Protected Wildlife and Buildings

Guidelines for Property Owners and Developers



J J Kaczanow / Bat Conservation Trust

- What wildlife is protected?
- How may finding protected wildlife affect my building plans?
- How do I know if I have protected wildlife?
- How can I encourage wildlife?

What types of wildlife are found in buildings?

You could expect to find any of the following wildlife in a building:

Bats: Many of the 9 species that live in North Wales.

Birds: Such as the barn owl, house martin, swallow, swift, spotted flycatcher, robin, blue tit and many more.

Other animals that may use buildings include solitary and social bees and wasps, and also reptiles and amphibians, which may use walls of buildings and the surrounding area.



Legally protected wildlife

Many animals that use our buildings are in decline and to help maintain the diversity of wildlife in the UK, many of them are protected by both UK and European law. This means that:

Bats: All types of bat in the UK are protected by both UK and European law (under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and the EU Conservation & etc. Regulations, 1994). Therefore it is illegal to kill, injure or disturb any bat and to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection (this generally means their roosts) even if bats are not present at the time.

Birds: It is usually illegal to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird as well as to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built (under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981). Some bird species, such as the Barn Owl receive further protection (under the same Act) and it is an offence even to disturb these birds whilst they are building or using nests if this is done intentionally.

If you suspect any of the above laws are being broken please contact the **North Wales Police** on the non emergency incident line: **0845 607 1001** (Welsh) **or 0845 607 1002** (English).

What signs can I look out for?

Whether you are applying for planning permission or not, the same laws for wildlife protection apply. Before starting any works or submitting an application you should have a look to assess whether any wildlife is present.

Here are some signs to look out for:

1. Barn owls may leave white streaks of droppings (white wash) down roof timbers and walls and often leave feathers and pellets (grey regurgitated remains of prey) that are about the size of an adult's thumb. Their nests consist of a layer of pellets on a flat enclosed area such as between bales, on a dry water tank, on a loft or attic floor or inside a chimney.







2. Swifts, swallow & house martins build their nests within roof spaces, such as on or under beams and ledges, or outside under the eaves. They enter the building through a hole under the eaves, under the soffit board, through broken slates or through open doors or windows. Even if the nests are inaccessible, the birds are easily seen when they are flying to and from the nest sites.

3. Bats are very small and may be tucked away anywhere within the structure of a building without you knowing. They may be found under slates, soffits, and eaves, in wall cavities or may use the gable end, windowsill, fascia board, porch or cellar. Other than seeing the bats, the most obvious signs of their presence are their droppings which look like mouse droppings, but crumble easily and contain insect remains.

How does this affect me?

If you are thinking of carrying out any kind of renovation project (such as treatment of timber in a loft, re-roofing a house, garage or out-building, converting a barn or demolition of a building) you should be aware of the animals that may be affected. The earlier that you contact the relevant authority the sooner any survey work or modifications can be incorporated into your work schedule.

- A database of biological records are held at Cofnod - North Wales Environmental Information Service. You can for a small fee ask for a search of this database to see if there is a history of protected species at the development site. (This may be done by the planning authority for those seeking planning permission).
- Where protected species are known or likely to be present you may need to employ a professional ecologist to carry out an ecological survey and assess the impacts of your proposals.
- If protected species are found at a site then some modifications may be needed. These may include:
  - a small entrance for the wildlife to access the building;
  - providing alternative nest sites or installing a nesting box/platform for the wildlife to use;
  - works being restricted to a particular time of year.
- For those seeking planning permission: if protected species are present your application will need to show how the protected species and their habitat would be protected during and after the development. Without such details it may not be possible to consider the application.
- If European Protected Species, such as bats are found, you will need to apply for a licence from the Welsh Assembly Government to disturb these animals.
- Further details about all the above can be obtained from the Local Planning Authority (see next page).
- If any protected wildlife is found once building works have started, you should inform the **Countryside Council for Wales** immediately **(Tel: 01248 385500).**

Penalties for infringing protected species legislation can be severe, with heavy fines and/or imprisonment.

What can I do to encourage wildlife in my building?

There are many ways in which you can help conserve wildlife by making minor modifications to your building. Some suggestions are made below:

- Encourage swallows to nest by providing a flat nesting platform high up inside a suitable building. Placing a plastic sheet under the nest collects the droppings.
- Artificial nests are commercially available for house martins. These are mounted on a board and fixed outside the eaves of a roof.
- Both old and modern barns and out-buildings can be adapted to be barn owl friendly, for example by including a small barn owl loft with a window, or installing a barn owl box.
- Bats may be encouraged by providing bat boxes, but better still, buildings can be adapted to ensure bat access by using 'bat bricks' and small dormer entrances.
- Responsible management of adjacent land will also be vital for the animals both during and after renovation works. Wildlife can be encouraged by maintaining and enhancing features like hedgerows, ponds, mature trees and rough grassland.

These organisations can provide further information on making your building more wildlife friendly:

RSPB: **www.rspb.org.uk**
Bat Conservation Trust: **www.bats.org.uk**
Barn Owl Trust: **www.barnowltrust.org.uk**
National Trust: **www.nationaltrust.org.uk**
www.actionforswifts.com/nestsites.htm

For further information about anything in this leaflet, please contact: