



# Bats in St Peter's Churchyard



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## Introduction

As part of Stoke Fleming's 'Living Churchyard Project', initiated by the Friends of St Peter's<sup>1</sup>, a survey has been undertaken of key elements of the flora and fauna present in the churchyard. At the time of writing there have been surveys of wildflowers, birds, insects, grasses and moths. Plans are also in place to survey the numerous types of lichen in the churchyard.

This is a report of a survey of bats, conducted in conjunction with the Devon Wildlife Trust's Bat Survey<sup>2</sup>.

For 3 nights from the 8<sup>th</sup> September

2023 sophisticated recording equipment, loaned by the Devon Wildlife Trust, was placed in very close proximity to the churchyard. The results were uploaded to a computer server run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) which runs cutting-edge sound identification of bats and other nocturnal wildlife and the results were then sent back to us.

For those who are interested, the following link takes you to a more detailed display of the total survey results for 2023: [https://app.bto.org/acoustic-pipeline/results/project/project\\_results\\_choice.jsp?code=DWT](https://app.bto.org/acoustic-pipeline/results/project/project_results_choice.jsp?code=DWT)

The following pages provide details of the survey we conducted at St. Peter's Church, Stoke Fleming.

Bear in mind that bats can have a range of up to 10km per night, so this survey represents the whole of Stoke Fleming and surrounds.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sf-livingchurchyard.uk>

<sup>2</sup> [www.devonwildlifetrust.org/devon-bat-survey-2023](http://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/devon-bat-survey-2023)

## Summary of Results

English & Scientific Name	Confident <sup>3</sup>	Low Confidence <sup>4</sup>	Total Observations
Common Pipistrelle [Pipistrellus pipistrellus]	882	288	1,170
Soprano Pipistrelle [Pipistrellus pygmaeus]	173	77	250
Daubenton's Bat [Myotis daubentonii]	31	7	38
Whiskered Bat [Myotis mystacinus]	33	2	35
Noctule [Nyctalus noctula]	10	13	23
Grey Long-eared Bat [Plecotus austriacus]	6	16	22
Brown Long-eared Bat [Plecotus auritus]	5	4	9
Barbastelle [Barbastella barbastellus]	6	1	7
Natterer's Bat [Myotis nattereri]	3	3	6
Lesser Horseshoe Bat [Rhinolophus hipposideros]	5		5
Nathusius' Pipistrelle [Pipistrellus nathusii]	3	2	5
Serotine [Eptesicus serotinus]	1	4	5
Leisler's Bat [Nyctalus leisleri]	1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,153</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>1,576</b>

Out of a total of 1,576 individual observations, 73% had a confidence rating of 50% or more.

We recorded 13 individual bat species which, considering that the total number of species identified across the whole Devon survey was 17, is a high number. In fact, there are only 18 species of bat in the whole UK, 17 of which are known to be breeding here. They represent almost a quarter of our mammal species. <sup>5</sup>

Three quarters of our observations were of the Common Pipistrelle which is the most widespread species in the UK, weighing a mere 5 grams (same as a 20p piece) and can eat 3,000 tiny insects in a night.

<sup>3</sup> Confidence level of 50%+

<sup>4</sup> Confidence level <50%

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/what-are-bats/uk-bats>

## Rare species

Four of the 11 mammal species native to Britain classified as being at imminent risk of extinction are bats.

Perhaps the most exciting finding was of the number of rare species we recorded:

**Grey Long-eared bat** – One of the rarest bats, there are thought to be only around 1,000 grey long-eared bats in England and the species has suffered through habitat loss, with unimproved grasslands, its favourite foraging habitat, declining by 92% in the last century, according to Bat Conservation Trust. The grey long-eared bat is so vulnerable it was made a target species for the 'Back from the Brink'<sup>6</sup> project, an ambitious nationwide partnership to save some of England's most threatened species from extinction.

**Barbastelle** - The barbastelle is very rare, found in southern and central England and Wales. Very few breeding sites are currently known in the UK - a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species – meaning a conservation priority.

**Lesser horse-shoe bat** - This species has shown a marked decline in numbers and distribution, although there is evidence of a recent increase in Wales. The lesser horseshoe bat is rare in the British Isles and is confined to Wales, western England and western Ireland. The decline of the lesser horseshoe bat is attributable to several factors, including disturbance to roosts and intensive agricultural practices.

**Nathusius' pipistrelle** - first recorded in Great Britain in the Shetland Islands in 1940. It was initially regarded as a vagrant, but its status was subsequently upgraded to winter visiting migrant as records accumulated, and since the 1990s it has been known to breed in the UK. A small number of maternity colonies are known both in England and Northern Ireland.




**Serotine** - The serotine is one of our less common species, occurring mainly south of a line drawn from The Wash to parts of South Wales. The decline in serotine numbers is probably due to loss of feeding habitat where large insects such as chafers can be found. As the serotine roosts almost entirely in buildings, it is subject to the effects of building work and the use of toxic chemicals in remedial timber treatment.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://naturebftb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/25422\\_BftB\\_outcomes\\_Grey-Long-eared-Bat-v3.pdf](https://naturebftb.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/25422_BftB_outcomes_Grey-Long-eared-Bat-v3.pdf)

## Brief overview of the recorded species.

The following is from Bat Conservation Trust website<sup>7</sup>. I recommend it as a source of detailed information on the habitats, diets, life cycle etc. of each species.

	<p><i>Barbastelle</i></p> <p>A rare and distinctive bat with a pug-like face and large, wide ears.</p> <p>Scientific name: <i>Barbastella barbastellus</i></p>
	<p><i>Brown long-eared bat</i></p> <p>This bat's huge ears provide exceptionally sensitive hearing - it can even hear a ladybird walking on a leaf!</p> <p>Scientific name: <i>Plecotus auritus</i></p>
	<p><i>Common pipistrelle</i></p> <p>Pipistrelles are the commonest British bats, weighing around 5 grams (same as a 20p piece). A single pipistrelle can eat 3,000 tiny insects in just one night!</p> <p>Scientific name: <i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i></p>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bats.org.uk>





*Daubenton's bat*

Known as the 'water bat', Daubenton's bats fish insects from the water's surface with their large feet or tail.

Scientific name: *Myotis daubentonii*



*Grey long-eared bat*

This bat is generally a little larger than the brown long-eared bat and has a dark face.

Scientific name: *Plecotus austriacus*



*Leisler's bat*

Also known as the 'hairy-armed bat', it's similar to the noctule but smaller with longer fur.

Scientific name: *Nyctalus leisleri*



*Lesser horseshoe bat*

Able to wrap its wings completely around its body while at rest, differing from the greater horseshoe bat whose face can usually be seen.

Scientific name: *Rhinolophus hipposideros*



*Nathusius' pipistrelle*

A previous migrant species, it has only been classed as a resident species since 1997.

Scientific name: *Pipistrellus nathusii*



*Natterer's bat*

Its broad wings enable it to fly slowly and prey on a wide variety of insects, even snatching spiders from their webs!

Scientific name: *Myotis nattereri*





*Noctule*

This bat has long narrow wings and flies in a straight line, very high and fast. It's our biggest bat, but it's still smaller than the palm of your hand!

Scientific name: *Nyctalus noctula*



*Serotine*

The Serotine has broad wings and a leisurely flapping flight.

Scientific name: *Eptesicus serotinus*



*Soprano pipistrelle*

Similar to common pipistrelle but distinguished by its higher frequency echolocation call.

Scientific name: *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*



*Whiskered bat*

Slightly smaller than Brandt's bat but sharing the same shaggy fur.

Scientific name: *Myotis mystacinus*



