

Bat and Bird Boxes

The main function of bat boxes is to provide alternative safe roosting sites for groups of bats where natural sites are unavailable or become unavailable. Although such roost provision is beneficial for bats, it should be pointed out that bat boxes can never replace a hollow tree or building roost. To encourage bats to use bat boxes, it is very important to site them carefully (more info on this is available on the Wildlife section of www.heritagecouncil.ie).

If birds are present in a building in which you plan to carry out works, then there may be an opportunity to incorporate "accommodation" for them into the design through the use of nest boxes. Most species that use buildings, especially hole or cavity nesting species will readily take to nest boxes. Swift colonies are very susceptible to habitat loss from building renovations, yet it is easy to design such renovations to allow swifts to nest in the buildings by providing appropriate nesting boxes.



House sparrow nest box on the side of a house. (Birdwatch Ireland)



Different styles of bat boxes all painted black to absorb more heat from the sun thereby keeping the bats warm. (Tina Aughney)

Useful Information and Contacts

National Parks and Wildlife Service

For any queries in relation to the law on bats, bats in your house or if you are planning building works and think that they might affect bats contact the NPWS Bat Helpline on freephone: **1800 405 000**.

For queries relating to birds contact your local NPWS Conservation Ranger through NPWS, 7, Ely Place, Dublin 2, Tel: +353 (0)1-888-2000. Web: www.npws.ie. (The NPWS publication: *Bats in Houses* can be found on the website.)

Bat Conservation Ireland (BCI)

Contact BCI for advice on bats. The website www.batconservationireland.org includes a searchable database of known bat species in each county, publications, and their newsletter 'The Natterer'.

Cork County Bat Group

Phone 021-7339247 or visit www.corkcountybatgroup.ie. Their website has a video demonstration on how to remove a bat which has strayed into living quarters.

BirdWatch Ireland: For advice on birds including legislation and practical matters such as nest boxes, bird identification etc. **BirdWatch Ireland**, P.O. Box 12, Greystones, Co. Wicklow. Tel: +353 (0)1-281-9878. Web: www.birdwatchireland.ie

If you find a sick or injured Bird

If you find a sick or injured bird, contact the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ISPCA) on 043-33-25035 or your local SPCA (check a local phonebook for details). Alternatively, a local veterinary surgeon may be able to help.

Heritage Council Publications available on the Wildlife section of its website <http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/wildlife/>:

- *Bat Survey Guidelines Traditional Farm Buildings Scheme*
- *Conserving Bats - How Local Authorities Can Help*
- *Biodiversity, the Law and You: a leaflet that informs you of the laws protecting biodiversity.*
- *Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife in Towns and Villages A Guide for Local Community Groups*
- *Conserving Hedgerows*

The Wildlife section of the website also contains further information on bats and birds in buildings relative to this publication including tables showing the feeding, roosting and nesting habits of different bird and bats species and a diagram identifying the locations within a dwelling house where bats like to roost.

For more information, please contact the Heritage Council Wildlife Officer.

Text written by Tina Aughney, Alex Copland and Oonagh Duggan.

Cover photo: A family home at the Green, Ramelton, Co. Donegal. Houses similar to this one can often provide roosting and nesting sites for bats and birds. (Colm Murray)

Cover Inset: Barn Owl. (John Lusby)

Background Photos: Newpark March, Co. Kilkenny (Oonagh Duggan) Hall House, Co. Kilkenny (Oonagh Duggan)

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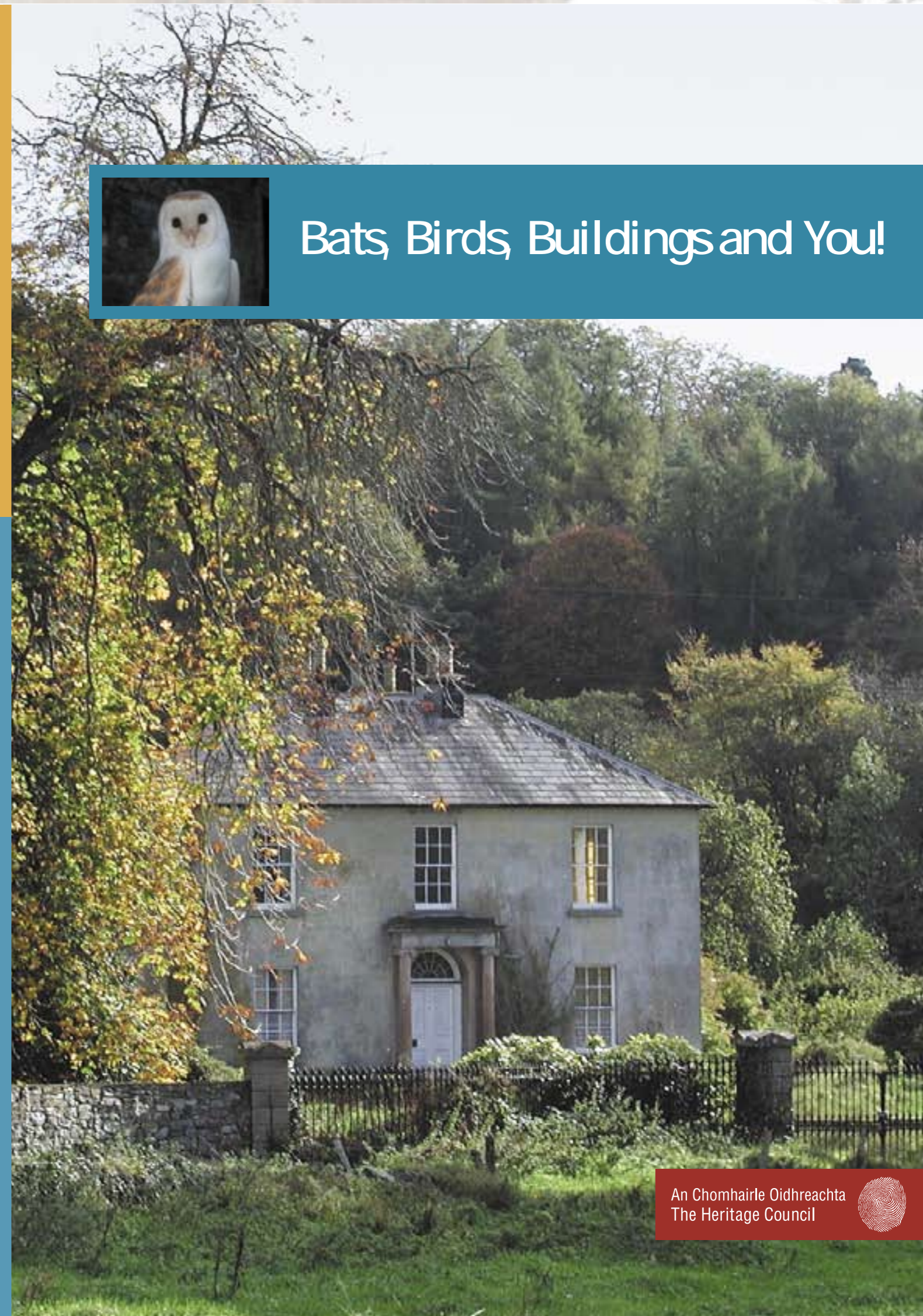
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Bats, Birds, Buildings and You!



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The Heritage Council



Biodiversity in our Buildings!

Do you notice when the first swallow arrives in the Spring after its long migration from Africa? Did you know that a single pipistrelle bat can eat around 3000 midges in a night? Or that the numbers of barn owl (the Late Late Showbird) once common in Ireland, could be as low as 300 pairs? So what do these species have in common?

...They often make their homes in buildings such as dwelling houses, old farm buildings, old churches, outhouses and sheds.

The birds and bats of Ireland are an important part of our biodiversity and our natural heritage. They provide important services for the wider environment and for people, and aid in countryside management. Bats are very beneficial to us as they eat thousands of the biting insects that are 'nuisances' to humans and livestock. Birds help to control garden and farmland pests (such as rodents) and weeds, and spread seeds.

Many of our birds and all of our bats species are vulnerable to human interference and if they nest or roost in a building, they can be harmed by any renovation or restoration works to it. All bats and birds, their nests and roosts, and their eggs and young have legal protection in Ireland. Therefore, it is important that we are aware of the habits of these animals and what can cause them harm, that we understand the laws protecting them, learn how we can co-exist with them in our buildings, enjoy their comings and goings, and even attract them into our spaces. This is the aim of this publication. Building owners are the guardians of many bats and nesting birds. This publication is not intended to be exhaustive guidance if you are planning works on your building, but to deepen our understanding of how important buildings are for bats and birds.

Birds Nesting

Birds can use all types of structures for nesting, from stone ruins to modern concrete buildings and from large industrial complexes to small garden sheds. Many bird species have come to rely on buildings to provide them with nesting habitats as a result of changes to our countryside. Perhaps the best known of these is the Swallow but others include the Barn Owl, House Martin and House Sparrow.

Most birds prefer quiet and undisturbed buildings for nesting. Old stone ruins, such as castles, old houses or even churches, can provide them with holes and crevices in which to nest. Buildings that are covered with ivy or other creepers offer even more cover for nesting birds. However, birds will also use buildings that are in everyday use. Many, such as House Martins, build or access their nests on the outside of buildings, but a few, such as Swallows, actually take up residence inside buildings. Some birds, such as Starling or Pied Wagtail, will take advantage of the warmer air in the middle of cities and use buildings to roost during winter. Even small wooden sheds or walls can be occupied by a Wren or a Robin looking for a nest site in a sheltered spot, safe from the weather. Generations of Swallows can use the same building to nest in for several years.



Mistle Thrush nesting on exterior light of a modern building. (Neil van Dokkum)

Bats Roosting

Trees, caves, old buildings and cellars were once the traditional roosting sites for bats but since these are less available now, bats are being forced to use any kind of building. All buildings, in particular, the walls, eaves and roofs are potential roosting sites. Bats like clean and draught-free buildings, without dust or cobwebs and normally conceal themselves in crevices, behind roofing felt, in wall cavities or under ridge tiles. They don't bring in nesting materials and will not gnaw wood or electric cables.



Brown long-eared bats roosting inside a wall. (Conor Kelleher)

Bat Species in Ireland

We have 10 species of bats in Ireland:

Soprano pipistrelle and common pipistrelle are our smallest bats (they will fit on the end of your thumb) and are the species most usually found in houses. They favour roosting at the gable ends, above soffits, at the top of cavity walls, near chimneys and behind bargeboards. They also roost under ridge tiles and under roofing felt.

Brown long-eared bat is the next most commonly found species in buildings though it prefers large roof spaces. This species is often clearly visible in the roof hanging from the ridge beam.

Leisler's bat, our largest bat, would fit in the palm of your hand; it is rarely found in the rest of Europe but is widespread in Ireland. It is often found in house eaves and trees.

Lesser horseshoe bat is our most protected bat and hangs freely up-side down with the wings wrapped around the body and often looks like hanging plums.

Whiskered, Brandt's, Natterer's and Daubenton's bats are similar in appearance and are occasionally found in the roof spaces of houses, crevices in stonework and brick work and along ridge beams.

Nathusius pipistrelle is a rare species and its habits are similar to the more common pipistrelles.

To see county maps showing the distribution of bat species in Ireland, visit Bat Conservation Ireland's website, www.batconservationireland.org

Barn Owl

Barn Owls typically use large, old stone buildings where they nest in cavities in the chimney or wall, all year round, and therefore can be adversely affected by renovation works at any time of the year. Any building that offers a suitably large cavity, including modern metal and concrete structures or even single-storey cottages with a roof-space or intact chimney-breast, can be occupied. Whenever a building is being renovated, checking for the presence of Barn Owls (pellets, droppings - also known as whitewash, and feathers) should be undertaken as a matter of course. Barn owls are 'red-listed' in Ireland: this means that, due to steep population declines, they are of 'high conservation concern' according to BirdWatch Ireland. Over 90% of the estimated 300 pairs in existence in Ireland nest in old buildings. There may be several reasons for the population decline, but the loss or renovation of once suitable buildings has been identified as a contributory factor. If you find any signs of Barn Owls, contact BirdWatch Ireland for advice (see contact info on the back page).



Barn Owl. (John Lusby)

