

What is the link between animal health planning and bat populations?



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Bats flit through the skies at dusk and hunt insects using echo-location. They may seem far removed from day-to-day livestock activities of crofters but they are strongly connected. The extensive livestock systems with low use of insecticides are good for invertebrates and the animals that eat them such as bats. This note discusses how health planning along with your vet can ensure only parasite treatments are used when necessary to ensure as little impact on insect as necessary.

Grazing management

Why are crofting systems so good for wildlife? One part of the puzzle is that there is a significant amount of stock outwintered. Outwintering provides dung for dung beetles and dung flies, many of which are winter active and in need of habitat and food sources that are not available when cows are housed. Promoting dung beetles also has a knock-on effect for soil health and provides a valuable food source for bats and birds that feed on the beetles and their larvae, and dung flies during the winter months¹ and throughout the year.

Another reason is that there are often significant areas with lots of wildflowers and sward heterogeneity which provides more habitats for various invertebrates. These are really important areas for bats to feed over, but also provide seed and nesting space for other small mammals, like mice and voles.

In some crofting areas there is a significant amount of scrub or planted hedges. This also benefits bats² as it can provide opportunities to roost, feed and navigate from their roosts to their feeding grounds.

What is health planning?

It is good practice for anyone with livestock to have a health plan. It does not need to be a long and complicated document. It will have most impact on the health of your herd/flock if it's a living document. Involving your vet is crucial for a successful animal health and welfare plan.

However it is suggested that if you are interested in wildlife on your croft you consider this as part of your health planning.



Animal health and welfare plan

This template can be used to document the key procedures and policies undertaken to maintain herd and flock health and welfare on your holding. The plan can be completed by the stockperson/ farmer/suitably qualified person (SQP); however, it must be reviewed by a vet. Alternatively, you may have an Animal Health Plan drawn up and reviewed by the vet.

Business (name and address)				
Person responsible for health and welfare (name and phone number)				
Veterinary Practice (name and address)				
Name of responsible veterinary surgeon				
Species this plan applies to (please tick)	CATTLE <input type="checkbox"/>		SHEEP <input type="checkbox"/>	
Type and number of livestock covered by the plan	Breeding Cows		Breeding Ewes	
	Bulls		Tups	
	Stones		Stones	
	Finishers		Finishers	
Plan completed by (e.g. vet, SQP, stockperson)	Name: <input type="text"/>		Signature: <input type="text"/>	
	Date: <input type="text"/>		Date: <input type="text"/>	
Review completed by vet	Name: <input type="text"/>		Signature: <input type="text"/>	
	Vet Practice: <input type="text"/>		Date: <input type="text"/>	

What are the key considerations for health planning that can benefit wildlife?

The good news is that reducing unnecessary use of wormers will benefit your profitability as well as wildlife³. However, caution is required as it is important that animal welfare is not negatively affected. Data that can be used to inform your treatment decisions include croft history, testing for parasite burdens, choice of product based on active ingredients, and this should all be done in partnership with your vet.

Next Steps

1. Further reading for education and inspiration before you start your health plan
 - [Liver fluke control in grazing livestock | AHDB](#)
 - [Promoting Sustainable Control of Cattle Parasites - COWS - Promoting Sustainable Control of Cattle Parasites](#)
 - [SCOPS | Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep](#)
 - [Dung Beetles for Farmers](#)
2. Draft up your health plan – If you are a member of QMS cattle and sheep [the template is found here](#)
3. Book an appointment with your vet to go through your health plan and get their improvements and insights. Once its complete and signed by your vet you will be ready for your next QMS assessment.

References

- 1 [Farm Advisory Service \(2024\) Grazing for Profit and Biodiversity – Deferred Grazing](#)
2. [Bat Conservation Trust – How are Trees Important to Bats?](#)
3. [Dung Beetle Mapping Project \(2019\) Case Study: British Dung Beetles – Here to Help](#)