

# FARM BUILDINGS AND ROOSTS FOR GREATER HORSESHOE BATS

DEVON  
GREATER  
HORSESHOE  
BAT PROJECT



Photo: Jan Whittington

**Greater horseshoe bats use a variety of roosts at different times of the year, moving between them with the changing seasons and their breeding requirements.**

## Summer roosts

In the summer, they roost predominantly in undisturbed buildings such as old barns with slate roofs which offer a dark and warm environment. The female bats form large maternity roosts, often of several hundred bats, to give birth and raise their young.

Maternity roosts require an optimal temperature range of between 25°C and 40°C. The adult females will often need to cool down on warm days and so roof spaces which are internally linked with cooler areas are ideal. The males by contrast are usually solitary in summer, and often roost underground.



**Devon**  
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## Winter roosts

During the winter, greater horseshoe bats favour caves, mines, cellars or cold basements which have a stable, cool temperature that is damp enough to prevent them dehydrating during hibernation. Greater horseshoes will continue to feed through the winter, particularly if weather conditions are mild.



## Other roosts

In addition to maternity and hibernation roosts, greater horseshoe bats will also use a range of buildings as night roosts throughout the year, where single or small numbers of bats will take a rest during feeding to digest their insect prey. These buildings can be quite small structures, indeed any farm out-buildings or even the farmhouse porch may be used for this purpose provided they are undisturbed, allow easy access and that there are suitable beams or other supports in the roof space for the bats to hang from. The first clue that bats may be using a building as a night roost is usually a combination of droppings and insect remains (moth wings or beetle wing cases) on the floor of the structure.

Greater horseshoe bats along with their smaller relative the lesser horseshoe, are the only British bats to hang freely with no part of their body supported. In order to do this, they need to be able to fly directly to their roosting positions in the roof space, where they grab on to rough structures such as beams with their feet. This means that their roosts must have clear access points as these large bats have a 40cm wing span and so require a big gap to fly in through.

## Mating

The mating season for greater horseshoe bats is in the autumn, and at this time males set up and defend territories to attract females. Such sites, known as mating roosts, are usually caves, mines, cellars or other underground sites, and a single male may hold the same territory for many years. Males may also advertise their presence to passing females by emitting a series of calls from a favoured perch; for this purpose they may use a range of structures similar to those used for night roosts.

## Other species

In addition to being important for greater horseshoe bats, farm buildings are also important to a wide variety of other bat species. Long-eared bats use buildings as maternity roosts, but can also be found in them year-round. Pipistrelles and other crevice dwelling bats will often be found under hanging tiles, or behind weather-boards.

## Legal protection

Due to the fact that most traditional farm buildings have the potential to act as a bat roost, even if only as a night roost for a single bat, it is important to state that all British bats and their roosts are legally protected. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat or destroy a roost (even if bats are not present at the time). Specialist advice must therefore be sought prior to any building works to check for the presence of bats.



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