

BaTML Factsheet: Organising bat walks and talks; guidance notes for bat workers

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Introduction

Delivering a bat event to the public makes an important contribution to bat conservation in that it provides opportunities to fascinate and at the same time dispel myths/prejudices. Many recruits into bat work experience these amazing mammals for the first time during such events. It may seem obvious, however many good intentions have been ruined due to poor planning. This factsheet provides some useful hints and tips for people engaged in organising such activities.

Before the event

- Consider the time of year carefully.
- Check sunset time and plan with this in mind.
- Check no other local events are on at same time.
- Consider which night of week is most appropriate.
- Ensure that your site is suitable and safe.
- Make local residents aware of your intentions.
- Think about an appropriate charge for the event. Consider making a donation to a local bat group.
- Think about your maximum attendance bearing in mind the site/facilities and ensure you have enough helpers to handle the numbers involved.
- Publicity/Press Releases. Don't give full details. This ensures attendees have to book to find out the exact arrangements. By doing this you are in control. Too many people attending an event can be every bit as disastrous as too few.
- Booking system. Take contact telephone numbers in case the event has to be cancelled. Check number of adults/children in the party.
- When booking ensure people are made aware of the arrangements (i.e. bring warm clothes / torch / sorry no dogs / start time '...until late' / meeting point / children accompanied / cost).
- Health & Safety. Carry out a risk assessment prior to the event. Visit the site in an evening.
- Check the site for bats prior to the night of the walk. Where are bats foraging? What time are the first ones seen?

Equipment Check List

First Aid Kit / Mobile Phone
Bat Detectors (spare batteries) / Headphones
Spotlights / Hand Torch / Spare Torches
Leaflets & Information (i.e. BCT/Local Bat Group)
Website Details (i.e. BCT/Local Bat Group)

During the talk/slide show

- Time the talk so it finishes before sunset. That way if you over run or start late you have a buffer.
- Keep the slide show short (45 minutes max).
- Revise your subject and remind yourself of all the relevant bat facts you would expect to know.
- Explain what the plans are for the evening.
- Don't be afraid to involve the audience. Don't be afraid to try something different.
- Make sure any wires from projectors etc are gaffer taped down.
- Have a drink on hand so you don't 'dry up'
- Recordings of bat calls add another dimension.
- Don't be afraid of not having all the answers to all the questions (no one does!). But do follow up on anything you can answer after a bit of research.
- Avoid using slides of people holding bats with bare hands.
- Don't give Rabies a high profile. By all means mention it in passing. Be able to answer basic questions accurately. If unsure about anything refer people to BCT website. Don't 'wing it'
- Bat Games/Crafts. There are lots, use your imagination. Bat & Moth done properly works very well. Get the adults to join in as well.

Tips on the walk

- In large groups always have a helper at the front of the party and one at the very back. Check all attendees have access to a torch and explain that these are not for viewing bats but for safety.
- Go to furthest point first whilst the light is good and work back or follow a circular route.
- Look for early emerging bats first (i.e. Noctule, pipistrelle spp), then finish with Daubenton's.
- If bat detectors are handed out ask that they are all tuned to the same frequency so you have a better chance of identifying any passing bats.
- If using a detector yourself use headphones so you can adjust your frequencies without being influenced by other detectors.
- Although bats do not seem to mind a bit of noise, opportunities are increased if people are quiet.
- When using torches don't shine at roost exits. Foraging Daubenton's seem less bothered by red filtered light, albeit white light is perfectly OK.
- Make sure that everyone sees bats during the evening by concentrating on those who haven't.