

UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Pipistrelle Bat (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*)

Current status

Although it remains the most abundant and widespread bat species in the UK, the pipistrelle is thought to have undergone a significant decline in numbers this century. Estimates from the National Bat Colony Survey suggest a population decline of approximately 70% between 1978 and 1993. The current pre-breeding population estimate for the UK stands at approximately 2,000,000. The problems of estimating populations trends have been compounded by the recent discovery that there may be two distinct species of pipistrelle bat in the UK.

The pipistrelle is listed on Appendix III of the Bern Convention, Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive and Appendix II of the Bonn Convention (and is included under the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe). It is protected under Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations, 1994 (Regulation 38) and Schedules 5 and 6 of the WCA 1981 and Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

Current factors causing loss or decline

Reduction in insect prey abundance, due to high intensity farming practice and inappropriate riparian management.

Loss of insect-rich feeding habitats and flyways, due to loss of wetlands, hedgerows and other suitable prey habitats.

Loss of winter roosting sites in buildings and old trees.

Disturbance and destruction of roosts, including the loss of maternity roosts due to the use of toxic timber treatment chemicals.

Current action

The JNCC recently commissioned a National Bat Habitat Survey, which provided much information on habitat preference and distribution.

The DoE is to commission a National Bat Monitoring programme which will include the pipistrelle. The National Bat Colony Survey has monitored many pipistrelle roosts since 1978 on the basis of annual summer roost counts.

A large amount of research is underway, investigating reproductive physiology, mating strategies, field activity, and the morphology and ecology of two taxa by investigation of echolocation calls and mitochondrial DNA.

SNH have developed design briefs for the conservation of pipistrelle roosts in houses.

Action plan objectives and targets

Maintain the existing population size of *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

Maintain the existing geographical range of *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

Maintain the existing population size of *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.

Maintain the existing geographical range of *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.

Restore population size of *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* to pre-1970 numbers.

Restore population size of *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* to pre-1970 numbers.

Proposed actions with lead agencies

Policy and legislation

Encourage water quality levels which will help support populations of aquatic insects on which pipistrelles feed. (ACTION: NRA, SEPA)

Ensure the needs of this species are considered in incentive schemes designed to encourage the management of habitat suitable for this species. (ACTION: FA, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD)

Site safeguard and management

Encourage favourable management of land adjacent to known roost sites to support foraging by juvenile pipistrelles. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, FA, SNH)

Species management and protection

Maintain current licensing procedures and training schemes as appropriate. Assess the effect of current management and protection policies and amend as necessary to ensure maintenance of healthy populations. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH)

Advisory

Ensure landowners are aware of the presence and legal status of pipistrelle bats, and that advice is available on appropriate methods of management for conservation of their roosts and foraging habitats. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, FA, SNH)

Future Research and Monitoring

Undertake research to clarify the taxonomic status of pipistrelle bats in the UK. (ACTION: JNCC)

Continue to research the habitat requirements and ecology of the species to help develop appropriate management advice. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH, JNCC)

Develop and implement a systematic survey technique to clarify the conservation status of the species in the UK. This should include monitoring of summer maternity roosts and the extent and effect of reproductive isolation of summer colonies used for monitoring. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH, JNCC)

Encourage research on the ecology and conservation of pipistrelles on an international level. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH)

Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to JNCC in order that it can be incorporated in a national database and contribute to the maintenance of an up-to-date Red List. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH)

Communications and Publicity

Maintain programmes of carefully supervised roost visiting, general education and publicity. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH)