

Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group

NEWSLETTER



AUTUMN 2023



ISSUE 1

The UK hosts 18 species of bats. All are protected against injuring, killing and disturbance. Their breeding sites and resting places (roosts) are protected against damage and destruction even when the animals are not present.

What is the Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group?

The Police Rural and Wildlife Crime Strategy 2022-2025, states *The UK Government is subject to international obligations to ensure wildlife crime is effectively investigated*. The police lead on this with a duty to tackle and disrupt wildlife crime, focusing on issues likely to have the greatest impact on communities, wildlife, and habitats.

The strategy provides a framework through which policing, and its partners can work. The National Wildlife Crime Unit's (NWCU) Strategic Assessment for Wildlife Crime outlines current threats, risks and emerging issues, this aids the UK decision-making process on identifying areas that become the wildlife crime priorities.

There are seven UK wildlife crime priorities for 2022 – 2025, bat crime is one of them.

<https://www.nwcu.police.uk/how-do-we-prioritise/priorities/>

The BCPDG leads on this, our work is shaped via the objective to reduce bat crime, by working with key stakeholders, identify obstacles that prevent us delivering our objectives, raise awareness of crimes against the eighteen UK bat species, promote a preventative approach, and develop support and improve standards of investigation relating to offences against bats and their habitats.

The BCPDG meets four times a year and is chaired by a member of the police service, the Bat Conservation Trust provides deputy chair support and secretariat services. Membership comprises primarily of those in the Criminal Justice System, such as the police, with expertise provided by Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies and other non-governmental organisations (NGO). This newsletter intends to provide the reader with information relating to BCPDG work, investigations, and prosecutions, along with other information that hopefully you will find to be of interest.



IN THIS ISSUE

What is the BCPDG?

Bats and the pandemic

Secretary - Mark Goulding

Bats and crime

Investigations

Awards for investigations



Bats and the pandemic

It is now clear that there haven't been any confirmed cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes the disease COVID-19 in people) in any bat species outside of experimental work with non-UK species.

However, it is possible that people could transmit SARS-CoV-2 to bats, or indeed to other mammals. To minimize this risk any person who needs to come into close proximity with bats or other unfamiliar mammals, wild or domestic, uses common sense, which includes wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a face covering and gloves.

If specific medical or veterinary advice is required relating to animal contact the appropriate national authority should be contacted, for example: Chief Veterinary Officer (UK or devolved administration level)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-government-veterinary-services/about> Animal & Plant Health Agency <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/animal-and-plant-health-agency>



Bat Facts

The pandemic did not help the public's perceptions of bats, so here are a few interesting factoids.

- Bats make up 20% of the world's mammals, there are some 1460 species globally.
- Kitti's hog-nosed bat (also called the bumblebee bat) weighs less than a penny – making it the world's smallest mammal!

BCPDG Secretariat – Mark Goulding



Mark has worked for the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) as the wildlife crime project officer since 2020, prior to this he served thirty-two years, both in the military and the Police service.

He was a Police Wildlife Crime Officer and investigated a broad range of species and habitat offences from Bats to primates, plants to protecting sites of special scientific interest. Mark has served on various National delivery groups relating to Wildlife Crime and has provided advice, guidance, and training to, members of the public, Police officers, statutory bodies, and NGOs. His other

roles included frontline response and community work as well as being a Police Support Unit Medic. Mark is currently the stand in chair of the BCPDG as well as the secretariat, with a lead on crime prevention.

His strengths lie in the practical application of legislation and the real time investigation of offences, whilst the essential ecological expertise is provided by academics, BCT staff, bat groups and bat workers. His priority is to reduce wildlife crime offending, whilst securing compliance with the law among those who might otherwise commit offences.

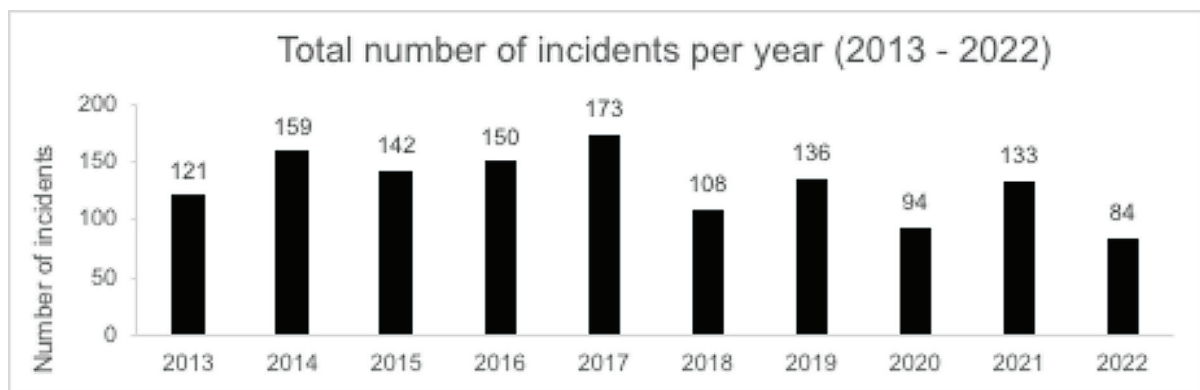
Fact: Mark was awarded the wildlife crime enforcer of the year award in 2015 sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund.

Allegations of bat crime

Wildlife crime is not recordable or notifiable under home office direction therefore it is difficult for UK police services to accurately identify wildlife crime incidents for a particular species; charitable organisations try to fill that gap.

Annual bat police incident figures are collated by the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), as an NGO the Bat Conservation Trust rely on the police service to notify them of new cases so that they can record incidents on their case management system. This Incident data is then analysed by the National Wildlife Crime Unit on behalf of the Bat Crime Priority Delivery Group. More than ten years' worth of bat incident data is available which allows for the analysis and comparison of trends over time.

In 2022, there were 84 incidents recorded by BCT. This figure of 84 incidents is notable because it is much lower than previous years.



Concerns were expressed in 2023 by the BCPDG that BCTs data did not accurately reflect the true national picture on bat related police incidents. This resulted in the NWCU asking all police constabularies to complete a return with their incident data for the year 2022.

Nineteen constabularies responded to the data request; an additional 80 incidents were identified! giving a combined total of **164** incidents for 2022! It is likely that the true incident figure is higher due to the limited response. (43 forces in England and Wales alone).

The combined data gives a different incident picture compared to the BCT data alone. This is significant in terms of decision making and resource allocation. For example, the prioritisation of crime prevention work is likely to depend on incident volume in a particular Police area.

The good news is that bat crime is being reported to the police, the bad news is there are more allegations relating to offences against bats and their habitats than the BCT data demonstrates.

This means that the BCPDG will be looking to develop solutions on the way incident data is captured for statistical analysis until a Home Office decision is made on making wildlife crime recordable and notifiable, thus providing the police a more accurate picture for targeted intelligence lead responses against such offences.

The primary causation factors for such offending are development and tree felling, with the loss of breeding sites and resting places, fundamentally habitat loss for many species of flora and fauna.

Investigations

Property developers fined for destroying bat roosts in Monmouthshire

PC1154 Mark Powell, a Natural Resources Wales (Statutory Nature Conservation Body) seconded Police officer, successfully investigated a housing development company based largely within Monmouthshire. The company directors carried out a renovation of a former primary school and the creation of two 'new build' houses at the location. However, whilst doing so they failed to implement the conditions of a European Protected Species Licence issued by Natural Resources Wales in respect of bats known to be present on the site.

continued over

Investigations – continued

Pleading guilty on behalf of the parent construction company, they were fined over £7,400. The officer stated, “their fines should stand as a warning to other developers in Wales who carry out work without first ensuring that the agreed licence conditions are followed and that all works support and protect all endangered species.”

Merthyr Tydfil developers fined for damaging bat roost

Natural Resources Wales successfully prosecuted two developers from Merthyr Tydfil on the 8th of March 2022. The Defendants pleaded guilty at Newport Magistrates Court to damaging a roost/resting place of bats when they converted a hall in Merthyr Tydfil.

However, in doing so they failed to obtain the necessary planning permission and carried out the development without the appropriate European Protected Species Bat Licences, despite knowing that there were bats roosting in the building. Their fines totalled more than £2,000.

Natural Resources Wales spoke person, said, “The conservation of Bats and other protected species must be ensured if future generations are to benefit from their continued existence. Bats are a very important indicator species that face ever increasing challenges every day. Hopefully this prosecution will serve as a reminder to developers and anyone carrying out work on buildings containing bats that they must follow the appropriate guidelines and ensure that any construction work is carefully completed within the law”.

Awards for investigations

The BCPDG are delighted to present the first Bat crime challenge coins to officers at Warwickshire Police. PC 2239 **Jennifer May-Royle** and PC 211 **Andrew Timmins** received the coins and certificates of merit for several investigations into offences against these protected species during the pandemic.

The officers at the height of the pandemic also had to manage competing police operational demands. Both officers have repeatedly recognised the significance offending has on bats, the loss of their habitats and the effect this has on local communities.

Mark Goulding, on behalf of the BCPDG stated “Both are capable, motivated and professional officers who represent Warwickshire Police rural crime team with distinction”



If you need to report a crime against Bats or any other wildlife crime, please contact your local Police Force on 101.

You can also email the trust regarding a police report at investigations@bats.org.uk

Please find more information on bats at the Bat Conservation Trust website: www.bats.org.uk