

Preliminary Visual Assessment for bats and breeding birds
Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 3QB
October 2023

A report by

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Natural England licence no: 2022-10537-CL17-BAT

Report details

Site address:	Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 3QB
Grid reference:	SX464541
Survey date:	10 th October 2023
Surveyors:	Amy Palmer BSc (Hons), AMRSB, Ecologist (Natural England licence no: 2022-10537-CL17-BAT)
Report date:	20 th October 2023
Report author:	Amy Palmer (Hons), AMRSB
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Report Reference:	WOR-4188

Declaration of compliance

BS 42020:2013

This study has been undertaken in accordance with British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity, Code of practice for planning and development.

Code of Professional Conduct

The information which we have prepared is true, and has been prepared and provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. We confirm that the opinions expressed are our true and professional bona fide opinions.

Validity of survey data and report

The findings of this report are valid for 12 months from the date of survey. If work has not commenced within this period, an updated survey by a suitably qualified ecologist will be required.

Table of contents

Non-technical summary	4
Assessment for bats	4
Assessment for breeding birds	4
Biodiversity enhancement.....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. Site description.....	5
1.2. Proposed works.....	6
1.3. Survey aims	6
2. Methods.....	7
2.1. Bat roost assessment.....	7
2.2. Breeding birds	8
2.3. Surveyors	8
3. Results.....	9
3.1. Bat roost description.....	9
3.2. Breeding birds	10
4. Assessment	11
4.1. Survey constraints.....	11
4.2. Assessment for bats.....	11
4.3. Assessment for breeding birds	11
4.4. Legislation	11
5. Recommendations and mitigation	13
5.1. Roosting bats	13
5.2. Breeding birds	13
6. References	14

Non-technical summary

Western Ecology has been commissioned to complete a preliminary visual assessment for bats and breeding birds of the building at Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 3QB. Proposed works are to remove a metal gantry from the building.

Prior to works commencing, a survey has been commissioned to ensure that the proposed works do not adversely affect bats and breeding birds. The survey will:

- Identify the past and/or current use of the site by bats and breeding birds;
- Assess the likely impact of the proposed development on bats and breeding birds;
- Provide a basis upon which to propose further survey work or mitigation, should they be affected by the development.

The survey was completed on 10th October 2023 with an air temperature of 17°C, force 1 wind, and 50% cloud cover.

Assessment for bats

No bats, or evidence of bats (such as droppings), were found associated with the structures surveyed. The structure has been assessed as having negligible suitability to support roosting bats. Works can proceed with negligible risk to bats and does not require a method statement for bats or a European Protected Species licence. It should be noted that in any building, individual bats could occasionally roost or move in at any time, and recommendations are made within Section 5.

Assessment for breeding birds

A disused pigeon nest was found atop one of the metal support beams of the gantry.

Any activities affecting these habitats should be completed during the period September to February inclusive, outside the accepted bird nesting season. If this is not practicable, within **24 to 48 hours** prior to the start of works these habitats should be thoroughly inspected by a suitably qualified person prior to disturbance or removal. If nesting birds are found, all activities likely to damage the immediate area should be delayed until chicks have fledged.

Biodiversity enhancement

Simple biodiversity enhancement is recommended in section 6.

1. Introduction

Western Ecology has been commissioned to complete a preliminary visual assessment for bats and breeding birds of a metal gantry at Stonehouse Barracks, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 3QB.

This survey has been prepared in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust's "Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines" (Collins, 2023).

1.1. Site description

The site is located in south-west Plymouth, Devon, approximately 1.5km from the city centre (Plan 1). The site is situated in an urban area surrounded by residential and commercial buildings, with scattered street plantings and lines of trees. Small areas of amenity grassland and wooded areas are found further afield approximately 500m north-west and 600m east of the site. The River Tamar estuary is found approximately 325m south-west of the site. The surrounding urban area will be largely lit at night and provides limited foraging and commuting habitats for bats.



Plan 1. The location of the building surveyed.



Plan 2. The building surveyed at this site (blue line)

1.2. Proposed works

The building will be the subject of a planning application to remove the metal gantry.

1.3. Survey aims

To ensure that the proposed development does not adversely affect bats and breeding birds, the survey will:

- Identify the past and/or current use of the site by bats and breeding birds;
- Assess the likely impact of the proposed development on bats and breeding birds;
- Provide a basis upon which to propose further survey work or mitigation, should they be affected by the development.

2. Methods

2.1. Bat roost assessment

All areas of the building were carefully examined for signs of use by bats, with the aid of torches, by a suitable qualified and licenced ecologist. This included a search for bat droppings, feeding remains, urine stains and polished/scratched woodwork. A search was also made for individual bats, as well as potential access points and cavities capable of providing a roosting space for bats.

This survey method complies with guidelines produced by the Bat Conservation Trust (Collins, 2023).

The assessment was completed on 10th October 2023 with an air temperature of 17°C, force 1 wind, and 50% cloud cover.

As part of the assessment, it is required that the buildings are valued for their suitability to support roosting bats, irrelevant of any signs of roosting. This is due to the highly cryptic nature of bats, in particular those species that roost in crevice habitat associated with roof coverings, fascia, soffit, bargeboards, flashing, feather boarding and stonework.

Buildings are valued as follows (Collins et al, 2023):

- No suitability – No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices / suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).
- Negligible suitability - No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
- Low suitability - A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats).
- Moderate suitability – A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
- High suitability - A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.

A data search was not considered appropriate due to the highly mobile nature of bats. It is assumed that all species of bat that are present in Devon could be active within the vicinity which includes Barbastelle, Serotine, Noctule, Lesser Horseshoe, Greater Horseshoe, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Nathusius Pipistrelle (very rare), Whiskered, Brandt's, Natterer's, Daubenton's, Brown Long-eared and possibly Grey Long-eared.

It is very unlikely when considering the location and structure being assessed that a data search would provide further meaningful information.

2.2. Breeding birds

The buildings and associated areas were searched for evidence of nesting bird species.

2.3. Surveyors

The survey was completed by Amy Palmer.

Amy Palmer has three years of experience carrying out ecology surveys for ecological consultancies including Western Ecology. She has 5 years of bat survey experience both with local bat groups and consultancies and holds a Level 1 Class Licence which permits the surveying of bats using artificial light.

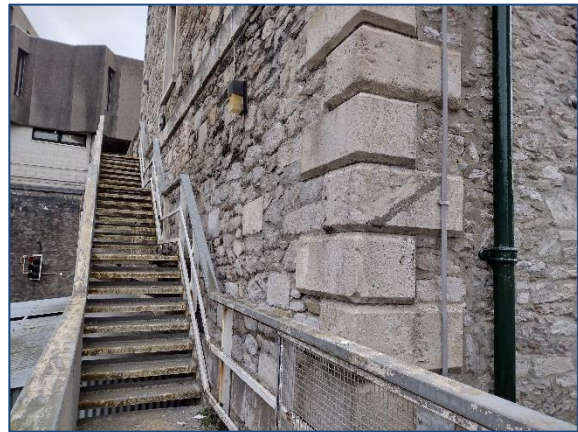
3. Results

3.1. Bat roost description

The site consists of a metal gantry walkway fixed to the northern elevation of the stone-built barracks building. There were no bats, or signs that they have used the building in areas where proposed works will take place. Large gaps were present behind the gantry but did not provide a suitable crevice for roosting bats. The stone walls were well pointed with a single gap just above the handrail to the west, which was closely inspected and had no bats or evidence of bats associated with it.



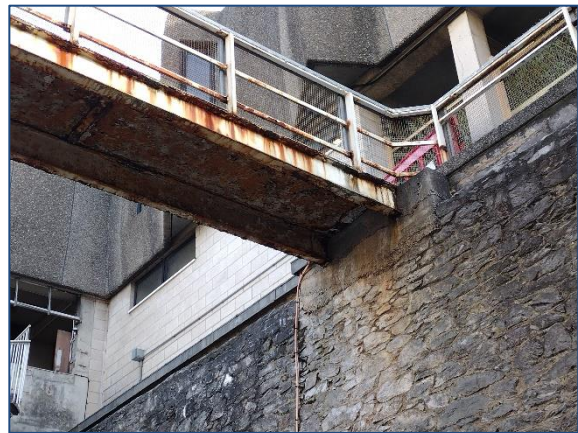
Metal gantry (north elevation)



Metal gantry (looking east)



Metal gantry (looking west)



Metal gantry and adjacent wall



Large gap behind gantry



Gantry fixed to wall and bird nest

3.2. Breeding birds

A disused pigeon nest was found atop one of the metal support beams of the gantry.

4. Assessment

4.1. Survey constraints

The survey was completed at a suitable time for the inspection of buildings and structures for bat roosts (Collins, 2023), and areas to be searched had not been cleaned/swept prior to survey. All areas of these buildings were accessible, and a full and complete initial assessment was made.

It is the professional opinion of the surveying ecologist that this survey provides sufficient information in relation to bats and breeding birds to allow the decision-maker to determine the planning permission. Further survey work would not make any material difference to the information provided.

4.2. Assessment for bats

No bats, or evidence of bats (such as droppings), were found associated with the structures surveyed. The structure has been assessed as having negligible suitability to support roosting bats. Works can proceed with negligible risk to bats and does not require a method statement for bats or a European Protected Species licence.

4.3. Assessment for breeding birds

A disused pigeon nest was found atop one of the metal support beams of the gantry.

Any activities affecting these habitats should be completed during the period September to February inclusive, outside the accepted bird nesting season. If this is not practicable, within **24 to 48 hours** prior to the start of works these habitats should be thoroughly inspected by a suitably qualified person prior to disturbance or removal. If nesting birds are found, all activities likely to damage the immediate area should be delayed until chicks have fledged.

4.4. Legislation

Bats

Bat species and their breeding or resting places (roosts) are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. They are identified as European Protected Species. Under these laws it is an offence to:

- capture, kill, disturb or injure bats (on purpose or by not taking enough care);
- damage or destroy a breeding or resting place (even accidentally);
- obstruct access to their resting or sheltering places (on purpose or by not taking enough care); or
- possess, sell, control or transport live or dead bats, or parts of them.

Seven species of bat are listed as being of principal importance, in the Secretary of State's opinion, for the purposes of conserving biodiversity. Under section 41 (England) of the

NERC Act (2006) there is a need for these species to be taken into consideration by a public body when performing any of its functions with a view to conserving biodiversity.

These are Barbastelle, Bechstein's, Noctule, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared, Greater Horseshoe and Lesser Horseshoe and are the subject of National and Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Activities that can affect bats include (from GOV.UK):

- renovating, converting or demolishing a building
- cutting down or removing branches from a mature tree
- repairing or replacing a roof
- repointing brickwork
- insulating or converting a loft
- installing lighting in a roost, or outside if it lights up the entrance to the roost
- removing commuting habitats such as hedgerows, watercourses or woodland
- changing or removing their foraging areas
- using insecticide
- treating timber

Breeding birds

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) from being killed, injured or captured whilst their nests and eggs are protected from being damaged, destroyed or taken. Birds which are listed under Schedule 1 of the Act are given additional protection against disturbance.

Fifty-nine species of bird are listed as species "of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity".

5. Recommendations and mitigation

5.1. Roosting bats

Works can proceed with negligible risk to bats and does not require a method statement for bats or a European Protected Species licence.

It should be noted that in any building, individual bats could occasionally roost or move in at any time, and we recommend the following approach:

- Prior to the start of works, all site staff will be briefed that bats can move into a building at any time and may be encountered during works.
- If bats are found unexpectedly during works, work should stop immediately and Natural England (0300 060 3900) or Western Ecology (0800 622 6828) be informed.
- Any bats found that are exposed and vulnerable should be protected from the elements and predators (particularly cats). You may need to contain the bat in a shoe box or similar sized container (with holes punched in the lid). You should not handle bats with bare hands.

5.2. Breeding birds

A disused pigeon nest was found atop one of the metal support beams of the gantry.

Any activities affecting these habitats should be completed during the period September to February inclusive, outside the accepted bird nesting season. If this is not practicable, within **24 to 48 hours** prior to the start of works these habitats should be thoroughly inspected by a suitably qualified person prior to disturbance or removal. If nesting birds are found, all activities likely to damage the immediate area should be delayed until chicks have fledged.

6. References

Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edition). The Bat Survey Trust, London. ISBN-978-1-7395126-0-6

Environmental Act 2021: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>