

The benefits of working with wildlife experts for your farm or croft



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Crofters and farmers have a wide variety of skills but cannot be experts at everything. Collaborating with other experts can bring greater benefits. This is a short case study about how forming links with bat experts has allowed crofting and farming businesses in Skye to learn more about the bats on their ground and is a key component to understanding more about the bat populations on Skye.

Bats on Skye

Bats are called ialtag in Gaelic. A lot of the islands around Scotland's coasts are considered to be data deficient for bats, but Skye may have more diverse bat populations than we realise. The newly formed Skye and Lochalsh Bat Group and work planned by the Species on the Edge Project will hopefully help tackle this information gap. Daubenton's bats, have been surveyed by the newly formed Skye and Lochalsh Bat group¹. Pipistrelle bats are the most widespread bat species on Skye. The latest BCT report (2021) shows that in Scotland the common pipistrelle has declined by 5.6% between 1999 and 2021 (this is the better figure)². It is unsurprising that they are found on Skye as midges make up a large part of their diet – a single bat can eat up to 3000³ midges per night. This is a great example of an ecosystem service – natural midge control!

What does this have to do with crofting? The extensive livestock systems with low use of insecticides are good for invertebrates and the animals that eat them such as bats. Crofters and Farmers should be pleased when they host bats as they indicate a healthy landscape with good insect populations and suitable habitats for feeding, roosting and hibernating.

Working with experts to find out more bat populations

Partnership between crofters and naturalists can be tricky as there is often not a shared language and people have to take time to see things from a different point of view. Over the Summer of 2022, four crofting and farming businesses have worked with the British Bat Survey run by the Bat Conservation Trust. They took part in a survey by putting up Audio Moth bat detectors on their crofts which recorded the nocturnal comings and goings of the bats on their crofts. These recordings are now having the soundwaves captured analysed by computer. We look forward to learning more about the species hunting midges on these crofts and farms early in 2023.

Next Steps

The crofters and farmers who took part in the Audio Moth survey are keen to hear the results. This work will help enhance conservationists' knowledge of bat populations on Skye. What benefits will the crofters and farmers receive? Foremost is the interest of knowing what animals are on your croft especially who may be most busy when you are sleeping!

Secondly there are likely benefits for those who also have tourism enterprises. What better way to mitigate midge filled nights for your guests than giving them the tools to watch bats swooping for prey in the dusk and perhaps hear them using equipment that can hear sounds human ears cannot.

The Species on the Edge project will get fully underway in 2023 and hopefully this will help shed further light on the bat populations in Skye and other Hebridean islands. Interesting work could include coining new Gaelic names for the different species that are found.⁴

References

1. [John Muir Trust \(2019\) Field Notes: Bats on Skye](#)
2. [Bat Conservation Trust \(2021\) National Bat Monitoring Programme Annual Report 2021 \(pg.22\)](#)
3. [Forestry and Land Scotland \(2019\) Bats in Scotland](#)
4. [NatureScot \(2021\) From the Bird's Mouth](#)