

HEDGE MANAGEMENT FOR GREATER HORSESHOE BATS

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Greater horseshoe bats rely on landscape features such as hedges and waterways in order to navigate through the countryside. Like all British bats they navigate and find their prey through echolocation: this is where the bat calls at a very high frequency and listens for the return echo as it bounces off an object.

This process allows them to build up a map of their surroundings and to hunt down insect food prey, but as the call of the greater horseshoe

disappears rapidly in the open this means that they need to stay close to hedges and other features to avoid getting lost and disorientated.

Without hedges, bats would struggle to find their way in the dark, but as well as this, hedges provide habitat and shelter for insects: the greater horseshoe bat's only source of food. Almost all hunting for insects occurs within 10m of a hedge, so the more hedges in a landscape the more available food there is for greater horseshoe bats!

At a glance: what a greater horseshoe bat looks for in an ideal hedge:

Tall (at least 10 ft./ 3 m)

Continuous cover to provide shelter

Thick and bushy (like the edge of a woodland)

Lots of mature hedge trees with overhanging branches



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What do bats look for in a hedgerow?

Tall, overgrown hedges are best especially when adjacent to cattle grazed pastures. Greater horseshoe bats favour hedges that mimic woodland edge habitats. They are tall enough to act as shelter and as a windbreak and bushy enough to give good structure and a range of micro-climates.

Almost all hunting for insects occurs within 10m of a hedge, further demonstrating not just the need for good quality hedges but also a need for a good number of hedges too.

Retaining uncut margins around the bases of hedges allows more flowers to bloom, more structure to develop and therefore more insects to thrive close to the hedge.

Standard hedgerow trees are very important for perch feeding. Maintaining as many as possible and a minimum of one every 20m is recommended.

Managing hedges for bats



Eventually all hedges need managing and both coppicing and laying allow them to remain under control but thick and bushy. Instead of flailing the top of the hedge, consider just a side trim and allow the hedge to grow upwards to provide shelter to both the bats and your field.

Allow standard trees to develop in trimmed hedges by tagging or marking them. This allows you to identify potential standard trees in the hedge to be left uncut when the rest of the hedge is trimmed in the winter.

Create a 'hedge management plan' to ensure that hedges on the farm are managed rotationally over a number of years. The plan would include rotationally managing hedges and their margins at different times over the course of a number of years. This would allow hedge and margin plants to flower and produce berries to attract in a host of wildlife.

Establishing new hedges where they have previously been lost or removed will create more opportunities for most wildlife on your land.



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