

Method Statement for the Appropriate Use of Endoscopes by Arborists

All bats and their roosts are protected by law, whether the roosts are occupied or not. In particular, it is an offence under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (England and Wales) (as amended), the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 as amended, and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended in Scotland, hereafter referred to as 'the Habitat Regulations' to damage or destroy a roost or deliberately (or recklessly in Scotland) to disturb a bat (see regulations 43, 34 and 39 respectively). It is therefore accepted that as a minimum standard, a visual inspection of trees is carried out before any work is undertaken that could potentially cause disturbance to bats or damage to a bat roost.

A detailed aerial inspection of trees by non-climbing bat workers is often perceived to be impractical and too costly. However, those arborists with the skills to access trees efficiently are, with specialist training, well-placed to carry out inspections of cavities in trees in which bats may roost.

The process of inspection, especially with the use of an endoscope, may in itself cause disturbance of bats, a potential offence under the Habitats Regulations. Arborists who do not have a bat licence should only use endoscopes to rule out the suitability of features as potential bat roosts and only when other less invasive methods are not possible. This means that only features with no observed evidence of bat usage would be investigated using this method. Provided the operator has been properly trained and follows best practice, a level of disturbance should not occur that could be likely to lead to a prosecution under regulations 43, 34 and 39 in England & Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland respectively. However, it is not the function of this Method Statement to give guidance on the law, and it should not be relied upon for that purpose. Further information about regulations 41, 34 and 39 can be obtained from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation's (SNCOs). **The use of endoscopes to inspect a known bat roost should only be undertaken by a licensed bat worker.**

This Method Statement gives guidance to arborists planning to use the endoscopes so as to minimise the risk of disturbance.

When should this method be used?

This survey should be used only if, the ground based scoping survey:

- Observed no evidence of bats (live or dead bats, droppings, staining, scratching, squeaking, etc.) and;
- Further investigation is required to see whether trees initially assessed as medium/high potential can be downgraded to low risk.

Any tree features that have been categorised as known/confirmed bat roosts or where it has been possible to assess the suitability of the feature as a potential bat roost on the first ground based survey (i.e. there has been evidence of bats found, a cavity has been observed which extends upwards and is dry, and suitable for bats or there are a number of cavities on a veteran tree) would not be included here. Any further surveys of known or suitable roost features should be undertaken by a bat specialist with the appropriate licence.

What to consider before using an endoscope

- Prior to undertaking **ANY** work, arborists must be able to demonstrate evidence that:
 - They have been trained in and have an understanding of basic bat ecology and biology specifically relating to the use of trees by roosting bats and can identify trees and features with the potential to support bat roosts; **AND**
 - They have received suitable training in the use of an endoscope specifically for the purpose of ruling out potential of features suitable for use by bats and are able to use the endoscope in the manner in which they were trained, including taking measures to avoid undue disturbance and harm to bats.
- Endoscopes should **ONLY** be used when the use of other less invasive methods is not possible. These include the use of small torches and mirrors which limit possible disturbance.
- Extreme care should be taken if assessing cavities during the winter when disturbance to bats can be particularly damaging.

How to use an Endoscope

When inserting an endoscope into a potential bat roosting cavity the following procedure should be followed:

- Ensure all health and safety assessments have been undertaken prior to commencing work as normal.
- The endoscope should be inserted slowly and with extreme care, looking for signs to suggest this feature could support a bat roost as the endoscope is pushed further into the cavity.
- The surveyor should observe whether:
 - The cavity extends beyond what is visible externally
 - If it extends upwards
 - If it is dry
- At all times the surveyor should also look for signs of bat usage.
 - Signs of bats will include live bats, dead bats, droppings, staining, scratching, squeaking.
- The brightness of the endoscope should be kept to a minimum.
- **DO NOT apply force** to get an endoscope into a cavity.
 - If the endoscope will not go in or you cannot fully examine the cavity, you will need to contact a licenced bat worker for further advice on alternative methods to rule out the potential of the feature.
- If **ANY** signs of bats are located, the endoscope should be withdrawn **IMMEDIATELY**, work **STOPPED** and a licenced bat worker or the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation informed.

Next steps

- If, upon inspection of the cavity, the feature is observed to be suitable for bats (if the cavity extends, if it extends upwards and if it is dry) OR if signs of bats (live or dead bats, droppings, scratch marks) are observed then the feature should be categorised as having medium/high potential or as a known roost and a licensed bat worker involved in any further surveys.
- If the feature is not found to be suitable for bats and no signs of bats are observed then the feature should be downgraded to low risk and no further surveys are required.

What to do if I find bats?

- **STOP**, return to the ground and contact a licenced bat worker or seek advice from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (see list below).
- Take note of what you have seen to help the specialist assess how to proceed.
- A licenced bat worker will be able to advise how to proceed further. This may include the **need to apply for a European Protected Species (EPS) derogation licence** from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation **before works recommence**.
- It should **NOT** be assumed that there is no risk of disturbance to a potential bat roost other than in the area immediately impacted by the proposed works. This decision should **ONLY** be made by a licenced bat worker.

Who do I contact?

Bat Conservation Trust - 0345 1300 228. www.bats.org.uk

Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations (SNCOs)

ENGLAND: Natural England: **0845 601 4523**. www.naturalengland.org.uk

WALES: Natural Resources Wales: **0300 065 3000** <http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/?lang=en>

SCOTLAND: Scottish Natural Heritage: www.snh.gov.uk check the website for your local office or contact the SNH licensing team on **01463 725364**

NORTHERN IRELAND: Northern Ireland Environment Agency: **0845 302 0008** www.ni-environment.gov.uk