

Bat biology

- 10 species of bats are currently known in Ireland and 3 are of international importance
- Although the amount of use varies between species, all are known to roost in buildings
- Irish bats feed exclusively on insects and spiders - not blood!
- Bats are NOT blind!
- Bats do NOT get caught in hair!
- Bats are NOT related to rats and mice!

All Irish bats are very small; the largest, Leisler's Bat, is only the size of a swift and all feed on insects such as midges and moths. A single soprano pipistrelle (our smallest bat) can eat as many as 3000 midges every night! These animals are nature's answer to insecticide! Bats forage in sheltered places where insect swarms gather; along hedgerows and tree lines, within woodland and scrub and over water bodies. Bats hibernate in winter, often retreating to underground sites such as caves or cellars. In spring, they reawaken and begin to return to their summer roosts which can be occupied by bats for many generations. In June, females give birth to a single baby in the safety of a nursery roost and, for six or seven weeks, the young is fed on breast milk until weaned.

For a short time, hundreds of bats may live in such a roost until the young are able to fly (usually in mid to late July) when the colony disperses. In autumn, bats mate before once again returning to hibernation for the winter.

Bats and the law

- Bats are protected by Irish and European law
- Under current legislation, it is illegal to kill or disturb bats or to damage or destroy a bat roost
- Building works on or near a bat roost are permitted under licence

Ireland is home to several bat species, some with high populations, however, bats are still very vulnerable to habitat destruction and, in particular, disturbance or destruction of roosts. Unsympathetic renovation works carried out at sensitive times of year can exclude bats from their roost or even entomb and so destroy a colony. Inappropriate lighting is also a concern. Thus, works that might impact a bat roost are subject to licencing by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). With expert advice, it is possible to implement mitigation measures to avoid or minimise any potential negative impacts of works on bats while still undertaking any necessary repairs, renovation or construction of buildings, including churches.



Leisler's Bat
(Phil Richardson)

Bats in churches

- conflicts and remedies

- Bat droppings and urine can be unsightly and may damage brass and wood
- At dusk, bats may fly in the nave during late services
- Unlike rodents, bats do NOT gnaw so cause no structural damage and, unlike birds, bats do NOT build nests
- Experienced bat workers can help you find solutions to problems

The presence of a small bat roost in a church often goes unnoticed but problems can arise where larger roosts occur. Bats tend to roost high up in the structure of a church but may sometimes sleep behind wall hangings. Droppings are usually the main problem as these need cleaning. However, measures to alleviate problems with bats are possible and are often straightforward. If you are having problems with bats in your church, please contact BCIreland or the NPWS for advice.



Soprano Pipistrelle
(Phil Richardson)

Why bats use churches

Most Irish bat species are known to roost in buildings, including churches, which they use as places to rest, give birth and nurse their single young and individual churches can be very important to local bat populations. Bats roost in churches as they are easily accessible, little disturbed and usually warm, dry and sheltered places. Once inside, these animals usually congregate in the roof space, within rafters or wall cavities; towers or belfries are very seldom used for roosting.

Bats would originally have roosted in caves and tree holes but have taken to using churches and other buildings as humans have altered the natural environment reducing the availability of natural roosting sites for bats. To a bat, the natural materials of stone and timber from which churches are constructed offer favourable alternatives to a cave or a crevice in a tree!



You can help bats by:

- Allowing these beneficial animals to remain in your church undisturbed
- Making your local community aware of bats and other wildlife in their church

The survival of bats in Ireland is, to a large extent, dependent on keeping their roosts open and free from disturbance. Simply by tolerating the bats in your church you are contributing to the continued survival of your local bats and Irish bats as a whole.

More about us

Bat Conservation Ireland is a charity dedicated to the conservation of Ireland's bats. We promote conservation of bats by disseminating educational materials, giving talks and leading bat walks, carrying out nationwide surveys and monitoring of bats, acting as an umbrella group for local bat groups and providing a central repository for bat records.

MISE is a project funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-2013 (INTERREG IVA) which sets out to foster involvement of communities in Ireland and Wales in mammal conservation.



**Mammals in
a Sustainable
Environment**



Useful contacts:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service
www.npws.ie
Bat Helpline: 1 800 405000
- Bat Conservation Ireland
www.batconservationireland.org
Batline: 086 4049468
- MISE project
www.miseproject.ie
Andrew Harrington: 086 4135544

MISE



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Bats in Churches

