



HONITON TOWN COUNCIL ROUNDBALL WOOD FACTSHEET NO. 3 The Bats of Roundball Wood



Bats are an important part of the fauna of Roundball Wood but they are not easy to see as they are nocturnal. The best time to see them is in the early evening during the summer months when they have just come out of their roosts to forage for the night. If you position yourself at the woodland edge, maybe on the viewing platform in the wood, you will be rewarded with sightings of bats swooping and diving to catch their insect prey.



Brown long-eared bat



Bats

Only if you come to the woods at night might you catch a glimpse of these nocturnal flying mammals. Surveys at the woods have shown that *common pipistrelle*, *soprano pipistrelle*, *brown long-eared* and *serotine* bats use the wood for foraging and possibly roosting. Most bats like to roost in trees and so any trees with hollows, woodpecker holes, splits, cracks, peeling bark or large ivy stems will provide suitable places to roost. Many of the mature trees in Roundball Wood have hollows and the addition of some bat boxes also makes it a very good place for bats.

Peeling bark can be used by bats for roosting.

The surrounding pasture, the trees and the wetland area all provide good sources of insects which bats feed on. All of our bat species in the UK are very small and only eat insects but in other parts of the world there are fruit bats that feed on pollen and nectar, fish-eating bats and even vampire bats which drink blood! Each UK bat species specialises in a particular group of insects including mosquitoes, moths and dung beetles. A tiny pipistrelle can eat 3000 mosquitoes in a night!



Bat habitat includes trees, woodland edges, wetlands and pastures.

In the UK we have 16 species of bats, all of which occur in Devon, which makes us one of the best counties in the country for bats. Around a quarter of all mammal species in the world are bats and that is the case here in the UK as well.

Other species recorded in the local area are *lesser horseshoe*, *Leisler's* and the rare *Bechstein's* bat. *Pipistrelles* are our most common and smallest species and they are tiny; an adult only weighs around 7gm, the same as a 2p piece, and can tuck into very small crevices. Our largest bat species is the *noctule* weighing in at a hefty 35gm. This tree-roosting bat has not been recorded on site but is very likely to occur in the area.

Echolocation

Bats have good eyesight but also use echolocation to navigate and hunt by making ultrasonic calls that we cannot hear. Their calls are a series of rapid clicks, which the bats shout out of their mouth, (or in the case of the horseshoe bats, out of their nose). These sounds then bounce off all the trees, hedges, buildings and insects and produce an echo which the bats listen for. The bats can then build up a

'sound map' of their surroundings in the dark. When homing in on prey, bats emit extremely rapid calls called 'feeding buzzes'. If you want to hear bats you need a piece of equipment called a bat detector.

Bat ecology

Bats are long-lived creatures with the small species living up to 10 years and some of the larger ones over 30 years. Only one pup is produced each year and typically weighs a third of the weight of the mother at birth, quickly becoming adult size within 4-5 weeks. The young are fed on milk from the mothers and then, when they can fly, they have to go out and learn to catch insects for themselves. Large numbers of females gather in maternity roosts in the summer which are often found in buildings where it is warm and cosy. In the autumn bats gather at swarming sites, often outside caves, to mate, and the females store the sperm over winter and become pregnant in the spring.

Bats hibernate in the winter, usually in a place where it is damp and the temperature is fairly constant such as caves, mines and cellars. In Devon bats can be seen at any time of the year and on mild winter days bats can sometimes be seen foraging, if there is a chance of insects being around. We do not know where most bats go in the winter as they are rarely found.

Tips for watching bats

- **Prepare yourself:**

As dawn and dusk are the best times for watching bats,

- Wearing dark clothing will help to provide camouflage. Keep warm!
- Carry binoculars to help improve your sightings from a distance.
- Take a torch and spare batteries, and avoid going out alone.

- **Bat Watching:**

- Sit out at dusk at the edge of the woodland, ideally near to a hedgerow. Bats tend to emerge around sunset and then follow linear flight paths travelling to foraging areas.
- Foraging behaviours can best be observed on woodland edges around mature overhanging trees, or over water.
- Squeaking a shrill call through wet lips may cause bats to call back, revealing their location in a tree roost for example.