

AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF POPULATIONS OF BATS IN EUROPE [EUROBATS]

NATIONAL REPORT

Ireland
2000 - 2003

A. General Information

- Name of party - Ireland
- Date of Report - 1 September 2003
- Period Covered - 2000 - 2003.
- Competent Authority - National Parks and Wildlife Service
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
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Ireland
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- Nominated member to
the Advisory Committee - Dr Ferdia Marnell

B. Status of Bats Within the Territory of the Party

1 Summary Details of Resident Species

The eight species of bat found in Ireland are:

- (a) Pipistrelle - *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*
- (b) - *P. 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*

2 Status and Trends

Eight species of bat have now been confirmed for Ireland, the most recent being the Soprano pipistrelle (55 kHz). Recent records of Nathusius's pipistrelle and Brandt's bat are awaiting confirmation. The collation of all data on lesser horseshoe bat roosts in 2003 has led to a revised national population estimate of 9 – 10,000 animals, slightly lower than previously estimated.

3 Habitat and Roost Sites

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 initiated. This programme focuses on maternity and hibernation roosts throughout the species range in Ireland. Recent estimate suggests that over 60% of the national population of lesser horseshoe bat is protected within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

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 [Wildlife Amendment Act, 2000] and the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme, an agri-environmental measure administered by the Department of Agriculture.

5 Data Collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination

Data collection is ongoing. Standardised recording forms and a centralised database for bat roost information are being developed. These will greatly facilitate the analysis, interpretation and dissemination of bat data. A publication on the status of the lesser horseshoe bat is in press.

Post-graduate bat research is being carried out at a number of Irish universities. For instance University College Galway is involved in projects entitled "A study of the ecology of the lesser horseshoe bat colony at the summer roost in Dromore, Co. Clare" and "The diet and foraging behaviour of Daubenton's bat at Aughnanure Castle, Co. Galway".

C Measures Taken to Implement Article III of the Agreement

6 Legal Measures

All bats in Ireland are protected under the Wildlife Acts [1976 and 2000] which make it an offence to deliberately kill or injure any bat species or to damage its roosts. This act is policed throughout the country by Rangers from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Licences are issued each year under the Wildlife Acts to facilitate bat research and bat surveys e.g 15 such licences were issued in the last 12 months.

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 Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) employs a full-time field officer in Ireland and additional staff are employed by them on short contracts to conduct intensive surveys to locate new lesser horseshoe roosts. The VWT continues to acquire and manage vulnerable maternity roosts of the lesser horseshoe.

8 Consideration given to important bat habitats.

Habitats associated with important roosts and vulnerable species such as lesser horseshoe bats continue to be identified. Many of these have been designated as SACs and others are proposed as Natural Heritage Areas (under national legislation)– see B.3.

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 NPWS and ENFO (the environmental information office of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government) 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 Wildlife 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 NPWS staff to promote bat awareness. Several events are organised by NPWS staff and local bat groups around the country for European Bat Night at the end of August each year.

Irish Bat Conferences and Bat Detector Workshops were held in 2001 and 2003 with funding from NPWS, the Heritage Council and Coillte.

The 10th European Bat Research Symposium takes place in Ireland from 20-26 August 2005.

NPWS continues to provide funding to the Dublin Bat Group.

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

NPWS of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is the body responsible for the provision of advice on bat conservation and management. The Heritage Council, a statutory body, have funded the production of a booklet on the conservation and management requirements of all bat species in Ireland. Local authority Heritage Officers may also provide advice at a county level and are involved in local bat projects.

11 Additional action undertaken to safeguard populations of bats.

NPWS maintains a close working relationship with other government agencies and with non-governmental organisations involved in bat conservation, in particular the VWT. NPWS 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.

There is a growing number of bat groups around the country. 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.

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

An annual programme of monitoring the summer and winter roosts of the lesser horseshoe bat continues.

In early 2003, a contract funded by NPW produced a database of all known information on all lesser horseshoe bat roosts in Ireland.

A meeting between The Heritage Council, NPWS and the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) was organised in spring 2003 to develop a pilot scheme of countryside monitoring for bats in Ireland. The pilot fieldwork (largely funded by the Heritage Council, but with some support funding from NPWS) took place at 7 locations in August 2003 and results are now being analysed. It is hoped that preliminary results will be presented at the bat detector workshop in France being organised by BCT this September. If successful it is planned to extend this scheme in future years.

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

14 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.

15 Measures taken to implement MoP Resolutions

Resolution 2.4 Transboundary Programme – underground habitats

Underground habitats are particularly important for the lesser horseshoe bat in Ireland. A database collating all available data for this species has recently been compiled and the relevant underground information has been made available to the Working Group on underground habitats.

Resolution 3.3 Format of National Reports

National reports are now prepared according to the new agreed format.
