

## Case Study

# South Downs Barbastelle Bats - A species conservation project

### Background

The barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus* is a medium-sized bat that is easily identified; the silky fur is almost black, usually with very pale or golden brown tips to the hairs. The ears are very broad with the inner edges joined together across the forehead.

Barbastelles are widely distributed across Southern England, including sites in the South Downs, commonly occupying wooded river valleys with water present; a habitat that provides space to roost and forage. Barbastelles appear to select cracks and crevices in wood for breeding, mostly in old or damaged trees.

The Barbastelle is one of the UK's rarest mammals; few maternity roost sites are known in the UK.

In 2000, the IUCN \* red list of threatened species classified the Barbastelle as 'vulnerable'. In the most recent edition; the Barbastelle is unfortunately 'near threatened', which means the population trend is decreasing, caused by disruption to habitat, e.g. due to the loss of our woodland habitats and pesticide-use that has reduced their insect-prey making.

Now more than ever the recording and conservation of known roosting sites are vital to save the barbastelle from extinction in our local landscape.

\*reference

<http://www.iucn.org/theme/species/publications/iucn-red-list-publications>



### The project

The conservation project, based in the South Downs National Park (SDNP), ran from April 2015 to March 2016. The Bat Conservation and Research Unit (BatCRU) managed and delivered this project working closely with project partners, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), the National Trust, and Natural England (only people who are trained and hold licenses are allowed to handle bats in the UK).

The key conservation aims of the project were to:

- 1) Identify populations of the two newly discovered colonies of Barbastelle
- 2) Map core roost areas
- 3) Map colony range, core foraging areas, and flight lines
- 4) Identify any other new barbastelle colonies in the project area
- 5) Identify areas of key importance for habitat improvement, restoration or creation.

BatCRU worked with project partners and volunteers to record and map Barbastelle flight lines from two newly-discovered colonies in the SDNP. Project staff and volunteers were trained in Barbastelle monitoring techniques, thereby increasing local knowledge, skills, and capacity, which will also help to ensure sustainability of the project.

A 'Barbastelle Research Week' was held at the National Trust's Slindon Bothy to:

- Bring Barbastelle experts to the local area to learn from their knowledge and experience
- Train partner staff and volunteers in Barbastelle monitoring
- Collect more data on local Barbastelle populations

Bat flight line data was entered onto GIS and shared with project partners and the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre.

“Bats play an important role in many environments around the world. While some people think bats are pests, some bats are actually pest controllers eating thousands of insects every night. UK bats won’t bite you or suck your blood – but they will help clear the air of bloodsucking mosquitoes!”

[http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/why\\_bats\\_matter](http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/why_bats_matter).

## The outcome

This project provided important evidence to develop and support a European funding bid to Life+ Nature for woodland bat conservation in the SDNP. The data collected was analysed and written up into a project report that will be vital for targeting habitat restoration and creation work to be delivered by the planned Life+ Nature woodland bats project and will also contribute to other SDNP priority work streams such as the South Downs Forestry Partnership and Countryside Stewardship work.

The project was successfully managed and delivered by BatCRU. The core partners worked well together, with complementary strengths: The SDNPA provided strategic guidance and support; the National Trust owned one of the project sites and provided a venue for training volunteers; Natural England provided guidance and data on national bat conservation priorities; and BatCRU provided the expert bat knowledge and survey and monitoring experience.

All the outcomes and outputs of the project were either wholly or partially achieved. Those which were only partially achieved related to the challenging logistics of radio trapping, tagging and tracking bats; it is very difficult to accurately estimate how many Barbastelle bats can be tagged and tracked within a set timeframe and with a finite amount of resources. Key outputs included:

- A total of 68 Barbastelles were captured during the surveys (out of a total of 154 bats of 12 different species)
- Six Barbastelles were radio tagged and five were successfully tracked
- 15 evening trapping surveys and 10 swarming surveys were carried out
- 24 volunteers were trained in Barbastelle survey and monitoring skills and helped with the surveys (key to project sustainability).

The final cost of the project was £23,365. SDNPA committed £11,000 in cash match funding, the National Trust £9,900 (£6,400 in-kind and £3,500 cash) and Chichester District Council (CDC) awarded a grant of £7,750 from the Environmental Grants Fund. The project represented good value for money (especially considering the challenging nature of the survey and monitoring work). BatCRU carried out bat survey, monitoring and training of volunteers at a reduced daily rate compared to the usual commercial rate (benchmarked against other professional bat survey companies).

## The future

Sustainability plans for this project are to secure further funding and volunteer resources for Barbastelle monitoring through the planned Life+ Nature woodland bats project. The funding bid submitted in September 2015 narrowly failed to score the required points. It was subsequently rewritten and resubmitted in September 2016. A decision is expected June/July 2017.

On an on-going basis, the data gathered will contribute to other SDNP priority work streams such as the South Downs Forestry Partnership and Countryside Stewardship work.

For further information please contact:

SDNPA  
[www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk) | [facebook](#) | [twitter](#) | [Ranger twitter](#) | [youtube](#)

Bat Conservation Trust  
<http://www.bats.org.uk/>



Source: Hampshirebatgroup