

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

## NATIONAL REPORT

Ireland  
2003 - 2004

### A. General Information

Name of party - Ireland

Date of Report - 16 May 2004

Period Covered - 2003 - 2004.

Competent Authority - National Parks and Wildlife Service  
Department of Environment, Heritage  
and Local Government  
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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 stable or 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. The most recently completed study, a PhD at University College Galway, examined the ecology of a lesser horseshoe bat colony at a summer roost in Co. Clare.

Dr Conor Kelleher of the Cork Bat Group attended the bat detector workshop organised by BCT in France last September.

Following recent concern about rabies and bats, a university team has been commissioned by the Department of Agriculture to undertake a survey for rabies in Daubenton's bats. The survey work will take place at four riverine locations around the country during the summer of 2004. Tissue and saliva samples will be sent to the veterinary labs in Weymouth, England for analysis. There has been no record of any form of rabies in Ireland for over 100 years.

## **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 Conservation 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. Approximately 12 - 15 such licences are each year e.g. to undertake mist netting or gather biopsy samples for rabies testing

## **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.**

An ongoing educational and awareness programme is being 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 NPWS staff to promote bat awareness. Several events were organised by NPWS staff and local bat groups around the country for European Bat Night at the end of August 2003.

The bi-annual Irish Bat Conference and Bat Detector Workshop was held in May 2003 with funding from NPWS, the Heritage Council and Coillte.

The 10<sup>th</sup> European Bat Research Symposium takes place in Ireland from 20-26 August 2005 and preparations are underway to ensure that this is a successful and constructive meeting.

A national bat NGO has been set up in Ireland for the first time. The group came together to elect officers in January 2004 and are now in the process of developing a web-site and arranging fund-raising events. This group will be called Bat Conservation Ireland [BCI] and will act as an umbrella body for local bat groups. NPWS has already met with BCI and looks forward to constructive co-operation on bat conservation issues in the coming years.

## **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, has 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 and BCI. NPWS in partnership with VWT has repaired sites and undertaken surveys and site monitoring.

The Heritage Council continues to fund bat surveys for those buildings likely to contain bats where they intend grant-aiding renovation works.

There is a growing number of local bat groups around the country. The Cork County Bat Group is the most recent addition. 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.

A pilot scheme of countryside monitoring (based on car transects) for bats in Ireland (largely funded by the Heritage Council, but with some support funding from NPWS) took place at 7 locations in August 2003. The results suggest that only 3 species of bats are likely to be encountered at sufficiently frequent intervals to allow monitoring using this technique. Taking on board a number of the recommendations of the first report the pilot scheme is being expanded in 2004 with the Heritage Council and NPWS as co-sponsors.

#### **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 forwarded to the Working Group on underground habitats.

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