

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and barbastelle bats



We want to change the environment for the better, delivering biodiversity net gain.

Our staff, partners and supply chain have embraced this approach, and EWR's team is spending a lot of time listening to and working closely with local groups, environmental bodies and local highway and planning authorities.

Of all the species living in habitats along the route, we get more questions about barbastelle bats than any other – so we've put together some key information about this particularly rare species.

What are barbastelle bats?

Barbastelle bats have a distinctive, pug-like face and wide ears. Adults grow to around 5cm long and weigh between six and 13 grams. They are also rare – there are estimated to be only about 5,000 of them in the UK. In the summer they live primarily in woodland, either in cracks or crevices in trees or in and around the timbers of old buildings; in the winter they may be found underground.

Using a unique form of echolocation known as 'stealth echolocation', they feed mainly on moths, as well as some small beetles and flies. Their calls are more than 10 times quieter than those of other bats which hunt insects in the same way, enabling them to ambush prey. On average, they forage up to 7 km away from their roosts.

Find out more detail on barbastelle bats from the [Bat Conservation Trust](#).

Where do they live that is near to the EWR route?

There are a small number of known barbastelle colonies in Cambridgeshire, including the colony in Wimpole and Eversden Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is located within our Preferred Route Option area and within 3-4km of the emerging route alignments between Bedford and Cambridge. During our survey work, we have also tracked some barbastelle bats in the Gamlingay area.

What is EWR doing to avoid negatively impacting barbastelle bats?

The potential route alignments that we have identified do not directly affect the woodlands in which barbastelle bats are currently known to roost. In relation to areas where barbastelle bats may forage or commute, we have been carrying out extensive surveys (see below) to provide a detailed picture of the behaviour of barbastelle populations living near or alongside the route.

East West Rail and barbastelle bats

Based on the results of those surveys, where there is a possibility of the line affecting their habitats, our design would include measures that have been successful elsewhere such as creating large and unlit culverts, underpasses or green bridges to allow bats to pass safely from one side of the new railway line to the other. In addition, we will aim to provide enhancement measures such as new or improved foraging habitat and commuting routes, and additional roosting opportunities including boxes known to be used by barbastelle bats. All measures put in place will be done in collaboration with Natural England and would become binding obligations under any Development Consent Order.

Will EWR ever seek to move a bat colony to another place?

Bats and their roosts are protected by law. They tend to return to the same roost each year, and the roost is protected even when not in use. It is not impossible to relocate a colony of bats, but it is only ever a last resort, and if it is done then strict measures must be put in place, as agreed under licence with Natural England. For this reason, we have avoided the woodlands that host barbastelle colonies.

What bat surveys is EWR carrying out?

To help us build a good picture of barbastelle bat habitats, we carried out extensive research. This involved collecting records held by local stakeholders, including local bat groups in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire. They told us about known colonies, such as the bats at Wimpole Hall, and other potential areas we would need to explore.

In early summer 2020, we contacted landowners where there was either proof or – on a precautionary basis - potential for barbastelles to be on or using their land. Because these bats forage over a wide area around their roosts, surveys are carried out over a wider geographical area than just the land covered by our Preferred Route Option.

From late summer 2020, our licenced experts undertook surveys using two techniques – static monitoring devices which record ultrasonic sounds made by the bats, helping improve our understanding of bat behaviour in the area; and careful trapping of bats followed by placing radio transmitters on them and setting them free, to accurately record how they move around the area. Additional surveys included looking at trees and built structures to assess how they are being used by all species of bats, and more detailed aerial assessments.

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and barbastelle bats

Who carries out the surveys?

We are working with several different specialist suppliers to deliver this work. All suppliers and surveyors have the relevant, skills, experience and necessary licences to undertake this work. Licences are needed because of the protection that is given to species like the Barbastelle under the law.

Has Covid-19 affected EWR's work on these surveys?

The pandemic has added an extra challenge to the process. In addition to government guidelines to ensure our surveyors remain safe, we must ensure we do not risk possibly passing on Covid-19 to bat populations. We have worked with Natural England to ensure we have the right controls in place.

What have EWR surveys of Barbastelle Bats revealed so far?

The 2020 surveys have echoed the 2005 barbastelle surveys of Wimpole Special Area of Conservation (SAC) woods – they show that there are still breeding colonies at this location. In addition, the surveys have revealed that barbastelle bats are making use of areas of the woodland to the west of Wimpole. Further up-to-date survey work should help us gain a greater understanding of this.

Will EWR make barbastelle bat surveys available to the public?

Yes. The information we collect through surveying, as well as what this means for the Project, will be made public as part of our assessment in the Environmental Statement. We will begin to share environmental information when we carry out our statutory consultation and the full information we collect will be submitted alongside our Development Consent Order application.

I think there is a bat colony near me. Who can I tell?

The Bat Conservation Trust can help – it has a [National Bat Helpline](#) (0345 1300 228) and lists [local Bat Groups](#).

Why are barbastelle bats a protected species?

The barbastelle is one of the UK's rarest mammals - there are few known sites in the country where they breed, and populations are also in decline in many other places in Europe.

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and barbastelle bats

How are barbastelle bats protected by law?

The species has higher protection in law than most other bats. They are protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 - commonly known as the Habitats Regulations. They are also a species of principal importance under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and are listed as Near Threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. This is why we are especially careful in how we assess and take account of barbastelle bats.

What does that legal protection mean for EWR?

It means we are required to monitor and analyse barbastelle bat populations, to determine if the Project is likely to have a significant adverse impact on their habitats. If our surveys conclude that there is potential for disturbance, we'll carry out a screening assessment for review by the Planning Inspectorate, when an application for a development consent order is made. Details of those surveys will be included in the environmental statement, as part of the planning process. We would also need to show how we can mitigate any potential impacts – see above.

Does leaving the EU alter their protection in any way?

Reflecting our new relationship with the EU, the Habitats Directive was transposed into UK legislation in the form of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, which was amended in 2019 to make sure that the same protection applied. This has not removed any of the protections afforded to barbastelles, and we do not anticipate this to change.

Get in touch

You can email, call or write to us

By email: contact@eastwestrail.co.uk

By phone: 0330 1340067

By post: FREEPOST East West Rail