

## INTERNATIONAL BAT EXPERTS GATHER IN DUBLIN CASTLE

Bat experts from all over Europe, the Middle East and North Africa are meeting this week in Dublin Castle. The group of experts are gathering under the auspices of Eurobats, an international agreement which focuses exclusively on the protection of bats in Europe. The meeting will examine how best to protect bats during the development of windfarms, road infrastructure and forestry practises; they will also be discussing best practise for monitoring bats and the latest developments in bat diseases and bat tracking technology.



There are only 9 species of bats in Ireland and all of them are protected under Irish and EU law. But there are 52 species of bats identified in Europe, and in some countries bat conservation is in its infancy and bats are still persecuted. Eurobats works through legislation, education and conservation measures to foster international co-operation right across Europe and the Middle East. Because some European bat species are now known to migrate across the Mediterranean, North African countries have recently been included in the Eurobats agreement. In total 62 countries are now included as range states in the Eurobats Agreement.

Opening the meeting today [Tuesday 15th May] in Dublin Castle, Mr Jimmy Deenihan, T.D. Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht commended the delegates on their work for bats. “Eurobats plays an important role in bat conservation and awareness across Europe and now also in the Middle East and North Africa”, he said. “Your working groups provide the forum for some of the most important discussions and debates about bat conservation and management anywhere in the world. And your guideline documents, prepared by the experts gathered in this room, provide international best practise advice to bats conservationists, heritage officers, developers and policy-makers across Europe and beyond.”

“There is a growing awareness in Ireland, among both the farming and urban communities,” he continued “of the importance of ecosystem services. And the value of bats, for example in natural pest control, is one of the messages we are now working to get across to the members of the public.”

Minister Deenihan also took the opportunity to highlight the work being done in Ireland by Bat Conservation Ireland. “Many thousands of people have been introduced to the joys of bats through the bat walks and bat talks organised by Bat Conservation Ireland over the years” he said. “This dedicated group of volunteers has also been working closely with the National Parks & Wildlife Service of my Department, and together they have developed a comprehensive and robust national monitoring programme for Irish bats.”

Mr Andreas Streit, Executive Secretary of the Eurobats Agreement said he was delighted to be in Ireland: “This is our first time meeting in Ireland” he said “and we are very pleased to be here. Ireland has made significant progress in bat conservation in the last ten years and is now a leading example to other countries in terms of bat monitoring and bat research.”

The meeting continues until Thursday 17th May.