BATS AND LIGHTING IN THE UK
Bats and the Built Environment Series

This document is aimed at lighting engineers, lighting designers, planning officers, developers, bat workers and anyone specifying lighting. It is intended to raise awareness of the impacts of lighting on bats and mitigation is suggested for various scenarios. It also offers an explanation of the facts associated with the lighting industry for the benefit of bat workers.

This is a working document and as such the information contained will be updated in line with advances in our knowledge both into the impact on bats and also to reflect the advances in technology available in the lighting industry.

The information provided here is believed to be correct. However, no responsibility can be accepted by the Bat Conservation Trust, the Institution of Lighting Engineers or any of their partners or officers for any consequences of errors or omissions, nor responsibility for loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of information and no claims for compensation for damage or negligence will be accepted.
ABOUT BATS - FOR THE LIGHTING INDUSTRY

General Ecology
Bats are the only true flying mammals. Like us, they are warm-blooded, give birth and suckle their young. They are also long-lived, intelligent and have a complex social life. In Britain there are 17 species, all of which are small (most weigh less than a £1 coin) and eat insects.

Bats have evolved a number of unusual features, mainly connected with their ability to fly. Their wings are formed from a web of highly elastic skin stretched over greatly elongated finger bones, the legs and tail, though their thumbs remain free to help them cling on when roosting. Bats have also developed a highly sophisticated echolocation system that allows them to avoid obstacles and catch tiny insects, which they seize in flight or pick off water, the ground or foliage, even in complete darkness. When they’re flying, bats produce a stream of high-pitched calls and listen to the echoes to produce a sound picture of their surroundings.

Some bats specialise in catching large insects such as beetles or moths but others eat large numbers of very small insects, such as gnats, midges and mosquitoes. Bats gather to feed wherever there are lots of insects, so the best places for them include traditional pasture, woodland, marshes, ponds and slow moving rivers.

During the winter there are relatively few insects available, so bats hibernate. In September and October they put on weight and then, as the weather gets colder, they seek out appropriate sheltered roosts, let their body temperature drop to close to that of their surroundings and slow their heart rate to only a few beats per minute. This greatly reduces their energy requirements so that their food reserves last as long as possible. Bats don't hibernate right through the winter but may wake up and go out to feed on mild evenings when insects are active.

During the spring and summer period female bats gather together into maternity colonies for a few weeks to give birth and rear their young (called pups). Usually only one pup is born each year. This is looked after carefully and suckled for between four and six weeks until it is old enough to fly out and hunt for itself. Bats don’t build nests and don't bring food back to the roost to feed their young, so the baby lives only on its mother's milk until it is old enough to fly. Once the baby is independent, the colony breaks up and the bats generally move to other roosts. Bats may gather together from a large area to form these maternity roosts, so any disaster at the summer breeding site can affect the whole colony of bats from a wide surrounding area. Many of these maternity sites are used every summer as bats have a strong tradition of returning to the same site year after year.

Legal Protection of bats
Due to the decline in bat numbers, all species of bat are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). This makes it illegal to: kill, injure, capture or disturb bats, obstruct access to bat roosts or damage/destroy bat roosts. Lighting in the vicinity of a bat roost causing disturbance could constitute an offence, so it is important that Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage or Environment and Heritage Service, Northern Ireland is consulted and allowed time to provide advice on lighting proposals in the vicinity of bats and roosts.
Impacts on bats

Roosts
Illuminating a bat roost creates disturbance and may cause the bats to desert the roost. Light falling on a roost access point will at least delay bats from emerging and this shortens the amount of time available to them for foraging. As the main peak of nocturnal insect abundance occurs at and soon after dusk, a delay in emergence means this vital time for feeding is missed.

Insects and foraging
In addition to causing disturbance to bats at the roost, artificial lighting can also affect the feeding behaviour of bats. There are two aspects to this. One is the attraction that light from certain types of lamps has to a range of insects; the other is the presence of lit conditions.

Many night flying species of insect are attracted to light, especially those lamps that emit an ultra-violet component and particularly if it is a single light source in a dark area. As well as moths a range of other insects can be attracted to light such as craneflies, midges and lacewings. Studies have shown that, although noctules, Leisler’s, serotine and pipistrelle bats swarm around white mercury street lights (this would also apply to metal halide) feeding on the insects attracted to the light, this behaviour is not true for all bat species. The slower flying broad winged species such as long-eared bats, *Myotis* species (which include Brandt’s, whiskered, Daubenton’s, Natterer’s and Bechstein’s), Barbastelle and greater and lesser horseshoe bats generally avoid street lights. In addition it is also thought that insects are attracted to lit areas from further afield. This is thought to result in adjacent habitats supporting reduced numbers of insects. This is a further impact on the ability of the light avoiding bats to be able to feed. It is noticeable that most of Britain’s rarest bats are among those species listed as avoiding light. Clearly, effective mitigation where there is potential for impact on bats has importance in the conservation of these species.

Artificial lighting is thought to increase the chances of bats being preyed upon. Many avian predators will hunt bats which may be one reason why bats avoid flying in the day. Observations have been made of kestrels (diurnal raptors) hunting at night under the artificial light along motorways.

Lighting can be particularly harmful if used along river corridors, near woodland edges and near hedgerows used by bats. In mainland Europe, in areas where there are foraging or ‘commuting’ bats, stretches of road are left unlit or lighting is designed in such a way as to avoid isolation of bat colonies.
Ongoing areas of research

- The impact of light on commuting corridors used by lesser horseshoe bats. Emma Stone, University of Bristol
- The effects of lighting on prime bat foraging areas within London, concentrating on riparian habitats and open spaces. Alison Fure.
- The effect of light and noise on British bat species. Frank Greenaway.

References

Institution of Lighting Engineers (2005) Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Light Pollution