This aide memoire will provide a brief understanding of the law and process when investigating offences relating to bats. It also provides links to further information.

- All species of bats found in the wild in the UK are protected by law. It is normally an offence to kill, injure or take bats or to disturb them. There is an absolute offence of damaging or destroying breeding and resting places of bats (roosts).

- There are other animal welfare and trade offences that are applicable to bats.

- The main offences relating to bats have penalties of up to six months imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. Most offences are summary only.

- Prosecutions should be initiated within 6 months of sufficient evidence being available to charge (in the view of the prosecutor). Proceedings must commence within 2 years of an offence being committed.

- Some non-UK species of bat are protected from sale, advertisement for sale, display for commercial use, etc.

- Offences committed against bats are the responsibility of the police to investigate (the only exception being where a Licence has been issued by Natural England, the English Government’s statutory wildlife body, and that Licence has been breached. Natural England may enforce these cases – contact species.enforcement@naturalengland.org.uk).

- Any report of a suspected offence against bats should be recorded by call handlers and allocated for further investigation.

- Where possible before commencing enquiries seek advice from a Force Wildlife Crime Officer or from the National Wildlife Crime Unit Investigation Support Officers.

- A constable has the power to enter land, take samples, search, etc. in relation to bat offences. This power enables them to take others with them to assist in their investigations.

- **DO NOT HANDLE BATS** - there is a potential risk from Rabies.
Investigators Guide to Bats

- Officers should be mindful of licensing requirements when carrying out their enquiries.

- Consider the need for expert assistance in relation to any site/scene visit. Consider Health and Safety aspects of the investigation that might apply to your enquiries/investigation – access to sites (buildings being renovated/demolished, building sites, lofts). See Scene and refer to force risk assessments.

- Consider the possibility of forensic opportunities during any site visit/investigation. Photographic (stills and video/body camera) evidence is likely to prove crucial in relation to proving offences.

For further information see the POLKA Wildlife Crime Community and supporting material (this link is available to authorised users who are logged on to POLKA).

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