

Dear Carol-Anne

You ask the question: "In your opinion - Is a bat corridor a habitat in itself?"

The answer is undoubtedly yes, a 'bat-corridor', that is a commuting route (or flight corridor) and/or a foraging site, is indeed vital bat habitat that must be protected alongside roosts. Bats of course need roosts, foraging sites and secure flight corridors between them to survive. Loss of any one of these components endangers the population. Protecting roosts alone is simply inadequate. This interpretation of the law is widely accepted and I and others have used it repeatedly in documents and at public inquiries. I have been involved in discussions with HS2 in which they have acknowledged the need to protect foraging sites and flight corridors. At a parliamentary select committee meeting on HS2, at which I gave evidence, HS2 agreed to the provision of substantial green bridges to mitigate disrupted flight corridors for Bechstein's bats in the Bernwood Forest area.

Having looked at the bat report and the maps of nearby ancient woodland, it is self-evident that as few trees as possible should be removed, to retain foraging habitat, roost potential and connectivity across this fragmented landscape. All species are under considerable pressure and their small populations reflect the already degraded nature of the landscape. Further stress on species through habitat degradation, loss and fragmentation will inevitably lead to further decline and possibly local extinction. The Annex II barbastelle already has a thin and patchy distribution in the UK, so local loss of this species is of national importance, in part because it leads to ever more isolated local populations which become increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and other pressures.

Planting any number of new trees is no excuse for removing established trees unless it is absolutely unavoidable – and the reasons why it is unavoidable must be clearly stated. Newly planted trees are never an adequate substitute for mature trees and could take decade before they are of any real ecological value. I am surprised that the removal of trees in high summer is even considered, given their importance to a wide range of wildlife at this time.

Best wishes

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Brief Biography: I have conducted biological research for over 35 years, published over 150 scientific papers and reports on a broad range of zoological and conservation topics and written three books on bats. I hold the Scientific Medal of the Zoological Society of London "for distinguished work in zoology". I advise Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Bat Conservation Trust on bat ecology and conservation issues. I am a scientific advisor to the National Trust and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. I am a regular advisor and contributor to BBC Natural History Unit programmes on bats and other topics.