BATS & TREES

Summary

- All tree survey work should include an assessment of the potential a tree has to support bats, as even unoccupied bat roosts are protected by law.

- Any trees to be felled or in need of tree surgery, should have a bat survey carried out, if there is any possibility of bats using them as roosts.

- The best time of year to carry out work on trees with potential bat roosts is spring (mid-March to end of April), after the young are weaned and independent, or autumn (September to late October), before hibernation. However, these times are very climate related and can vary from year to year.

- If no bats are found, yet possible roost places have been identified, the best practice would be to lower the branches or trunk with possible roost cavities to the ground by rope and leave for 48 hours for any bat to escape, before carefully opening up the cavities.

- If bats are discovered when branches are removed or trees felled (particularly in winter), work must stop immediately and Natural England or the Natural Environment Team contacted. Advice will be given on how to proceed, including collecting up any bats with gloved hands and putting them into a bat box, if appropriate. It maybe useful to carry a bat box in your vehicle.

Background

A tree forms an essential part of an often complex ecosystem that provides a variety of habitats for a range of different wildlife species, including bats. Of the sixteen bat species in the UK, thirteen are known to roost in trees. Some bat species rely exclusively on trees for roost sites, whilst others use them for part of the year. All sixteen species forage in woodland and along woodland edges.

Any tree can be used as a bat roost, as long as it provides shelter, e.g. in the form of splits, cracks, holes and cavities in the trunk and branches, loose bark and ivy cover (Figure 1). Roosts can be at any height in the tree, although upper trunk and branches are probably more common.

Good Working Practice

- Plan ahead.

- Establish procedures that consider the possible presence of bats in trees (incl. in an emergency), at all times of year, by incorporating a bat check into tree surveys.

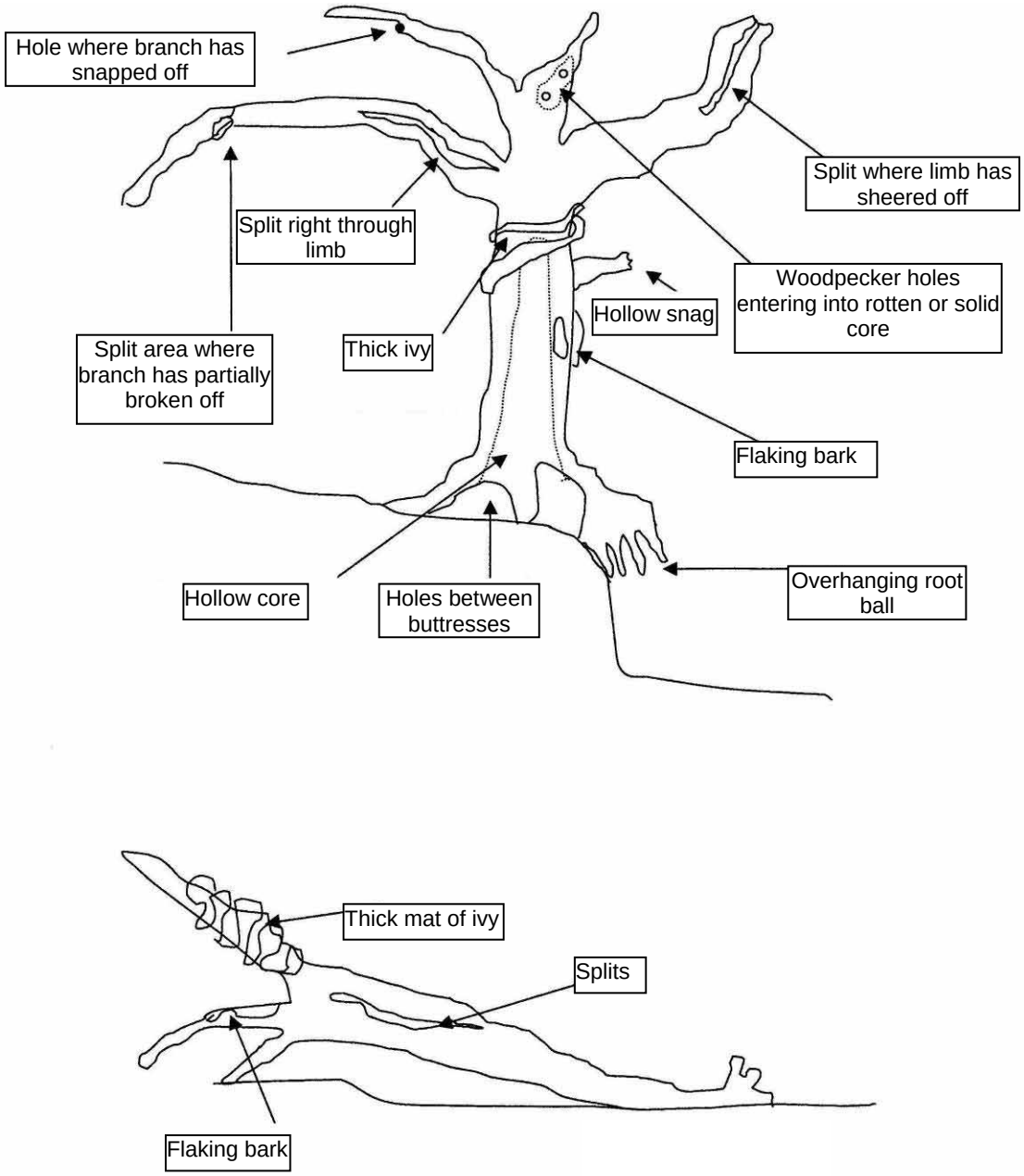
- Consider how and when tree work will be undertaken.

- Ensure the work carried out is proportional to the risk, i.e. it may be possible to make the tree safe without felling it, by reducing the crown, cutting/reducing limbs, etc., whilst retaining an important roost area, re-routing a footpath, etc.

- Aim to limit the chances of a bat or their roost(s) being damaged or destroyed and minimise any adverse impacts by carrying out tree surgery sensitively. Try wherever possible to retain any tree used by bats.

- If a bat roost is damaged it may be necessary to demonstrate to Natural England that good practice was implemented.

Figure 1: Potential bat roost sites in trees



Billington (2003)

Procedures

For all tree work:

1. Check Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) database for any known bat roosts.
2. Survey tree for bat potential and evidence of bats.
3. Consider the trees potential as a roosting habitat for bats (p.2)
4. Assess outcome of survey. Ensure recommended arboricultural work takes account of the findings.
5. Ensure contractors are aware of the potential to damage or disturb bats and their habitat and that they have a copy of this document and emergency contact details.
6. Wherever possible retain dead, dying or ivy clad trees.
7. Carry out work according to outcome of survey and/or Natural England licence.
8. Leave wood on-site if practical, for 48 hours or indefinitely as deadwood provides invertebrate food for bats and other wildlife species.
9. Consider the potential for habitat management improvement and compensate for loss of bat habitat by putting up bat boxes.
10. Keep NE and NET contact details on-site in case of any emergencies.
11. Carry thick gloves and bat box in vehicle in case you need to handle a bat.

Contact Natural England or the Natural Environment Team at any stage of the procedure if you need advice.

Surveying for bats

1. Assess tree for bat potential

HIGH POTENTIAL	MEDIUM POTENTIAL	LOW POTENTIAL
WOODPECKER HOLES	FEW SMALL CRACKS OR CREVICES	NO CRACKS/CREVICES
CRACKS/CREVICES	LOW IVY COVER	NO FLAKING BARK
LOOSE OR FLAKING BARK	DEADWOOD IN CANOPY OR STEM	LOW/NO IVY COVER
MEDIUM – DENSE IVY COVER		
DEADWOOD IN CANOPY OR STEM		
SNAGGED BRANCHES		
HOLLOW STEM OR LIMB		
HOLE B/T BUTTRESSES/HOLLOW CORE		

2. Look for evidence of bat presence

- Staining around a hole, caused by natural oils in the bats fur.
- Stains beneath a hole, caused by bat urine.
- Scratch marks around a hole, caused by bat claws.
- Bat droppings beneath a hole.
- Audible squeaking from within a hole, especially on hot days or at dusk.
- Insects (especially flies) around a hole.
- Bats emerging at dusk and returning at dawn (in summer).

Keep records of surveys and mark any trees with high bat potential or evidence of bats on map to indicate further survey work is required.

Assessing Outcome of Survey

Low/No Potential – no further survey work/no consultation required – carry out work.

Medium Potential – no further survey work/no consultation required – carry out work. Proceed with caution.

High Potential – further survey work required i.e. aerial inspection of holes/cracks/splits etc., using inspection camera/endoscope. If in summer, evening roost visit by licensed bat workers. Do not cut through any cracks, splits, holes, etc. Consider lowering limbs if possible. Take photographs. Contact the Natural Environment Team for advice.

For trees with medium – high bat potential you should always proceed with caution and follow best practice for tree surgery works.

Evidence of bats – If evidence of bats is found during a survey, e.g. bat droppings, audible squeaks, staining beneath a hole, contact the Natural Environment Team for advice, as further survey work may be required.

Finding bats

If bats are discovered when branches are removed or trees felled (particularly in winter), work must stop immediately and Natural England or the Natural Environment Team contacted. Advice will be given on how to proceed, including collecting up any bats with gloved hands and putting them into a bat box, if appropriate.

If a bat is found in a tree, then it and its roost are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010. A Natural England European Protected Species licence may also be needed.

Any bat roost found will be fully surveyed by a licensed bat worker and information about the roost (i.e. location, species of tree and bat) will be sent to Natural England and DERC.

Emergency tree work

In an emergency, i.e. public health and safety at risk, advice should be sought from Natural England on how to proceed. It would be best to get written advice (i.e. fax) if possible. A qualified/licensed person may need to be present on-site.

This advice note should be read in conjunction with the 2. Bats General Advice Note.

Please contact the Natural Environment Team for more information: 01305 224290 Email: net@dorsetcc.gov.uk or Natural England: 0300 060 2570