

A Strategic Action Plan for Bat Species in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire

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This Strategic Action Plan
has been produced by
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*Countryside
Services*



Strategic Action Plan for Bats in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire – 2000-2005.

INTRODUCTION

The UK Steering Group Report (Anon 1995, 1999) identifies species and habitats that require conservation action through the production of costed national action plans. It lists all species of bat as being 'Species of Conservation Concern', and highlights 6 species as 'Priority Species' (Pipistrelle, Bechstein's Bat, Barbastelle, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Greater Horseshoe Bat and Greater Mouse-eared Bat¹). National action plans have now been written for these 6 species, and the Bat Conservation Trust have been appointed Lead Partner for national work on 4 of them.

This Strategic Action Plan has been written to incorporate all species of bat recorded in the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Its purpose is to provide an overall approach to tackling the conservation and enhancement of bat species locally. It outlines the current status of bat species, factors leading to their loss and decline, current local action underway and proposed actions for the next 5 years. This plan has been written in partnership with many organisations including Oxfordshire Bat Group, Berkshire and south Buckinghamshire Bat Group, English Nature, the Environment Agency and local authorities.

1. PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

- I. To maintain the known range and populations of all bat species within the Berks, Bucks and Oxon area
- II. TARGET: ongoing
- III. To increase populations of all bat species by: maintaining and increasing opportunities for roosting, enhancing feeding habitats and by appropriate habitat management (e.g. maintenance of landscape corridors to link habitats)
- IV. TARGET: ongoing
- V. To establish and implement a monitoring programme at key sites, to determine species distribution and population trends
- VI. TARGET: By 2005
- VII. To increase accessibility to information on bat conservation issues, and to raise public awareness of the status and conservation requirements of bat species
- VIII. TARGET: Ongoing

¹ NB - this species went extinct in the UK in 1991

2. CURRENT STATUS

2.1 *National Distribution*

There are 16 resident species of bat in the UK. Little is known about the current status of most of these bat species, but available evidence suggests an overall decline in populations. For example the Greater Mouse-eared Bat went extinct in the UK in 1991, and the Pipistrelle is thought to have declined by an estimated 60% between 1978 and 1986 (Wynne *et al* 1995).

2.2 *Local Distribution*

13 of the UK species of bat have been recorded in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. This tally is based on the collation of data from the two local Bat Groups, English Nature, the Environment Agency, Local Authorities, the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust and the local Environmental Record Centres.

In the three counties bat species are mostly found roosting in buildings and trees. There is a scarcity of caves and tunnels in the area. The local status and distribution of each species can be seen in Table 1 below and Figures 1 to 12 in Appendix 1. Some records reported in the table do not appear in the corresponding maps. This is because the grid reference or specific locations of these records were not available at the time of the collation of this report, and so they could not be accurately plotted onto the maps. It should be noted that a large proportion of these records (but not all) are reports of roost sites, many of which are in houses and other buildings, and have been reported by concerned householders/builders/contractors.

3. LEGAL STATUS

All species of bat in the UK are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c) Regulations 1994.

Under these two pieces of legislation you must not intentionally:

- I. Kill, injure, catch or keep bats
- II. Damage, destroy or obstruct bat roosts
- III. Disturb bats, e.g. by entering known roost or hibernation sites
- IV. Sell, barter or exchange bats, alive or dead.

Internationally all our UK species are protected under the EC Habitats and Species Directive, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (BERN Convention) 1979, and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (BONN Convention) 1980.

Table 1 - Local status and habitat of bat species recorded in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, based on current knowledge.

Species	Local Status	Habitat
Pipistrelle (45kHz, 55kHz and Nathusius' are all considered together)	<p>Oxon - The most common and widespread species in Oxfordshire. Several breeding roosts known: 3 very large (>400 bats) and one of the largest in England (>1300).</p> <p>Bucks – Post 1980, pipistrelles have been recorded in 14 10km² in Bucks. Black Park and Denham Country Parks – Common. In Burnham Beeches area - seen flying reasonably commonly.</p> <p>Berks – frequent, mainly in 'modern' houses. 1 Nathusius' Pipistrelle found by Reading Bat Group.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - buildings and trees. Winter roosts - buildings. Feeds over water and marshes, in open woodland and woodland edge, farmland, along hedgerows, suburban gardens and urban areas.</p>
Daubenton's bat	<p>Oxon - Widespread – no known breeding roosts. 6 hibernation sites.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, daubenton's have been recorded in 2 10km² in Bucks. Black Park – frequent feeding over lake; at Denham Country Park along Grand Union Canal. In Burnham Beeches area seen occasionally over ponds.</p> <p>Berks – Only a few summer roosts located, although often recorded over lakes and waterways.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - trees plus bridges, tunnels, caves, mines, cellar and occasionally stone buildings. Winter roosts - caves, mines and other underground sites. Has been found hibernating underground. Feeds over lakes, rivers, canals and ponds.</p>
Noctule	<p>Oxon - Widespread, no known roosts.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, noctules have been recorded in 4 10km² in Bucks. Black Park – regularly seen feeding over lake. Roosts in Burnham Beeches, but not as often seen as might be expected.</p> <p>Berks – Declining, recorded less often than in the mid 1980's.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - tree dweller, occupies woodpecker and rot holes. Seldom in buildings. Winter roosts - trees, rock fissures and hollows, bat boxes and buildings. Feeds in deciduous woodland, parkland, pasture, water and forest edges.</p>
Natterer's bat	<p>Oxon – Widespread, 4 known breeding roosts (the largest, 120 bats). 6 hibernation sites.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, natterer's bats have been recorded in 2 10km² in Bucks. Black Park – occasional sightings. Recorded in Burnham Beeches.</p> <p>Berks – Large winter hibernaculum in the county, over 50 recorded in 1999.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - old stone buildings, large timbered barns, and tree holes. Winter roosts - caves, mines and most underground shelters. Feeds in woodland, parkland, hedgerows and along waterside vegetation.</p>
Leisler's bat	<p>Oxon - Uncommon. 3 known breeding roosts. 1 found hibernating in north Oxon.</p> <p>Bucks – no post 1980 records, but there are pre-1980 records recorded in 2 10km².</p> <p>Berks – no records.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - tree holes, bat boxes and buildings. Winter roosts - tree holes, buildings and occasionally caves and tunnels. Feeds in open deciduous and coniferous woodland, parkland, suburban areas and around street lamps.</p>
Serotine	<p>Oxon - Uncommon. No known</p>	<p>Summer roosts - buildings. Winter</p>

	<p>breeding roosts. 5 known summer roosts.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, serotines have been recorded in 1 10km² in Bucks. Roost in a church in Burnham Beeches area.</p> <p>Berks – house roofs in Slough and Mortimer.</p>	<p>roosts - probably buildings. Feeds in pasture, parkland, open woodland edge, tall hedgerows, gardens and suburban areas.</p>
<p>Whiskered/Brandt's bat (these 2 species are considered together as they are hard to distinguish)</p>	<p>Oxon - Fairly widespread. 2 known breeding roosts in private houses. 3 known hibernating sites.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, whiskered bats have been recorded in 1 10km² in Bucks. There is 1 pre-1980 record of a brandt's bat recorded in 1 10km². One possible sighting in Burnham Beeches.</p> <p>Berks –local, occasionally with natterer's. Species not separated by hand examination.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - mainly buildings and trees. Winter roosts - sometimes caves and tunnels. Feeds in wooded country, often over water.</p>
<p>Lesser Horseshoe bat</p>	<p>Oxon – uncommon. 2 known hibernation sites and one found dead in a cellar.</p> <p>Bucks – no records.</p> <p>Berks – no records.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - originally cave dwellers, now often found in roofs of larger houses and stable blocks. Winter roosts - caves, mines, tunnels and cellars. Feeds in open deciduous woodland, scrub, parkland, wetland and permanent pasture.</p>
<p>Brown Long-eared</p>	<p>Oxon – Widespread. Normal roost size 5-30 animals. 2 large roosts (45 and 65 bats) found in private houses. 6 hibernation sites known.</p> <p>Bucks - Post 1980, brown long-eared bats have been recorded in 9 10km² in Bucks. Black Park – regular sightings and use sawmill buildings as summer roost. In Burnham Beeches and surrounding area, seen flying fairly frequently.</p> <p>Berks – second most frequent species, usually in older houses than the pipistrelle.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - older buildings, churches, barns and trees. Winter roosts - caves, tunnels, mines, ice houses and probably trees and buildings. Feeds in deciduous and coniferous woodland, parkland and orchards.</p>
<p>Barbastelle</p>	<p>Oxon - Rare. 1 injured bat found, kept captive for 6 month but then died. 1 hibernation site known, only 1 bat seen.</p> <p>Bucks – no post 1980 records, but there are pre-1980 records recorded in 3 10km².</p> <p>Berks – no records.</p>	<p>Summer roosts - buildings, trees, bat boxes and cave entrances. Winter roosts - caves, mines, cellars and trees. Feeds over water, at woodland edges and in gardens.</p>

4. CURRENT FACTORS LEADING TO LOSS OR DECLINE

4.1 *Habitat Loss*

- Maternity roost sites in buildings and trees can be disturbed, damaged or destroyed by inappropriate land management or development.
- Loss of hibernation roost sites in buildings, trees and underground sites can occur for similar reasons to those above.
- Destruction of habitats such as riparian, wetland, woodland and unimproved grassland has resulted in the loss of insect-rich feeding habitats.

4.2 *Land use Changes*

- Loss and decline of linear landscape features (e.g. tree lines, hedgerows, ditches) remove important flyways and flight line features along which bats hunt for insect prey.
- The trend for opening up land to produce large uniform fields has led to a decrease in habitat diversity, and consequently a loss of feeding habitat and decline of insect prey.

4.3 *Use of Pesticides and other chemicals*

- The widespread use of pesticides in both the garden and the wider countryside has led to a decline in the presence of insect prey.
- The use of inappropriate timber treatment chemicals at roost sites (i.e. those that are toxic and persistent) can be directly harmful to bats, and decrease the availability of roost sites.
- An increase in the use of internal veterinary products (e.g. intestinal wormers for cattle and horses) can have a detrimental effect on the insect fauna of animal dung. This is potentially a big problem for pasture feeding species such as the horseshoe bats.

4.4 *Lack of Awareness and Education*

- I. Lack of knowledge by contractors (e.g. roofing contractors and tree surgeons) of the protected status of bats can lead to loss or damage of roosts.
- II. Lack of knowledge of legislation and enforcement by local authorities, land managers and other agencies can lead to loss or damage of roosts.
- III. Lack of knowledge of landowners and roost owners to the presence of roosts and to appropriate management and building practices can lead to the loss or damage of roosts and feeding habitat.
- IV. Poor public image and misunderstanding of legislation and conservation needs of bats can lead to persecution and the loss or damage of roosts and feeding habitat.

5. CURRENT ACTION

The Oxfordshire Bat Group, the Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Bat Group and individuals in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes are the key people in the three-counties who generate enthusiasm and concern for bats, and involve people at a practical level.

Various bat work takes place throughout the area, some of which is detailed below:

5.1 *Site Protection and Management*

- Structure and local plans - None of the structure or local plans in Berks, Bucks and Oxon specifically name bats as a species to be protected. They do however contain sections on species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which includes all species of bat (see section 3). In addition: the Bucks County Council Structure Plan stresses the importance of linear features; South Oxon District Council have a Review Plan in its early stages and they will be emphasising the importance of Habitat and Species Action Plans; Oxon County Council has sought the advice of the Oxon Bat Group during

the maintenance of bridges; and Milton Keynes Council regularly visit sites being considered for planning applications (such as barn conversions) which may have implications for bats.

- Hibernacula - The conversion of appropriate buildings to hibernacula affords roost sites a degree of protection from adverse management and/or land use change. Hibernacula have been created at various sites throughout Berks, Bucks and Oxon including: Burnham Beeches; Wycombe Airfield; three reserves belonging to the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (Warburg, Cholsey Marsh and CS Lewis reserves); Black Park Country Park; Green Park, Aston Clinton; and a road bridge near Pangbourne. Several other sites have been proposed. Oxon Bat Group regularly monitor known hibernacula sites and selected summer roosts.
- Bat boxes and the provision of roost sites – Thames water have put up bat boxes at many of their sites in Berks, Bucks and Oxon. The Environment Agency provides roost sites on new footbridges, and has bat boxes at lock and weir sites along the Thames.

5.2 Data Collation And Survey

- Local authorities –
Records Centres - Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire have local records centres where biological data is collated using the 'Recorder' database. In Berkshire there is no longer a central database, instead several of the unitary authorities have their own copies of Recorder.
In recent years transects have been undertaken at Black Park Country Park, Bucks. In Oxon a number of bat roosts are highlighted in the alert maps (maps of Wildlife Sites), which are used for planning consultation and advice. Aylesbury Vale Countryside Management Project are working with EN to co-ordinate a programme of bat licensing for several volunteers to attempt to provide a recording group in the middle of Bucks to survey roost sites.
- English Nature - has records of roost site locations in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. The data is based on requests for advice from NCC/English Nature and so is a reflection of the distribution of concerned householder/builders/contractors not necessarily of bat species. There are over 1800 records dated between 1982 and 1997, and these records are included in the distribution maps in Appendix 1 (Figures 1 to 12).
- The Oxfordshire Bat Group and Berkshire and south Buckinghamshire Bat Group – these groups have active and licensed members who carry out a variety of work, ranging from the collection of grounded bats to surveying and monitoring of roost sites and bat boxes to raising public awareness of bat issues. In north Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes work is carried out by key individuals but without the backing of a local bat group.
- Oxon Bat Group carry out bat box surveys at 2 reserves belonging to the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (Whitecross Green and Harry Williams'/Lamb's Pool).
- In Berks, Bucks and Oxon volunteers undertake surveying and monitoring on behalf of the National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP). The NBMP was launched in January 1996 following the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe, which came into force in 1994. The programme involves surveying and monitoring for 7 UK bat species with the aim of providing an 'early warning' system for identifying declines in populations. Initially the programme will run for 5 years and is being co-ordinated by the Bat Conservation Trust (Bat Conservation Trust 1996).
- The Environment Agency is currently collating data on key species for the production of its Regional Biodiversity Strategy. The Agency has a number of bat boxes at lock and weir sites and commissions their monitoring.
- There is regular monitoring at Burnham Beeches via transects.

5.3 Public awareness and educational activities

- I. Nationally English Nature has produced the 'Bat Workers Manual', and also a booklet called 'Focus on Bats'.
- II. A large range of literature covering all bat-related issues is available from the Bat Conservation Trust.

- III. The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust have produced several resources on bats, which are available to the public: a series of briefing sheets called 'Take Action for Wildlife'. Briefing number 9 is concerned with bats and contains information on bats legal status, local contacts and references; a colour 'Wildlife Pocket Guide' which contains information on 10 species of bats such as identification, habitat and flight path. It was produced with financial support from Buckinghamshire County Council and the Corporation of London, and will be used to raise awareness and increase the profile of bats in the three counties.
- IV. Each year there are a variety of bat-related walks and talks throughout Berks, Bucks and Oxon, arranged by the local bat groups, local authorities and other organisations such as the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, The Northmoor Trust and Burnham Beeches. Aylesbury Countryside Management Project have organised a seminar on Bats and Planning Issues for Aylesbury Vale DC.
 - Nature Conservation Fora – each of the 3 counties of Berks, Bucks and Oxon has a Nature Conservation Forum who are at different stages in producing county Biodiversity Action Plans. The forums are partnerships between local authorities, statutory authorities, nature conservation organisations (e.g. the local Wildlife Trust and RSPB) and other local and community groups. Through the BAP's it is hoped to increase awareness and stimulate action at all tiers of the community from the individual to the county level.

6. PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES – 2000 TO 2005

Abbreviations used for lead agencies and partners: BBOWT: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust; BW: British Waterways; CLA: Country Landowners Association; CSWP: Chiltern Small Woodlands Project; EN: English Nature; EA: Environment Agency; FA: Forestry Authority; FC: Forestry Commission; FRCA: Farming and Rural Conservation Agency; FWAG: Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group; LA: Local Authorities; LBG: Local Bat Groups; LRC: Local Records Centres; WSP: Wildlife Sites Projects

Proposed Action	Lead Agencies	Partners	Objectives
6.1 Policy and Legislation			
Ensure that protection for all species of bat is incorporated into Local Development Plans	LA		1, 2
Incorporate the promotion of bat conservation in Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPS)	EA		1, 2, 4
Provide details of key roost sites to all LA's for developmental control	LRC	LBG, BBOWT	1, 2
Consider bats in all relevant planning applications to prevent damage to roosts and associated habitat, and, if appropriate, use planning obligations to establish new roosts	LA	EN, EA, BW, LBG, BBOWT, LRC	1, 2
Ensure that bats needs are taken into account in relevant agri-environment and forestry schemes (Countryside Stewardship, Woodland Grant, Environmentally Sensitive Areas etc)	FWAG, FRCA, WSP	EN, EA, FA, FC, CLA, CSWP, BBOWT	1, 2
6.2 Site Safeguard and Management			
Ensure that bats and their needs are taken into account in all NNR, LNR and Wildlife Trust reserve management plans	LA, EN, BBOWT		1, 2
Identify important tree roosts, especially along riparian and canal habitat, and ensure they have additional protection	LBG, EN	LA, EA, BW, WSP, BBOWT	1, 2
Identify all key maternity roost sites in the 3 counties	LBG, EN	LA, BBOWT	1, 2
Raise awareness of existing roosts to landowners and site managers and	FWAG, LBG,	EN, BBOWT,	1, 2, 4

promote the favourable management of roosts and feeding areas	WSP	EA	
Promote the conservation value of trees as bat roosts (including those that are dead or damaged) to foresters, tree surgeons, highways staff etc	LA, LBG, BBOWT	EN, FA, FC, CSWP	1, 2, 4
Promote sympathetic riparian habitat management (following the MAFF Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Protection of Water), to encourage good riparian habitat quality	FRCA, FWAG	EA, BW, WSP, LA	1, 2, 4
Identify potential underground sites and protect by grilling if applicable	LBG	EN, BBOWT	1, 2
At key sites promote the construction and conversion of appropriate structures to hibernacula (e.g. pill boxes, ice houses)	LBG	BBOWT, EN, EA, BW, CSWP	1, 2
Provide license training for volunteers	EN	LGB	4
Promote monitoring to tree officers and tree wardens	LA	EN, LBG, BBOWT	1, 2, 3
Increase number of bat box schemes where natural roost sites are lacking	LBG	BBOWT, LA, EN, EA, FWAG, CSWP	1, 2, 3
6.3 Advisory			
Produce a planning guidance note for planners, developers, tree officers and tree wardens	BBOWT	EN, LBG, LA	1, 2, 4
Develop relationships with local authorities and foresters and advise them on tree management practices that will assist bat conservation	BBOWT, LBG	FWAG, WSP, CSWP, EN	1, 2, 4
Develop a liaison role with landowners, land managers and tree wardens and advise them on tree management practices that will assist bat conservation	BBOWT, LBG	FWAG, WSP, CSWP, EN	1, 2, 4
Raise awareness with organisations who build/maintain tunnels and bridges to the potential importance of these as roost sites, and emphasise that such structures should be checked for the presence of bats before repairs are carried out (e.g. Railtrack, British Waterways, Highways Agency, local authorities etc)	LA, LBG	EN, BW, BBOWT	1, 4
Ensure advice is easily available to the public through services such as the Wildlife Information Officer	BBOWT	LBG	4
Ensure adequate training and licensing of volunteers	EN	LBG, BBOWT	3, 4

6.4 Future Research and Monitoring			
Develop centralised databases of bat records at the local biological record centres, and ensure that records are regularly sent here	LRC	All	3, 4
Collate roost records and encourage the sending in of records by the public	LRC	All	3, 4
Implement standardised monitoring at key maternity roost sites to identify population changes	LBG	BBOWT, EN	3
Continue to monitor the population of Lesser Horseshoe Bats in Oxfordshire, and review action as necessary	LBG	EN, BBOWT	3
Improve expertise in monitoring through training (e.g. in the use of bat detectors)	LBG	BBOWT, LA	3
Recruit and train 10 licensed bat workers	LBG, EN	BBOWT, LA	4
6.5 Communications and Publicity			
Establish a partnership programme of educational events for the general public (e.g. walks, talks, family days etc)	All		4
Participate in national bat events	All		4
Promote awareness of bat conservation issues through publications and articles to the general public and those coming into contact with bats	All		4
Promote awareness of bat conservation issues through relevant publications and articles to landowners, land managers, foresters and tree surgeons	All		4
Promote awareness of bat conservation issues to schools, Watch groups, community groups	BBOWT	LBG, LA	4
Raise awareness amongst householders, builders, timber treatment companies, church authorities, architects, pest control companies, environmental health officers and others who have influence on bats and their roosts, of the statutory role of EN in bat related issues	All		4
Encourage the making of bat boxes with the dual aim of providing roost sites and involving the community	BBOWT	LBG, LA	1, 2, 4

7. CONTACTS

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9. REFERENCES

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10. FURTHER READING

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APPENDICES

Distribution maps of Bat records in Berk, Bucks and Oxon – 1980-1999

(Data compiled from English Nature, Berks and South Bucks Bat Group, Environment Agency and Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust)

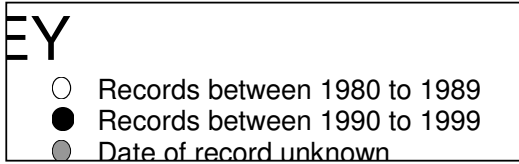


Figure 1 - Pipistrelle
(all 3 species are represented together)

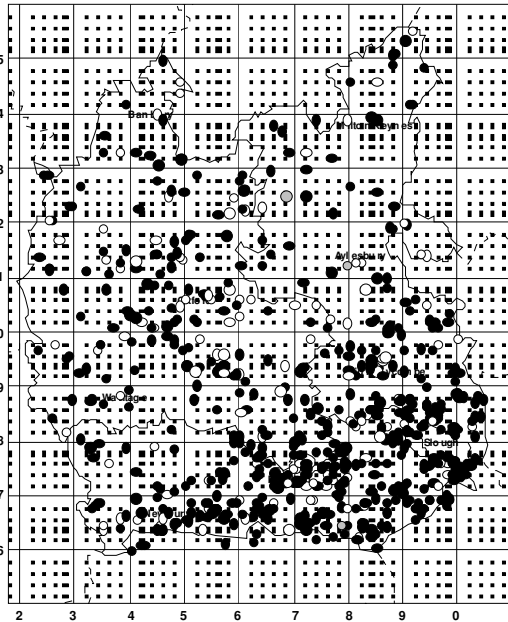


Figure 2 - Daubenton's Bat

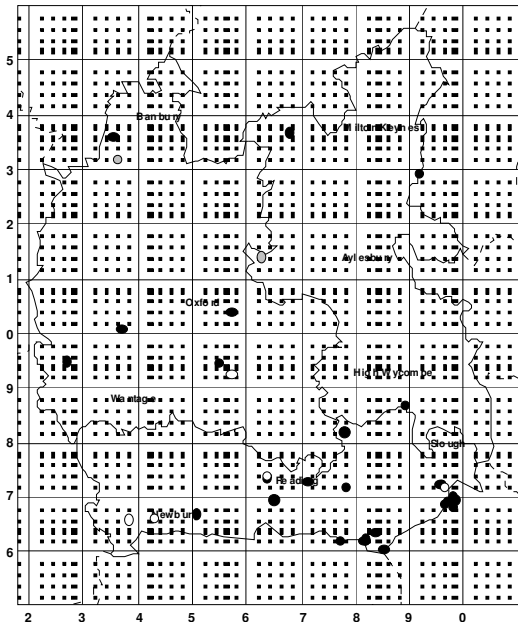


Figure 3 - Noctule

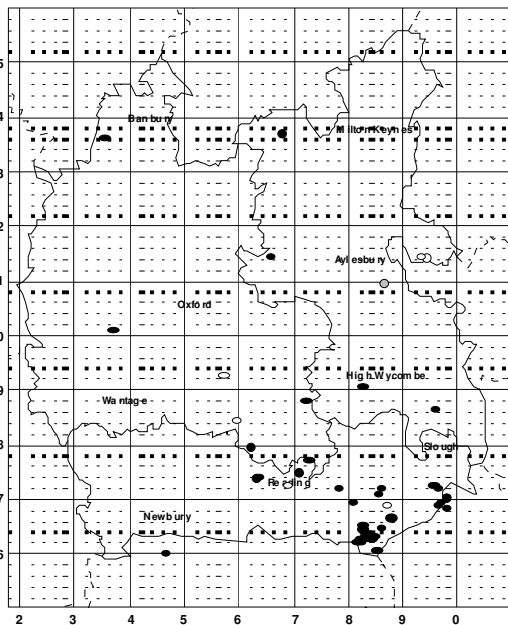


Figure 4 - Natterer's Bat

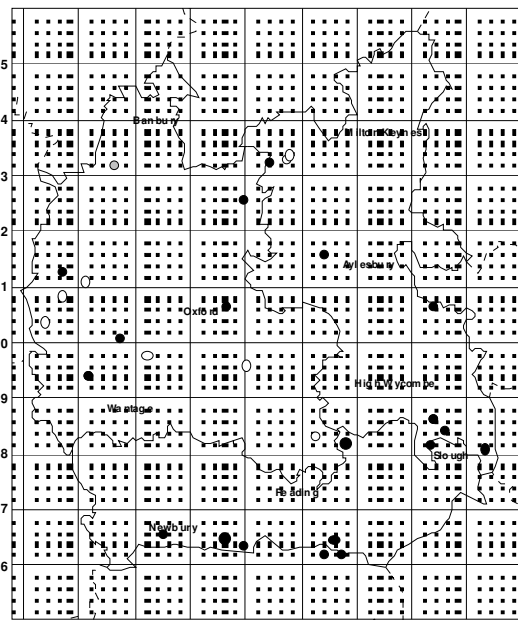


Figure 5 - Leisler's Bat

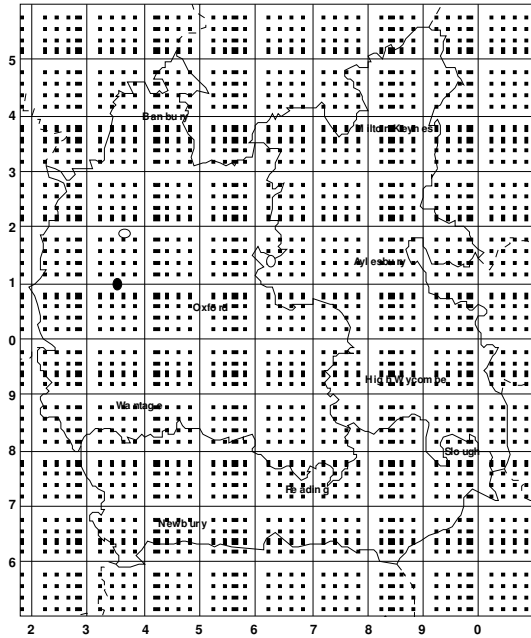


Figure 6 - Serotine

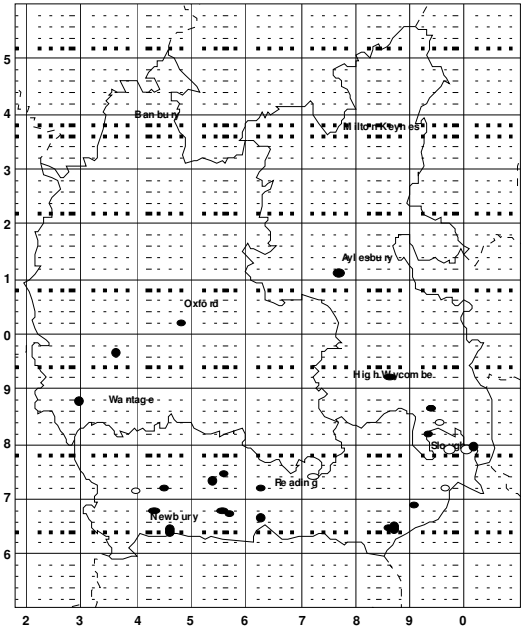


Figure 7 - Whiskered/Brandt's Bats
(bats not identified further)

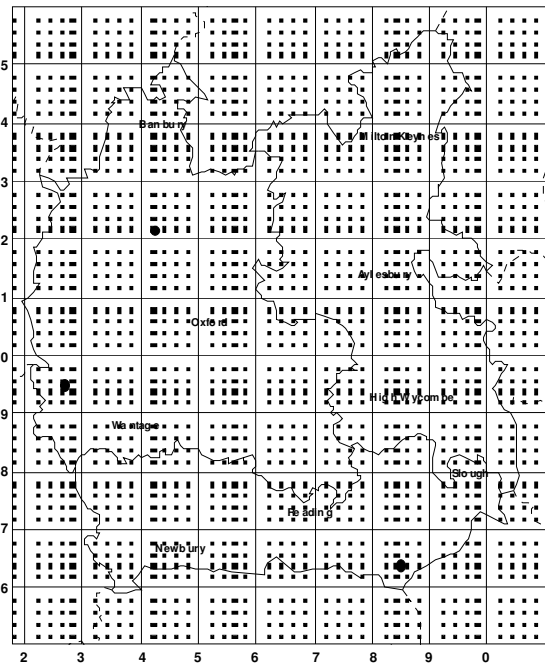


Figure 8 - Whiskered Bat

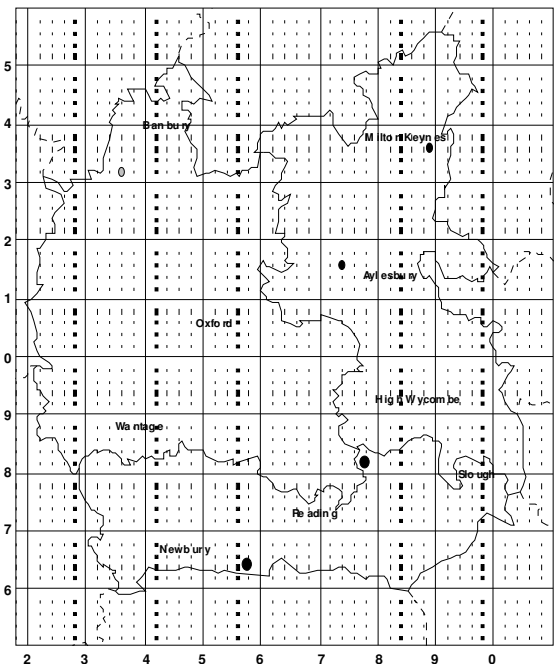


Figure 9 - Brown Long-eared Bat

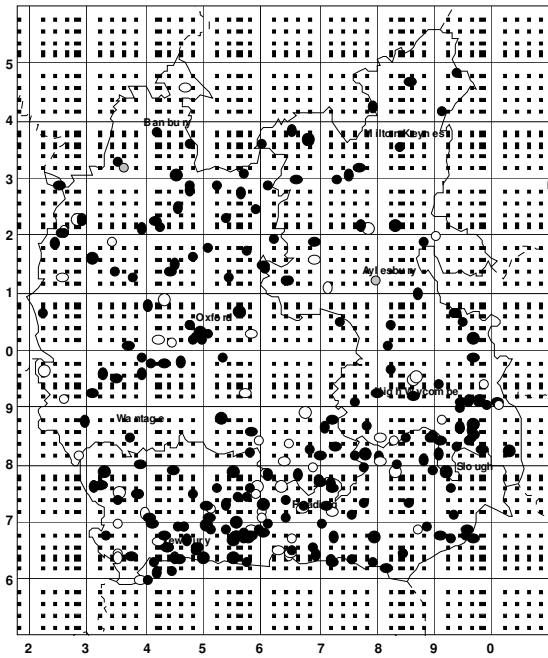


Figure 10 - Long-eared Bat
(bats not identified further)

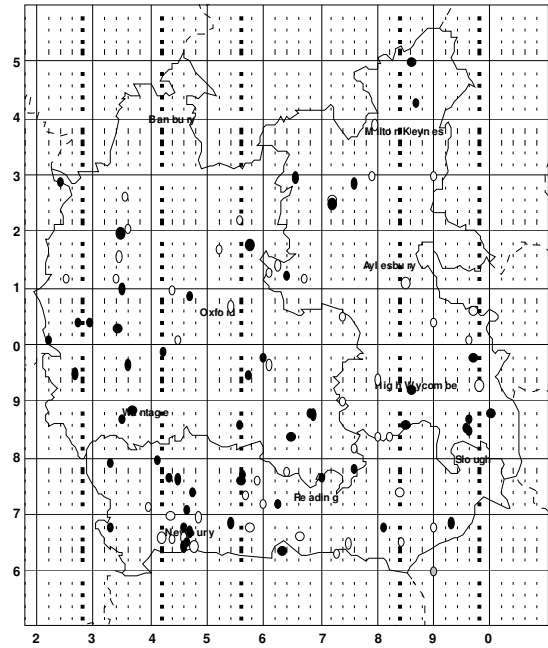


Figure 11 - Lesser Horseshoe Bat

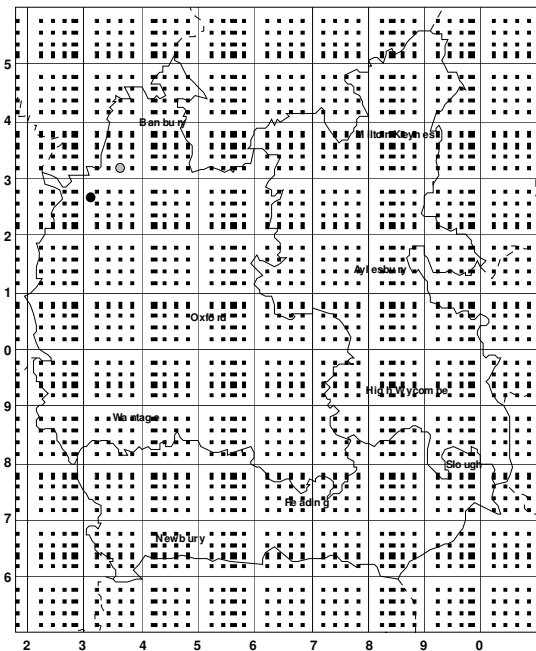


Figure 12 – Unidentified bat records

