

AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF BATS IN EUROPE

NATIONAL REPORT

IRELAND

A. General Information

Name of party	-	Ireland
Date of Report	-	May 2002
Period Covered	-	April 1998 to April 2002.
Competent Authority		Dúchas – The Heritage Service National Parks and Wildlife Dún Scéine Harcourt Lane Dublin 2 IRELAND Tel: + 353 1 411 7103 Fax: + 353 1 411 7120 Email: npw@ealga.ie

B. Status of Bats Within the Territory of the Party

B.1 Summary Details of Resident Species

Eight species of bat have now been confirmed for Ireland. Since the last national report the presence of the Soprano pipistrelle (55 kHz) has been established. Although detection work for this species is recent, results indicate that it may be as common and widespread as the Common pipistrelle. Nathusius' pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii* has been recorded for Northern Ireland and bat detector based records suggest it may also be in Ireland. The species recorded for Ireland are:

- (a) Common pipistrelle – *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

- (b) Soprano Pipistrelle - *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*
- (c) Brown Long-eared bat – *Plecotus auritus*.
- (d) Leisler's bat – *Nyctalus leisleri*.
- (e) Whiskered bat – *Myotis mystacinus*.
- (f) Daubenton's bat – *Myotis daubentoni*.
- (g) Natterer's bat – *Myotis nattereri*
- (h) Lesser Horseshoe bat – *Rhinolophus hipposideros*.

B.2 Status and Trends

The results of the national survey, carried out between 1985 and 1988, were published in 1994. These and any subsequent records have been incorporated into the Bat Conservation Trust's publication 'Distribution Atlas of Bats in Britain and Ireland'.

For most species repeat site visits have been carried out at irregular intervals. These data suggest that over the past ten to twenty years population trends appear to be upwards.

Under the requirements of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) a monitoring programme for the Lesser Horseshoe bat has been formalised and agreed and is in the process of being implemented by Dúchas The Heritage Service. This programme focuses on maternity and hibernating roosts throughout its range in Ireland.

B.3 Habitat and Roost Sites

Roost sites continue to be identified for all species by the Conservation Rangers of Dúchas The Heritage Service, The Vincent Wildlife Trust, various Bat Groups, post graduate students and individuals.

In the case of the Lesser Horseshoe there has been a continuing and systematic effort to locate all roosts. Any vulnerable roosts particularly caves, were grilled and protected, some hibernating sites were built and some nursery sites roofed and improved. Habitats associated with important roosts were identified and 91 of these have been proposed as Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) under national legislation for further protection. Some 36 bat sites have been proposed as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive, and Management Plans are being drawn up for their conservation.

B.4 Threats

The main threats to bats in Ireland come from loss of habitat, loss of roosting sites, pollution and use of harmful chemicals. The use of insecticides and pesticides and agricultural intensification may be reducing prey abundance generally.

Hedgerow removal and maintenance may be reducing the connectivity in the landscape so essential to bats. These issues are being addressed through the amendment of national legislation and the Rural Environment Protection Scheme, an agri-environment measure administered by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

B.5 Data Collection

Data collection is ongoing with a view to publishing regular reports on numbers and trends, status, distribution and threats.

The Heritage Council funded surveys covering inner Dublin and the utilisation of bridges in counties Sligo and Leitrim.

Post-graduate bat research is being carried out at a number of Irish Universities. For instance the Zoology Department of University College Galway is involved with projects entitled 'A study of the ecology of the Lesser Horseshoe colony at the summer roost in Dromore, Co Clare' and 'The diet and foraging behaviour of Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentoni* at Aughanure Castle, Co Galway'.

C Measures Taken to Implement Article III of the Agreement

C.6 Legal Measures

All bats in Ireland are protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976 and its recent amendment, the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, which makes it an offence to kill, capture or take any bats. These Acts are implemented throughout the country by Conservation Rangers from National Parks & Wildlife of Dúchas The Heritage Service.

C.7 Sites identified and protected

Many sites have been identified and protected, grilles have been put in place, roofs repaired and hibernacula built in some cases. The Heritage Council has purchased one building to protect a Lesser Horseshoe maternity roost at Dromore, Co Clare.

Since the mid-1990's The Vincent Wildlife Trust has increasingly focussed its resources on acquiring and enhancing key breeding roosts for rare bats such as the Lesser Horseshoe bat. Acquiring, maintaining,

enhancing and monitoring bat reserves now represents the core of its work. During the period 1998-2002 The VWT established nine reserves for the Lesser Horseshoe in Ireland. The VWT continues to employ a full-time field officer and additional staff are employed on short contracts to conduct intensive surveys to locate new lesser horseshoe roosts. Approximately 1,000 square kilometres have been surveyed in the period 1998 – 2000 in counties Clare, Cork and Kerry resulting in the discovery of 40 sites, each containing a minimum of 30 bats, and 13 containing over 100 bats. Three of these sites have since been purchased or leased by the Trust. The VWT has employed two staff members for summer 2002 to survey counties Galway and Kerry.

C.8 Consideration given to important bat habitats.

Habitats associated with important roosts and vulnerable species such as Lesser Horseshoe bats have been identified. Many of these have been designated as SACs and others are proposed as NHAs.

C.9 Activities carried out to promote the awareness of the importance of the conservation of bats.

Since bats have an unfavourable public image, bat leaflets have been produced by both Dúchas and ENFO and made available to the public. Pest control agencies have been contacted so that bats will not be harmed. An educational and awareness programme has been carried out by Conservation Rangers throughout the country, which included visits to schools and use of the media to promote public awareness. Bat training courses and other local events have also been organised by Dúchas staff.

Ireland participates in European Bat Night on 29th and 30th August each year.

Irish Bat Conferences were held in 1999 and 2001. These were jointly funded by Dúchas, The Heritage Council and Coillte, were well attended with up to 70 participants including representatives from Northern Ireland and Britain and with speakers from home and abroad.

The Xth European Bat Research Symposium takes place in Ireland from 20 – 26 August 2005 and will be hosted by the Zoology Department of University College Galway.

C.10 Responsible bodies nominated for the provision of advice on bat conservation and management.

National Parks and Wildlife of Dúchas The Heritage Service is the body responsible for the provision of advice on bat conservation and management. The Heritage Council, a statutory body, may provide or be requested to provide advice on policies and priorities. Local authority Heritage Officers may also provide advice at a county level

and are involved in local bat projects. They are currently engaged in the production of a Heritage Council funded booklet on the conservation and management requirements of all bat species in Ireland.

C.11 Additional action undertaken to safeguard populations of bats.

NPW maintains a close working relationship with other government agencies and with non-governmental organisations involved in bat conservation, in particular The VWT. NPW in partnership with VWT has repaired sites and undertaken surveys and site monitoring.

The Heritage Council have introduced the requirement of a bat survey for those buildings likely to contain bats where they intend grant-aiding renovation works. They have also set up a panel of experts and seek to maintain and upgrade its skills through regular workshops.

The Department of the Environment initiative to provide funding for Non-governmental Organisations covers Bat Groups.

The Cork County Bat Group is one of these. Its aim is to conserve bats by undertaking field research, educating the public and liaising with timber treatment companies, construction firms, local authorities and roost owners.

The group organises talks, walks, slide-shows and school visits. It raises awareness of the threats to bats by contributing articles and interviews to the media, lobbying politicians and advising both roost and landowners. The group is also involved in providing training and organises Detector Workshops. The erection of bat boxes, field surveys and the collection of data on bat distribution are ongoing projects. It is affiliated to the UK Bat Conservation Trust and the Irish Wildlife Trust.

C.12 Recent and ongoing programmes relating to conservation and management of bats.

The VWT extended its Bat Box project to Ireland in 1999 when 162 Schwegler bat boxes were erected in three woods in Co. Galway. The aim of this project is to gain information on the ecology of tree-roosting species.

C.13 Consideration being given to effects of pesticides on bats.

Pest control agencies have been contacted so that bats will not be harmed during their operations.

D. Functioning of Agreement

D.1 Co-operation with other Range States

Ireland is co-operating with other Range States and with other Member States of the EU in research and conservation matters.

E. References

Hayden, T. and Harrington, R. (2000). Exploring Irish Mammals. Town House. Dublin.

O'Sullivan, P. (1994). Bats in Ireland. Special Supplement to The Irish Naturalists' Journal.

Richardson, P. (2000). Distribution Atlas of Bats in Britain and Ireland. The Bat Conservation Trust. UK.