

## 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the Parties

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### Guidelines for the implementation of Resolution No. 4 adopted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Meeting of Parties Transboundary programme - habitats: Data Compilation

(Dr. Tony Mitchell-Jones, Mr. Zoltán Bihari, Dr. Luisa Rodrigues, Dr. Matti Masing)



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#### **1. What is an underground habitat?**

Because bats have adapted to using a variety of man-made structures as ‘artificial caves’ the term ‘underground habitat’ should be interpreted widely to include any underground (or mainly underground) structures which fulfil the function of a natural cave in the lives of bats. Such places should have many of the characteristics of an underground climate: reduced or absent light and photoperiod, reduced annual temperature range and high humidity.

This definition would include, for example:

Natural caves and rock crevices

Mines, galleries and other underground workings

Underground fortifications of all types and ages

Tunnels (road, rail, service, canal etc.), particularly when these are disused

Cellars, ice-houses and other structures associated with buildings.

Some classifications have been proposed for types of underground site. Masing (1990), for example, proposed a system that differentiated sites on accessibility to humans and whether the sites had an artificial lining. However, any such hierarchical classifications suffer from difficulties when attempting to classify sites with a mixed origin, such as natural caves that have been modified by mining. Instead, we proposed that sites are allocated to one of the following categories, based on the main characteristics of the site:

Key	Site Type
A	Artificial bat site (constructed specifically for bats)
B	Building or cellar
C	Cave (natural)
E	Church
F	Fortification, including forts, bunkers, defensive lines
I	Ice-house
K	Kiln (usually for burning lime)
M	Mine or quarry
O	Other
R	Road/rail tunnel
S	Souterrain or burial site
U	Unknown
W	Waterway tunnel

Based on data received to 2014, the most frequently recorded underground sites for bats are caves, mines and fortifications.

Sites can also be classified according to the main season of use by bats or by the use bats make of them. In general, the latter classification is probably more useful as it relates to the biological requirement. A suitable classification, based on the main use of the site is:

Key	Usage
A	All-year: bats can be found at the site throughout the year.
H	Hibernation: predominantly used in winter.
M	Maternity: predominantly used for rearing young.
O	Other use: details can be given in the comments field.
T	Transient/migratory: used during periods of population movement.
U	Unknown

This classification may depend on the species of bat. For example, a site may function as a maternity site for one species but a hibernation site for another species. In this case, the site itself would be classified as an all-year site, because bats are present more or less throughout the year, but the first species would be recorded as using it as a maternity site in the table of species details. Bats also use underground habitats for other reasons (night-roosts, swarming sites, mating roosts), but sites are unlikely to be nationally important for these reasons alone.

Within these definitions, there are also differing interpretations of the concept of a site. In some cases a site can be taken to be a single tunnel, cave or mine, in other cases a group of closely related underground features may be considered as a single site. We propose that the question of what constitutes a site is left to the national authorities, who are best placed to make this judgement.

## **2 Criteria for identifying underground habitats of European importance**

The national conservation importance of sites has been assessed on two basic criteria:

Species present (or number of species present)

Number of bats

In the majority of situations, the two criteria are used together so that both the species and number of bats are used together in selecting sites of national importance. These two criteria have been applied in various ways across Europe and several national classification schemes have been developed.

### **2.1 Species richness schemes**

Species richness schemes have been applied to sites used by multiple species. These take into consideration both the number of bats using the site and the number of species recorded there (both recorded in a variety of ways).

A simple unweighted system (Masing, 1998) has used the number of bats multiplied by the number of species to rank hibernation sites in Estonia at a national level. The same system could also be used to rank underground habitats used as maternity sites in southern Europe. Identifying sites of national importance then requires the application of a threshold point to the ordered list.

An alternative method of classifying multi-species sites has been to set thresholds for the number of species and/or the number of individuals. For example, in the UK sites containing either:

4 or more species and 50 or more individuals;

3 or more species and 100 or more individuals;

2 or more species and 150 or more individuals;

have been identified as nationally important (Nature Conservancy Council, 1989). A very similar scheme has been applied in Portugal (ICNF, 2013), where the IUCN conservation status of the species was also taken into account. Clearly, the application of such a system requires some prior knowledge of the species and numbers of bats found in underground habitats in the territory and implies that some assessment of the number of sites likely to qualify has been done.

For this project, where the information available for each sites varies greatly across Europe, we propose collecting information about species and numbers in a selection of the best sites in each country and then testing a simple scoring system to rank sites at the European scale. The proposed scoring (Table 1) is based on the EUROBATs

priority list and conservation status from The Status and Distribution of European Mammals (Temple & Terry, 2007). Species which are EUROBATS priority or considered VU or EN in Temple & Terry (2007) score 4 points, species which are NT score 2 points (with *Myotis blythii* included as it is difficult to separate from *M. myotis*), the remaining species score 1 point. Some newly-described or unassessed species cannot currently be evaluated in this way as they do not have an IUCN regional classification for Europe. This scoring system could also be used in the initial selection of sites for each country, though we recognise that a final decision about the application of a scoring system cannot be made until it can be tested on some data.

<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>EUROBATS priority</b>	<b>ERDB Status</b>	<b>Dependence on underground habitats</b>	<b>Proposed score</b>
<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>		-	H	-
<i>Taphozous nudiventris</i>		-	H	-
<i>Rhinolophus blasii</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Rhinolophus euryale</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Rhinolophus ferrumequinum</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Rhinolophus hipposideros</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Rhinolophus mehelyi</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Myotis alcathoe</i>		DD	M	-
<i>Myotis aurascens</i>		LC	M	-
<i>Myotis bechsteinii</i>	Y	VU	M	4
<i>Myotis blythii</i>		NT	H	2
<i>Myotis brandtii</i>		LC	M	1
<i>Myotis capaccinii</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Myotis dasycneme</i>	Y	VU	M	4
<i>Myotis daubentonii</i>		LC	M	1
<i>Myotis emarginatus</i>	Y	VU	H	4
<i>Myotis escaleraei</i>	Y	-	M	4
<i>Myotis hajastanicus</i>	Y	-	M	4
<i>Myotis myotis</i>		LC	H	2
<i>Myotis mystacinus</i>		LC	M	1
<i>Myotis nattereri</i>		LC	M	1
<i>Myotis nipalensis</i>		-	M	-
<i>Myotis punicus</i>		NT	M	-
<i>Myotis schaubi</i>	Y	-	M	4
<i>Pipistrellus hanaki</i>	Y	-	L	4
<i>Pipistrellus kuhlii</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Pipistrellus maderensis</i>	Y	EN	L	
<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>	Y	LC	L	1
<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>		LC	L	
<i>Hypsugo savii</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Nyctalus azoreum</i>	Y	EN	L	4

<i>Nyctalus lasiopterus</i>	Y	DD	L	4
<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Eptesicus anatolicus</i>		-	L	-
<i>Eptesicus bottae</i>		-	L	1
<i>Eptesicus isabellinus</i>	Y	-	L	4
<i>Eptesicus nilssonii</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Vespertilio murinus</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>	Y	VU	M	4
<i>Barbastella darjelingensis</i>		-	M	1
<i>Plecotus auritus</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Plecotus austriacus</i>		LC	L	1
<i>Plecotus kolombatovici</i>	Y	NT	L	4
<i>Plecotus macrobullaris</i>	Y	NT	L	4
<i>Plecotus sardus</i>	Y	VU	L	4
<i>Plecotus teneriffae</i>	Y	EN	L	4
<i>Miniopterus schreibersii</i>	Y	NT	H	4
<i>Tadarida teniotis</i>	Y	-	L	4
<i>Otonycteris hemprichii</i>		-	L	

When applying scoring systems of this type, data may be selected in two ways:

- 1 The score may be applied to the highest count of each species separately within the agreed time-frame (perhaps 20 years). A drawback of this approach is that the maximum count of each species may have been made at a different time during this period, so adding together the maximum counts may give a misleading impression of the total number of bats occupying the site at any time
- 2 The maximum total count within the agreed time-frame may be taken and the scoring applied to each species contributing to this total.

For this project, we will collect data that will allow us to apply method 1, where detailed data are available or method 2, where fewer data are available. Whatever method is used, it must be recognised that the total number of bats dependent on any site may be very different to the number counted there at any point in time. This may be because of seasonal or short-term population movements or simply the difficulty of counting the number of bats accurately.

## 2.2 Single species schemes

Single species schemes have generally been applied to a subset of species that are considered to be of particularly high conservation value. These may be species that are rare in the territory and/or for which there is an international obligation to identify and protect sites (eg EU Habitats Directive Annex II). Ranking underground habitats for single species has been applied in two ways. For species of particularly high

conservation value (most commonly *Rhinolophus* species) the whole resource may be considered to be of national significance. For example, in Portugal all breeding roosts of *Rhinolophus euryale* and *R. mehelyi* are considered to be nationally important (ICNF 2013). Where the number of sites used by the species is large, either ranking or threshold systems have been applied to select a subset of sites as nationally important. For example, in the UK a threshold system was used to identify nationally important hibernation sites for lesser horseshoe bats (*R. hipposideros*) by selecting all sites containing 50 or more bats (Nature Conservancy Council, 1989).

### **3 Selecting the most important sites**

As described above, the most important underground habitats in a territory may include single-species and multi-species sites, both of which make an important contribution to bat conservation. A project to identify the most important sites at both a national and European scale should thus allow for the inclusion of both types of site, though in many cases it is likely that many of the sites that are important for single species will also be important for multiple species.

For the purposes of the Eurobats project, single species sites should initially be identified for those species which have been agreed as a priority. These are: *Rhinolophus euryale*, *R. ferrumequinum*, *R. hipposideros*, *R. mehelyi*, *Myotis bechsteinii*, *M. capaccinii*, *M. dasycneme*, *M. emarginatus*, *M. escalerae*, *M. hajastanicus*, *M. schaubi*, *Pipistrellus hanaki*, *P. maderensis*, *P. nathusii*, *Nyctalus azoreum*, *N. lasiopterus*, *Eptesicus isabellinus*, *Barbastella barbastellus*, *Plecotus kolombatovici*, *P. macrotus*, *P. sardus*, *P. teneriffae*, *Miniopterus schreibersii*, *Tadarida teniotis*.

### **4 Data requirements and use**

Data about species and numbers in underground habitats have been collected by researchers in a variety of formats and at varying intervals. For a few sites, long data series are available over periods of many years, but for the majority of sites data are fragmented and incomplete, consisting of perhaps only a few observations. If the selection of important sites is limited to only those with long runs of data it seems certain that many sites, perhaps even some of the most important in Europe, would be excluded from consideration. This suggests that ranking or selecting sites should use as much of the available information as possible and that very simple measures of value should be used, so as not to exclude sites with limited data. We propose, therefore, that the maximum number of individuals (of each species where possible) counted at the

site within the previous 8 years is used. This simple measure has the advantage of including all sites and does not require any complex assessment of numbers. It does not, however, take into account any possible declines in numbers that may have occurred in the 8-year period and we leave it to individual countries to modify their selection if adequate data on declines are available.

## **5 How many sites in each country?**

Bats are unevenly distributed across Europe, so that, based on species and numbers, a site considered nationally important by one country may be considered of only local importance in another. If all sites were ranked only at the European scale, the result would be a list of sites heavily biased towards those countries that still have the richest bat populations. Such an outcome would ignore the objective of maintaining the geographic range of species and the contribution of bats to biodiversity in each country. This would probably also exclude sites in areas where the conservation of underground sites is most urgent and the decline in bat populations has been greatest. We propose, therefore, that each country should first identify its most important underground habitats for bats and submit this list for further consideration and possible inclusion in a European list. This process is similar to the one carried out by the EU to identify Natura 2000 sites and the Bern Convention Emerald Network proposals and we would expect many of the same sites to be selected.

Setting the number of sites for each country presents a particular challenge. A mechanistic approach could be adopted, for example identifying the 10 best sites in each category (single species, species assemblage), or the judgement about how many sites to include in the initial list could be left to each country. As there are currently few sources of information about the relative numbers of underground habitats known in each country, we suggest that it would be valuable at this stage for countries to submit more extensive lists for discussion. This would allow the development of an overview of the state of knowledge of underground sites in Europe and allow broad comparisons to be made on biogeographic grounds.

## **6 The next steps**

In order to make progress, data are now required from each Party or Range State wishing to participate. For the initial stage, sites for inclusion in the draft lists should be selected at the national level.

## 6.1 Multi-species sites

Multi-species sites should be selected according to the following criteria.

Sites which are considered to be nationally-important for their bat species assemblages.

The following data are required for each site:

Name of site (or code number if the national authority considers the name to be confidential)

Location (latitude, longitude)

Type of site (cave, mine etc.)

Use by bats (all-year, maternity, hibernation, transient)

Number of species recorded since 1994 (when EUROBATS began)

Maximum total number of bats recorded on a single survey since 1994

Maximum number of each species recorded since 1994

The use each species makes of the site (maternity, hibernation etc.)

Whether site is protected with a grille or other means of preventing unauthorised entry

Threats to the site

## 6.2 Single species sites

Single species sites should be selected according to the following criteria:

Sites for Habitats and Species Directive Annex II species (Natura 2000 sites) should all be included.

Sites considered to be nationally-important for the following species: *Rhinolophus euryale*, *R. ferrumequinum*, *R. hipposideros*, *R. mehelyi*, *Myotis bechsteinii*, *M. capaccinii*, *M. dasycneme*, *M. emarginatus*, *M. escaleraei*, *M. hajastanicus*, *M. schaubi*, *Pipistrellus hanaki*, *P. maderensis*, *P. nathusii*, *Nyctalus azoreum*, *N. lasiopterus*, *Eptesicus isabellinus*, *Barbastella barbastellus*, *Plecotus kolombatovici*, *P. macrobullaris*, *P. sardus*, *P. teneriffae*, *Miniopterus schreibersii*, *Tadarida teniotis*.

The following data are required for each site:

Species

Name of site (or code number if the national authority considers the name to be confidential)

Location (latitude, longitude)

Type of site (cave, mine etc.)

Use by bats (all-year, maternity, hibernation, transient)

Maximum number of individuals of the species recorded on a single visit since 1994

Whether site is protected with a grille or other means of preventing unauthorised entry

Threats to the site

## **7 References**

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