

Bats in Churches Partnerships Project – Bat Group Briefing

This briefing note has been prepared for bat groups in England that have expressed an interest in participating in the Bats in Churches Partnership (BiC) Project but don't have any of the 102 project churches in their area. It aims to give an overview of the project and introduce the key members of the project team that will be engaging with churches and bat groups.

Overview of the Project

Brief summary of the problems that the project is seeking to address:

Bats and churches are wonderful examples of natural and cultural heritage but risk coming into conflict. Churches have been roosting sites for bats for centuries, including some whose survival now depends on them. Whilst many church communities co-exist with their bats, sometimes they cause (droppings, urine, dead bats) unacceptable impacts upon nationally recognised heritage, vital community space and the people who look after church buildings.

The Bats in Churches project is a ground-breaking partnership bringing together community, heritage and nature conservation interests to develop sustainable solutions.

The Partners to the project are: Natural England, Church of England, Historic England, BCT and the Churches Conservation Trust.

Brief summary of the scope of the project:

- **Work with 102 churches** – practical tailored solutions to reduce negative impact of bats, with 20 of those churches having funded capital works as part of the project. Contracts with consultants on built heritage as well as bat ecology, the latter supported by a new NE Bats in Churches Class licence. (Two courses for Bats in Churches Class Licence have already taken place.) Some of these churches have been selected because they want to celebrate their bat populations.
- **Community engagement** – engaging the church and local communities to inspire them about the church buildings and the bats. The 102 churches will have a suite of activities to choose from (built environment, bats, etc.). These activities will hopefully extend beyond these churches and the aim is to have engaged 12,000 people directly with activities at the 102 churches but also reach over 110,000 people in a variety of ways during the five years of the project (including in bat surveys). Three engagement officers (hosted by the Church of England) are leading on this side of the project (Honor Gay, Rosemary Riddle and Diana Spencer; see below for an introduction to each of them) but there will also be input from the Training & Survey Officer (Claire Boothby hosted by BCT, you can find an introduction to Claire below) as well as support from bat groups that wish to be involved with the project.
- **National Network of Skilled Volunteers** – aim is to have 1,812 fully trained volunteers able to provide general bats in churches training and support churches with bats in England, this will be through a total of 94 training courses over the five years. The training provided will include: general bats in churches training, advanced VBRV training, basic VBRV training, church heritage cleaning, and bats in churches engagement training (how to lead a bat walk, for example). The Training & Survey Officer is coordinating this with support from relevant advisors within the project, as well as other trainers (Claire is also delivering some training herself).

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- **Relationship building** – communications are a critical aspect to this project, hence the project having a dedicated communications officer (Ione Bingley, based at the Church of England). Ensuring there are good communications with bat groups will be key too, and in this the Training & Survey Manager will be supported by Colin Morris, BCT's Bat Groups Officer.
- **Knowledge sharing** – the aim is for the project to have reach beyond the project churches, to not just other churches but also other historic buildings. New methods developed during the project will be shared in a variety of ways, including demonstration days, specialist workshops and an end of project symposium. There also be cases studies and a new website. There will be BCT involvement in this but to be determined as the project develops.
- **Church Bat Detectives** – there are actually two surveys under this heading:
 - National Bats in Churches Study (NBICS) – this will be a survey of 1000 stratified randomly selected churches. The work is being led by Claire with support from BCT's National Bat Monitoring Programme (NBMP) team. A new database has been developed to support the study (and link with the Church Heritage Record database as well as existing NBMP systems) and surveys will include church surveys, deployment of a static bat detector, a questionnaire to be completed with the church warden/church representative, and collection of bat droppings for DNA analysis.
 - Church Bat Detectives – this is a simpler version of the NBICS survey (easier church survey, no bat detector and no collection of droppings) of 500 churches selected by volunteers (excluding the 1000 churches in the BICS and the 102 BiC project churches).

Project timescales:

We received the go ahead from Heritage Lottery Fund in December 2018. The project team were then recruited and all were in place for February. External contracts have been let for the ecological survey work as well as for the new Bats in Churches database and online recording system, which are being piloted this summer.

The BiC Project will be delivered over the next five years with a certain number of churches supported each year as well as targets for additional surveys and training. The National Bats in Churches Study has just been launched with 70 churches (outside of the 102 project churches) being surveyed this year during July. More details about this are in the covering email this document was attached to and details are also being shared in the June Bat Group Bulletin.

We are working on the overall training plan and next year we'll have a training schedule set-up in advance, but for this year the current schedule includes:

- National Bats in Churches Study workshops (two will have taken place by the end of June as part of the pilot year for the study)
- Cleaning workshops scheduled for September
- Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor church specific training in the spring of 2020
- Engagement training/general Bats in Churches Training (late summer)

We will be in touch with bat groups sharing more details about training in due course.

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Project team members

An introduction from the main project team members that bats groups are most likely to have contact with are provided below. (You can see a picture of the whole team in the latest project newsletter sent out with this briefing note.)

Claire Boothby, Training & Survey Officer (based with BCT)

I have had an interest in bats for a number of years, getting involved with bat monitoring and organising bat walks during my previous work with National Trust, and taking part in the NBMP. However, my MSc research was actually focused on the study of birds and I have just come from a job with British Trust for Ornithology, working as the Development Officer for BTO Garden BirdWatch and as the Organiser of the Tawny Owl Calling Survey. I'm excited to make this transition and get involved with the wonderful world of bat surveying, being involved with what promises to be an extremely rewarding and valuable project.

Claire will be in contact with all bat groups about the National Bats in Churches Study aspect of the project as well as with bat groups that have project churches in their areas in relation to training.

Three Engagement Officers (based with the Church of England)

Honor Gay – My training is in tropical ecology and I'm proud to have rescued a beautiful fruit bat from the cooking pot in Sulawesi during my field work. I've worked for HLF, the Natural History Museum and the Wildlife Trusts over the past 15 years, most recently for the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich on the conservation of the great ceiling of the Painted Hall. My Masters' dissertation was about reconciling conflict between natural and cultural heritage, and I am really looking forward to engaging people with bats in churches and learning more about bats.

The counties that Honor will be working in are: Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Kent, Lincolnshire (shared with Diana), Northamptonshire (shared with Rose), Suffolk (shared with Diana), Sussex, and Wiltshire.

Diana Spencer – I've been working with people and wildlife for 15 years, across the country from Cornwall to the North of Scotland. I've worked on species reintroduction with the Wildlife Trusts, seabird and wetland conservation with the RPSB, marine work with Whale & Dolphin Conservation, and a stately home and historic park restoration project with the National Trust for Scotland and Aberdeenshire Council. I've built up a hugely impressive collection of logoed fleeces along the way... I've worked on the Norfolk Coast before and know it well, but I'm looking forward to exploring the rest of the region, discovering lots of new churches, and with a bit of luck finally getting to see a Stone Curlew.

The counties that Diana will be working in are: Lincolnshire (shared with Honor), Norfolk, and Suffolk (shared with Honor).

Rose Riddle – I am based in Buxton, Derbyshire, but will be covering a wide geographical area including the North of England and the Midlands.

For the last 10 years I have worked as a member of the outreach team for the Peak District National Park Authority, devising and delivering family, community and school activities focused on the special qualities of the Peak District, its wildlife, geology, communities and landscapes. I have worked in a

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similar capacity for Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, delivering a wide range of engagement activities with a focus on habitats.

The counties that Rose will be working in are: Avon, Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire (shared with Honor), Shropshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, and Worcestershire.

Project funders and partners

