

# Feature GARDENING

## Night-time aviators in West Cork



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**Grant Jenkins** of The Tree Company on protecting the local bat population

**T**wist and turns, loop the loops, victory rolls, barn storming aerobatics to make you miss a heartbeat and no I'm not talking about an air show flying demonstration but a spectacle that can be seen on most nights through the late spring, summer and early autumn from the bat populations of West Cork. This fascinating species that go about their business while we sleep are perfectly suited to their aerial environment and nocturnal lifestyle. These tiny mammals have evolved and adapted bodies for flying with amazing echolocation abilities for sensing their prey.

There are nine recorded species of Irish bats with the possibility a further two, each of which has evolved its own specific lifestyle. Bats will make their homes or roosts in varied locations, for example houses, out-buildings, stone bridges, caves, woodland, mature hedgerows and individual trees. Trees play an important role in the life of bats



*Brown Long Eared Bat*



*Pipistrelle bat*

and most Irish bats will frequent trees, woodlands and hedgerows at some time, whether as a roost or to hunt or for winter hibernation. There are some bats that are more associated with trees than others, for example the Natterer's and the Whiskered bats; the Brown Long Eared bats actually pluck their prey from the leaves and will use trees for summer roosting, whereas Common Pipistrelle bats will often use trees for winter hibernation.

Bats that live and roost in trees can be found in cracks, splits, holes and cavities in branches or the main trunk or under loose bark. Any tree can be used, but the older larger tree is often favoured because it will provide more of this type of habitat. Native trees like Oak, Ash and Scots pine are frequently used but I have found evidence of bats using Monterey pine and Monterey

cypress trees as a roost. In general tree roosts are hard to see from the ground especially when a tree is in full leaf and situated in the upper crown or on the tops of larger branches. If you have an old tree which you suspect bats may be living in, dusk on a warm summer's night is a good time to check, as they can often be seen leaving the roost to venture out for a night's foraging, and if you are really enthusiastic you might see them flying around the roost entrance as they return at dawn.

Bats will typically feed on flying insects like moths, midges, flying beetles, flies and caddis flies, often using the tree branches to rest between bouts of feeding. They can use trees to guide them as they fly from roosts to their hunting area which may sometimes be miles away. Female bats may choose a particular tree near

a good insect population as a nursery roost in the early spring and summer where females will gather together to give birth and bring up their young.

Care and consideration should be taken to when carrying out any work to mature trees, hedgerows and woodlands, which have bat populations, as bats and their roosts are protected by law under the Wildlife Act. If you are uncertain you should contact the Parks and Wildlife service or the Cork County Bat group for advice and use a tree specialist capable of understanding the sensitivities of working with trees colonised by bats. These amazing creatures along with the trees they live in need our respect and understanding to survive in our modern world. Like most animals that are highly specialised they do not adapt well to changes in their envi-

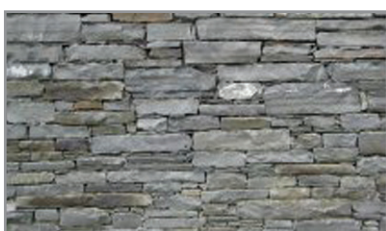
ronment. Loss of habitat due to removal of mature and old trees, hedgerows and woodland, the use of pesticides and insecticides has affected bat populations.

West Cork bats could well be using the trees and hedgerows in your garden, protecting this habitat could prove beneficial to you as bats will keep the insect population in check especially midges, one Pipistrelle bat can eat upwards of three thousand midges in one night! For further information about the wonderful life of Irish bats take a look at the Cork County Bat group or Bat Conservation Ireland's web sites.

Just to remind you that National tree week runs from March 7 to 13, and as Ireland is one of the least tree populated countries in Europe, it's not too late to plant a tree or two in your garden, at your school or place of work.

If you are interested in tree events near you check out the Tree Council of Ireland's web site.

*If you need any further information regarding this article or indeed any other tree matters please get in touch with us at The Tree Company, Ballydehob, Co Cork or email us at [info@thetreecompany.ie](mailto:info@thetreecompany.ie) or call our office on 028 37630.*



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## Bantry Tidy Town's Biodiversity Survey needs your help

**B**antry has a wealth of wildlife and habitats within the town boundaries and in the surrounding countryside. Marine habitats are obviously important given Bantry's location by the sea. For example, the shores range from rock to shingle to sand and gravel. There are earthen cliff and marine islands. Terns and common seals breed in the bay and dolphins can sometimes be spotted. In and around the town there are many other habitats including lovely old woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, moorland, old walls, a lagoon, freshwater lakes, buildings with bat roosts and much more.

However, the habitats and wildlife of Bantry have never been mapped or fully documented. As a result, the habitats of



Bantry are undervalued, as we are not aware of what biodiversity is present and its potential value in terms of conservation, tourism and education.

Bantry Tidy Towns Biodiversity Survey (BTTBS) aims to highlight and enhance the wonderful array of wildlife in and around Bantry town. As part of the

project they want to find out where various mammals, amphibians and birds occur in and around the town. They're looking for animals such as hedgehogs, squirrels, otters, frogs, newts, bats, barn owls and swifts and they need your help!

If you see a wild animal in or around Bantry, BTTBS would be delighted if you could tell them its location by marking it on a map found on the website [www.biology.ie](http://www.biology.ie). Click on the Bantry Tidy Towns Biodiversity Survey section and follow the instructions. If you see animals in Bantry which are not on this list or if you would like to tell BTTBS more about your wildlife sightings you can e-mail [clareheardman@envirom.ie](mailto:clareheardman@envirom.ie).

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