



Information Sheet 8 – Bats & Swifts in Buildings

(Please see Guidance Overleaf)

Contact Details.

For further information contact:

Town Planning & Building Control

Suite 631 Europort, Gibraltar

Tel: (350) 20075483

Fax: (350) 20074086

OR

The Department of the Environment

Duke of Kent House

Line Wall Road

Gibraltar

Tel: (350) 20048450

Fax: (350) 20059833



Bats and Swifts
form an important
part of our urban
wildlife and have
come to depend
on us for their
survival.
They are
fascinating and
useful animals that
need our protection.



Bats and Swifts in Buildings



Bats and Swifts in Buildings

Contents

page

Bats and Swifts in Buildings 4

The Bats 5

The Swifts 5

Flying Insecticides 6

Dangers to Bats 7

Building Work 7

Timing of Operations 7

Alterations to Roosts 8

Pest Control 9

Rodents 9

Dangers to Swifts 10

Reroofing 10

Bats, Swifts and The Law 11

Other Urban Wildlife 12

Where to go for Help 13

Appendix 14

Bats & Swifts in Buildings

The old buildings of the Town of Gibraltar were constructed using traditional methods, largely with timber beams, leaving gaps under the eaves which served for ventilation. This avoided damp in winter and in summer provided a means of cooling.

These spaces under the eaves have long been used by Gibraltar's urban wildlife, notably the swifts and the bats. Swifts have also long made use of holes in the old walls of the city for nesting.

Present day buildings have no such access for these species, so that whenever old buildings are replaced they are lost. In addition, re-roofing operations also cause the loss of bat and swift sites and, if carried out during the breeding season, will cause distress and agonising death to many of these animals, especially the young.





The Bats

World wide there are 18 families of bats of which only three are represented in Gibraltar. Gibraltar's bats are listed on page 14.

Of these the three pipistrelles (which are very difficult to distinguish from each other) and the European Free-tailed Bat are the most likely to use buildings as roosts or nurseries where they raise their young.

The Swifts

Two species of swift nest in built-up areas in

Gibraltar, the dark, almost black Swift *Apus apus* and the paler, dark brown Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*. Another way in which they differ is that the Pallid Swift has a larger white throat patch. The Pallid Swift, which as well as buildings uses in cliffs and caves for nesting, is more common in Gibraltar than the Swift which is restricted to human structures (and, exceptionally, cavities in palm trees!).

Both species spend the winter in tropical Africa. Pallid Swifts return to Gibraltar as early as February, while common Swifts do not appear until April. Both species build small nests out of windblown material, largely feathers. Common

Swifts raise one brood of two to three young and are gone by mid July. Pallid Swifts generally raise two broods and may still be around in October. Swifts may spend three years on the wing continuously between fledging and nesting. They will feed, mate and even sleep on the wing. The masses of swifts wheeling over the rooftops and chasing and screaming through our narrow streets are a feature of Gibraltar in the summer months.



Flying Insecticides

Gibraltar's swifts and bats feed exclusively on insects, spiders and similar creatures which they always catch on the wing. Calculations based on scientific research have indicated that Gibraltar's approximately five thousand pairs of swifts consume many millions of insects weekly.

In the evening when the swifts return to their roosts, the bats take over, feeding on nocturnal insects, notably moths.

Both swifts and bats therefore have the beneficial effect of removing many millions of potential pests, including mosquitos, between them. They are

clean animals and there is no risk of their bringing disease into households.

Bats will only bite rarely and then only if touched or picked up. They should be left alone.

Dangers to Bats

Building Work

Building work can result in the total loss of bat roosts and disturbance to or death of the bats. Therefore much of this damage can be avoided if works operations are correctly timed and planned, though the loss of the bat roost is sometimes unavoidable. In such cases a licence is required under the

Nature Protection Ordinance.

However, experience has shown that bats will accept considerable changes to the structure of a particular building without abandoning the roost site.

Nevertheless, efforts should always be made to allow the bats continuing access.

Timing of Operations

Bats are at their most vulnerable in buildings during the summer months when numbers may be gathered together and young bats unable to fly may be present.

The species most commonly occurring in

houses, the pipistrelle, is a highly gregarious small bat which uses roofs for breeding during the summer and, in general, the majority of the animals will disperse during the autumn. Therefore it is of vital importance that operations to known breeding sites should be timed to avoid the months of June, July and August. The best time of the years for building or reroofing operations where bats are present are early spring and autumn. At these times of the years the bats will be able to feed on most nights and may be active or torpid during the day, depending on the weather conditions, but will not be breeding. Although bats may be

inadvertently or deliberately killed by workmen, the main problems are disturbance and the permanent or temporary loss of a hibernation site. As the bats in the building will already have been disturbed, the most appropriate solution is to collect any torpid bats into a box and call GONHS immediately so that they can either be released at dusk or moved to another part of the same building.

Alterations to Roosts

In some cases, such as demolition, the loss of the roost site is inevitable. For example, in Engineer House, demolished in the 1970s, 2000 pipistrelle bats lost their roost. But during repairs it is often possible for appropriate

access holes and roost sites to be left so that the bats can re-occupy their roost at a later date.

Pest control

Bats can be found in all kinds of buildings, usually in the roof but also in other areas. All professional surveyors, particularly those involved in any form of pest control, should be aware that any roof or building is a potential bat roost and should therefore check for the presence of bat droppings or bats.

Rodents

Bats are of course not attracted to rodent baits, so these present no hazard from this point of view.

However, there is a possibility that bats, particularly babies, could fall into open trays of bait or poorly sited trays of contact rodenticide and accumulate poison on their fur. They could then be poisoned when this is groomed off. If the bait has been placed in position by a professional pest control operative, the possibility of such occurrences are remote, but cases have been recorded where bat droppings have been misidentified as rodent droppings and open trays of poison have been placed directly under the bat roost site. Such practices are both undesirable and ineffective and should not be allowed to

continue. It is, of course, illegal deliberately to attempt to poison bats.

Dangers to Swifts

Reroofing

Swifts of either species will be occupying nests between February and October, with *both* species in residence in their respective areas from April to July. Reroofing operations should therefore be carried out only after a preliminary survey to determine whether the site is used by swifts. Both swift species may nest under eaves, and, especially the Swift,

also in holes in walls. They may enter the nest opening either from the side or from below, so that overhanging roofs are favoured.

It is an offence to disturb a nesting bird, its nest, eggs or young, so that forward planning is called for when reroofing is required. If it is essential to carry out the work during the nesting season a licence is required under the Nature Protection Ordinance. It will usually be requested that steps are taken to discourage the nest from being occupied on the swifts return from winter quarters in Africa.

The Development &

Planning Commission will also strongly recommend that new roofs and new buildings should be constructed so as to provide nest sites for swifts.

These nest sites may be in the form of hollow blocks with a side entrance built into the walls at least 3 metres from the ground (Figure

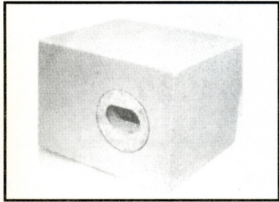


FIGURE 1

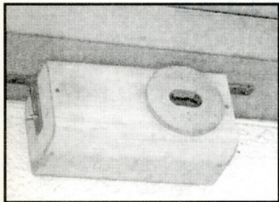


FIGURE 2

1), or suspended under eaves (figure 2), special Marley Roof Tiles (Figure 3) or any other arrangement which allows a vertical or horizontal access to an area of suitable dimensions (Figure 4).

These may be as little as 25cm long by 10cm wide and 10cm high.

Access to larger areas

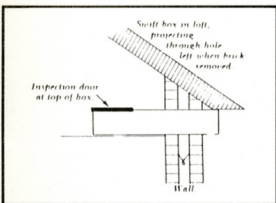


FIGURE 3

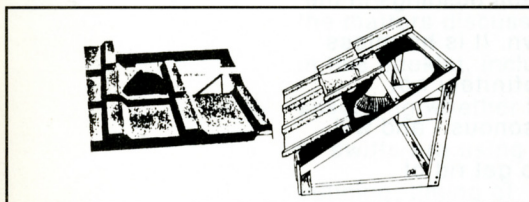


FIGURE 4

under eaves is also suitable. A roofing project in Gavino's Passage incorporated inexpensive purpose-built cavities at roof level that were quickly adopted by Pallid Swifts.

Bats, Swifts and The Law

All bats and swifts are protected by law in Gibraltar (Nature Protection Ordinance, 1991) as they are throughout Europe.

The law protects the swifts, their nests and eggs and prohibits any disturbance also to nesting birds on or near the nest. This will include the erecting of scaffolding ladders, etc.

on the side of buildings near swift nests which may interfere with the swift's access to the nesting site.

The law also gives

special protection to bats because of their roosting requirements. Therefore it is an offence intentionally to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, including houses and out-buildings.

Offences under the Nature Protection Ordinance may attract a fine of up to £2000 or 2 years' imprisonment.

Other Urban Wildlife

Gibraltar has other urban wildlife. The feral (domestic) pigeon is a pest in many areas and in fact displaces swifts from some nest sites. Yellow-legged Gulls also

nest on buildings. They too are considered pests and may even prey directly on bats and swifts.

The House Sparrow is a common nester in roofs and walls and a popular bird. The glossy black Spotless Starling also nests in buildings, and can often be heard calling from television aeriels. In winter the Black Redstart is often to be seen on rooftops. Females are brown with rust-red tails. Males are black, with white wing patches and red tails.

The Moorish Gecko is the only reptile likely to inhabit buildings in the Town. It is harmless - definitely not poisonous - and will help get rid of cockroaches which it

likes to eat. Moorish geckos are mainly inactive in winter, active by day in spring and autumn, and totally nocturnal in the summer.

Where to go for Help

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) is the body responsible for advising Government and the general public on nature conservation in Gibraltar. It is able to offer help and advice on the matters discussed in this booklet, including assessing whether bats or swifts are using a building, timing of

operations, legal aspects, and in constructing or obtaining suitable nesting sites for swifts and access to bat roosts.

**GONHS can be contacted on
Tel. 72639,
Fax 74022 or at
P.O. Box 843,
Gibraltar.**

This booklet is published through funds provided by Her Majesty's Government Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Text by Tony Santana and John Cortes
Designed & Printed in Gibraltar
by 123 Printers.
123 Main Street, Tel. 42123.

Appendix

Species of Bats found in Gibraltar

The Horseshoe Bat Family RHINOLOPHIDAE

Lesser Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

Extinct in northern and central Europe. Greatly endangered in Gibraltar. Causes include disturbance and destruction of roosts, and in other areas, the use of insecticides.

The Vesper Bat Family VESPERTILIONIDAE

Long-eared Bat *Plecotus auritus*

Common and widespread in Spain. Greatly endangered in some parts of Europe due to timber treatment with chemicals. Very rare in Gibraltar.

Schreiber's Bat *Miniopterus schreibersi*

Extinct in France and Switzerland. In Gibraltar is endangered as it has declined greatly in recent years. Specific roost protection is required.

Greater Mouse-eared Bat *Myotis myotis*

Greatly endangered in Gibraltar, threatened with extinction. Causes include disturbance and destruction of roosts. Local populations have declined by 90% in the last 30 years.

Pipistrelles *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, *P. savii*, *P. ruhli*

The smallest European bats, locally predominantly a house dwelling species. Common throughout Gibraltar, but has declined significantly over the past twenty years. Protection of nursery roosts is necessary.

Serotine *Eptesicus serotinus*

Vagrant to Gibraltar.

Greater Noctule Bat *Nyctalus lasiopterus*

Vagrant to Gibraltar.

Barbastrelle *Barbastrellus barbastrellus*

Vagrant to Gibraltar.

The Free-tailed Bat Family MOLOSSIDAE

European Free-tailed Bat *Tadarida teniotis*

Very little is known about the status of this species. A rock dwelling bat found in crevices of sea cliffs, caves and buildings.



© The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society 1996

Jew's Gate, Upper Rock, Nature Reserve

P.O. Box 843, Gibraltar. Tel. 72639, Fax 74022

GONHS is a charity dedicated to researching
and conserving wildlife and the environment.

Designed & Printed in Gibraltar by 123 Printers. Tel. 42123