

If you have up to 120 common pipistrelles living in your house, you can learn a lot about them as *John Adams* explains

The Discovery

It hardly seems possible that almost 18 years have passed since the discovery of a bat roost at my home.

It all began when my daughter Jane said she could hear flapping noises in the wall of her bedroom. Was it a bird? I listened with the aid of a glass tumbler and could hear squeaks and chirrups, Could it be bats? A call to Joan and Tony followed a visit by them confirmed they were pipistrelle bats and hand net capture of two under an English Nature licence showed they were female. From then on I have counted the number of bats emerging from the roost each evening.

Location, location location

The bats were emerging from a small gap between a bedroom windows sill and wooden cladding in the south facing rear of my house built in 1974 and located only 0.5 kilometres from Chicksands Wood.

The early years

I soon learned that bat counting was impossible by hand and bought a mechanical counter, which enabled me to watch constantly. In 1988 the bats arrived on April 18th and left on September 29th. During this period there were three peaks in numbers which indicated it was a maternity roost. The first two peaks showed the build up of adults in the roost. The second trough was due to adults remaining in the roost whilst giving birth to their young. The third and largest peak shows that adults and young were flying from the roost. It's wonderful what you can deduce from emergence counts.

Since then there hasn't been repeat of the double peak and trough pattern suggesting that it is now a roost where pregnant females gather prior to flying off to where they will give birth to their young.

This is confirmed by their earlier departure date that has remained remarkably consistent over the years

Full details are given each year in the Annual Report, but the table below gives you an overview of some of this data

Year	Peak No.	Departure date
1997	108	6 th July
1998	119	22 nd June
1999	99	21 st June
2000	76	17 th June
2001	80	19 th June
2002	80	18 th June
2003	101	17 th June

Bat Behaviour

The first sign of the bats' return to the roost are dropping on the lower window sill, and high pitched chirruping heard inside the bedroom and when standing below the roost exit. The bats don't all arrive together but in twos and threes, the total number building over several weeks.

The behaviour of the early arrivals is interesting. They emerge from the roost and immediately circle a large larch which is some 12 metres from the roost. They appear to be familiarising themselves with the roost garden geography before heading off to their foraging areas. A week or so later they fly directly out of the garden on emergence.

The bats seem willing to fly, no doubt motivated by hunger, in almost every weather condition except for heavy continuous rain and or very strong winds.

During some counts one or two bats will return to the roost before all the bats have left (maybe to communicate the outside conditions – but we don't know for sure.) Another piece of behaviour seen during the latter stages of roost emergence is what I call "circuits and bumps". A bat will return to the roost but not enter. It just touches the boarding and flies off again rather like a small aeroplane aborting a landing. It's almost as if the touch down bat is trying to induce the reluctant bats to emerge the "come on out the weather's lovely" syndrome. We don't know and it is of course unwise to apply human characteristics to any other mammals – especially bats. Like us they are just doing what their DNA tells them to do.

Bat Watching

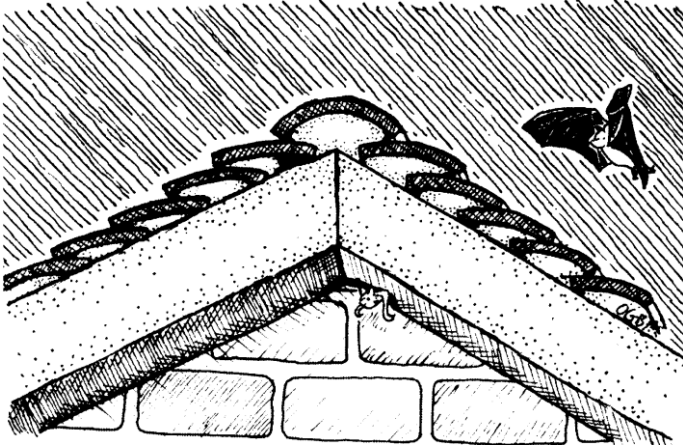
Each Spring I look forward to the return of "my" bats and start watching early so I don't miss the beginning. I sit some distance from the roost usually well wrapped in a blanket, counter in hand. As the light fades I hear the last quiet songs of a robin and the "creaking" of partridge in the distance – then the first bat emerges and flies around my head – MAGIC.

With thanks to Tony and Joan for their help and support over the years

John Adams

What does it mean if you are lucky enough to share your house with a bat?

Sharing your home with a bat roost can affect your life in ways you might not predict



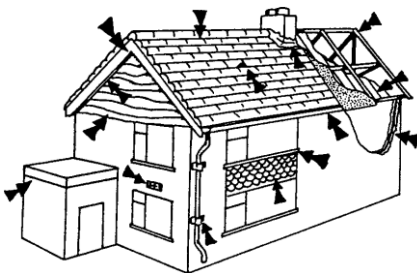
Our bats have always been accustomed to noise because their roost as in the wall of the bedroom that was first occupied by our daughter Jane and after she left home by our son Robert and everyone knows about teenagers and their music.

I was a little worried about using the Hoover but they did not appear to mind the noise this made (Bother, I still have to clean this room) However, one day without thinking about the bats I decided to redecorate the room. I started to prepare the walls by rubbing them down with sandpaper and to my horror out of the window I saw the bats leaving the roost. What had I done? What would John say? I stopped at once and left the room somewhat in shock.

John counted the bats out that night, there were still some left but not in the numbers there had been the night before. Now if we want to decorate this room we wait until all the bats have left.

Ann Adams

Where do bats live in houses?



Bats need quiet clean and draught free places to roost. Long eared bats prefer older houses and will use attic spaces. Pipistrelles prefer more modern properties. They can squeeze into tiny spaces on the outside of the house between the soffit boards and the house walls, or under slipped tiles or fascia boards.

According to European folklore

At one time a bat found flying around the inside of a house or flying into a room was seen as a sign that misfortune would befall some-one known to the family. Richard Jefferies in 1879 noted that this was made worse if the bat collided with a candle.

In Shropshire it was bad luck to kill a bat, even if it had got into your house.

In Bosnia, on the other hand, finding a bat in your home is lucky, especially if you find it in your chimney.

If you saw a bat on the wing at twilight then this was a sign that the next day's weather would be good. If you saw a bat fly into the side of a building, this meant that it would rain.

Bat folklore from Burkina Faso

Anna Campbell,

*Anna, an American Peace Corps Volunteer, posted this on **Batline** (batline@basicallybats.org) and gave me permission to reproduce it here*

Since I know bat researchers are fond of collecting positive bat folklore, here's a little something from Burkina Faso in West Africa The other night I was recording the squeaky-toy sounds of the 100 or so fruit bats which roost in my neighbours' neem tree. I started talking to my neighbour about bats, who called them "a different kind of bird we have here" as he did not remember the word for bat in French. I asked my neighbor why people here say that having a bat in your house or courtyard is good. He said "See that tree over there? The bats don't sleep there, although that tree gives better shade. So bats don't live in just any tree. They choose certain trees. We say that bats will not stay in the courtyard of a family who does not give their pardon, who does not easily forgive. So having bats in your courtyard means that you are forgiving."