.
- Surveys should be submitted to the Planning Authority within **one year** of being carried out.

- In the event that the planning application goes to appeal or public inquiry, the person(s) contracted to carry out survey work may be required to appear at, or give evidence to, the inquiry. As highlighted previously, recordings of surveys undertaken must be retained as they may be required by NIEA as evidence.
- NIEA recommends that all located bat records and roosts should be reported to the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR).
- A protected species licence must be obtained from the NIEA Wildlife Team prior to the commencement of the following bat survey methods:
 - **Entering a potential bat roost structure - this includes the parts of occupied buildings which are not in normal daily use i.e. roof spaces.**
 - **Disturbing a potential bat roost during a close-up inspection, either when using a torch or endoscope.**
 - **Catching or handling bats.**

For more guidance and information please refer to the following publications and websites:

NIEA Development Management website

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/development-management>

NIEA Development Management publication – Bats and Development

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/bats-development>

NI Bat group

<http://www.bats-ni.org.uk/>

Bat Conservation Trust website and Best Practice Guidelines

<http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/batsurveyguide.html>

Wildlife Management and Licensing web page

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/biodiversity/wildlife-licensing-and-management>

Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)

<http://www.nmni.com/cedar>

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management

www.cieem.net

