

GUIDELINES: on care of 'grounded' bats



Bats are protected, so it is normally illegal to keep healthy, flying bats, and a licence is needed to handle them. However, anyone who finds a bat which is obviously ill or injured may take care of it in whatever way is most humane and practical with the objective of its rehabilitation to the wild. If it is obviously seriously ill, your local vet will be able to euthanase the bat.

For any bat maintained in captivity:

It is extremely important to have details of who found the bat, exactly where it was found and the circumstances.

The most important initial care for the bat is to provide water and warmth.

In all circumstances **please contact your local Bat Group** as an expert may be needed to advise; for example puncture wounds may be present on the body and can be extremely small but may still need expert medical attention. Your local Bat Group may be experienced in the care of grounded bats, and will be glad of the records.

Initial nursing

Grounded bats are likely to be injured or otherwise incapacitated. Expert attention should be sought immediately. Do not put a grounded bat outside without proper assessment of the situation, and never put it into the loft, which may be totally unsuitable. Use gloves, or a cloth, when handling, as frightened wild animals may try to bite.

British bats are small and can be confused with baby bats (which are born around June-July) which sometimes become separated from their mothers. Baby bats have no fur or very short fur and should be referred to the local bat group immediately.

Shock and dehydration can be fatal but here are a few guidelines which will help a grounded bat survive.

Fluid

It is very important to offer water, on a small, clean paintbrush or cotton bud; or on a plastic teaspoon; this may be enough on its own to revive the bat. It is best not to put a pot of water in with the bat.

Food

Bats need to be warm before feeding, they may therefore need warming up. Mealworms (from pet food shops) are the best food for bats but are often difficult to obtain; small chunks of meaty cat food are an alternative. Bats usually need hand feeding at first. It is probably best to pass them to an experienced bat worker.

Release

If there are no injuries, the bat should be released as soon as it is able to fly well enough. This must be close to where it was found, at the same spot if possible and in mild weather at dusk. The sooner a fit bat is released the better its chance of survival. Do not throw the bat, ensure it is warm and place it in your open palm and hold it up.

Temporary housing

1. Place the bat in a small, secure container, with no gaps bigger than 5mm (1/4 in). A large margarine or ice-cream container, or a shoe-box is useful in an emergency. Line the container with kitchen paper, or soft cloth, for the bat to hang on to. **Make sure there are adequate air-holes.**
2. Keep the bat in a warm place, where it can use all its energy for recovery. A dark airing cupboard is ideal.
3. Handle the bat as little as possible initially, and keep it somewhere quiet. Do not expose to extremes of temperature, nor movement which may exacerbate its condition.
4. If the bat is to be kept longer than a few hours, water should be offered regularly - see 'Fluid' section.

Dead bats

Bats in torpor can be mistaken for dead: ensure the bat is dead first.

Please send any freshly dead bats for analysis to: Rabies Diagnostics, Central Veterinary Laboratory, New Haw, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 3NB, and enclose as much information on the bat you can (i.e.: where it was found, when, the situation, its condition, species, etc). Pack the bat in a tightly sealed container with absorbent material sealed in leak-proof container or bag placed in a rigid container surrounded by absorbent material. Mark the package "Pathological Specimen; Handle with Care" and a large red R. Contact your local bat group if you have any worries as they may have arrangement regarding collection for delivery to CVL.

Further caring

For more detailed advice on the care of sick or injured bats please refer to your local bat group or 'Bat Care News', a quarterly newsletter about, for, and by bat carers - available from Maggie Brown (West Yorkshire Bat Group, 10 North Avenue, Otley, Leeds, LS21 1AJ).

For further information about bats or the contact for your local bat group, please contact:
The Bat Conservation Trust, 15 Cloisters House,
8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4BG.
Tel: 0171 627 2629. Fax: 0171 627 2628.
E-mail: enquiries@bats.org.uk. Website: www.bats.org.uk

Northern Ireland Bat Group

Telephone 028 9031 8832

