

Tayside Biodiversity Partnership



BIODIVERSITY

THE VARIETY OF LIFE

Bat Boxes

With autumn and winter suddenly upon us, the chore of "cleaning out nest boxes" comes round again. However, a word of warning: if you decide to peek into your bat box, there may be hibernating bats inside. If this is the case, quickly put back the lid and return the box as carefully as possible to its original position. A special licence is required to disturb (or handle) bats so if you have any queries, contact the National Bat Helpline on 0845 1300 228.

Very occasionally bat boxes will need to be cleaned out, but it does not need to be an annual task like sprucing up bird nestboxes. In fact, to prevent draughts and predators, it is best to put up the type of bat box that does not have a removable lid. There are so many types of boxes available commercially, but the main features need to be a grooved "bat ladder" and narrow entrance slit at the bottom of the box.

Bat boxes need to be put up high: around 4+ metres is good. A clear flight-line is needed as bats prefer to swoop up into the box rather than get round obstacles such as tree branches or a lot of dense foliage. As they like different temperatures at different times of year, it is best to provide at least two boxes, if not 3 or 4 in the same area - each facing a different direction. Avoid putting up the box so that it catches the prevailing wind or if it is likely to get baked by the sun. Moreover, be patient: bats are very choosy so they may take a few years to take up residence.

When buying or making a bat box, make sure the timber is rough-sawn and totally untreated: bats are extremely sensitive to the chemicals used for timber treatment. The box is best placed in the area where the bats are likely to feed: a garden or allotment with trees, hedges or ponds are ideal. Night-scented flowers (honeysuckle, stock, evening primrose, etc.) will attract moths. But anything that attracts moths, beetles and craneflies may encourage bats to stay - each bat can eat up to 3,000 midges a night, so they are good to have around!

For more information on bats, or to request a copy of the "Living with Bats" or "Bat-friendly Gardening" booklets, contact the Helpline number above, or go to www.bats.org.uk.

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