

Detailed guide: Manage and protect woodland wildlife

You must comply with regulations protecting wildlife species and habitats when you're managing woodland and planning forestry operations. These include the European protected species (EPS) listed in the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) and the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#).

It's an offence to:

- deliberately capture, injure, kill or cause significant disturbance to a protected species
- deliberately destroy the eggs of a protected species
- damage or destroy protected species' breeding sites or resting places (such as a bat roost in a tree or a dormouse nest on the woodland floor)

You must carry out planned operations carefully, making the necessary checks, and you may need a wildlife licence in certain circumstances. If you follow good practice you should be able to carry out most activities without the need for a licence – but to do so you may just have to modify or reschedule some of your management proposals or practices.

Penalties

You can get an unlimited fine and up to 6 months in prison if you don't have a wildlife management licence when carrying out an activity that have an impact on protected species.

Who to contact

Although Natural England are the statutory body for wildlife licensing, the [Forestry Commission local area teams](#) offer support to woodland managers and owners who may need to [apply for a wildlife licence from the Natural England licensing unit](#). The Forestry Commission will carry out an initial assessment to help with processing of wildlife licence applications and give applicants a single point of contact. Natural England will make the final decision on wildlife licences and will issue them through the Forestry Commission.

Read more about [how to comply with habitats regulations](#)
(PDF, 1.18MB, 19 pages)

– including decision-making and woodland planning processes that help to effectively manage protected species in woodlands.

Protected species checklists

Use this

[European protected species and woodland operations checklist](#)

(PDF, 135KB, 1 page)

when you begin to plan what work you want to do and how it might affect protected species. The completed checklist will help provide some evidence that you have considered protected wildlife if your operations are later challenged, but you must also research what species records are available, survey your woodland for evidence of species presence and manage your woodland according.

Operational site assessments

You can also complete an operational site assessment (OSA), using the

[site feature checklist](#)

(PDF, 23.5KB, 1 page)

This is a simple checklist to use when planning forest operations – eg harvesting or civil engineering work. Use the OSA to consider any aspect of the work that could cause a problem, including to:

- wildlife on or close to the site
- people directly involved in the operation
- third parties such as members of the public, neighbours etc
- the landowner who is legally responsible for operations that occur on the site

Read Forestry Commission

[guidance on OSA and protected species](#)

(PDF, 64.2KB, 2 pages)

You can download species-specific advice from the Forestry Commission on how to check your woodland for protected species and how you should operate in their presence:

- [all 17 species of bats](#)
(PDF, 311KB, 12 pages)
- [dormouse](#)
(PDF, 79.5KB, 9 pages)
- [great crested newt](#)
(PDF, 171KB, 10 pages)
- [otter](#)
(PDF, 89.7KB, 10 pages)

- [sand lizard and smooth snake](#)
(PDF, 80.3KB, 9 pages)

Read the [Forestry Commission field guide on European protected species](#)
(PDF, 5.64MB, 96 pages)

Badgers

It's an offence to kill, injure or take badgers. It's also an offence to interfere with their setts. If you're in doubt over whether you might damage or disturb badgers or if damage or disturbance would be unavoidable, you should [apply for a wildlife licence](#)

Red squirrels

Red squirrels and their drays are protected by law. Find out more about the [legal protection of the red squirrel](#).

Plants

You should also consider plants in your woodland that might be protected by law. See the list of [plants protected by law and how they are protected](#).

Note: woodland managers should follow the good practice found in the [UK Forestry Standard](#).

Biodiversity

Find out more about [managing your woodland to benefit species and habitats biodiversity](#).

Apply for a wildlife licence

Find out when you need [to apply, the type of licence you need and how to complete the application](#). This guide provides a full list of licensing information for:

- badgers
- bats
- bumblebees – non-native species
- deer
- dormice
- freshwater fish
- great crested newts
- invertebrates
- mink, coypu, muskrat and grey squirrel
- natterjack toads

- otters
- plants
- reptiles
- water voles
- white-clawed crayfish
- wild birds

Wild plant licences

Find out how to apply for a [licence to cover activities affecting wild plants](#)

Tree felling

You should be able to undertake felling operations without a wildlife licence even in the presence of EPS, providing you follow the associated good practice rules and make proportionate decisions on how to deliver your work proposals

You may need a wildlife licence if felling operations could adversely affect any protected species on your site, for example, when you need to fell trees that host protected species because of a tree pest or disease. Find out more about tree-felling and applying for felling licences.

Contact the Forestry Commission

You can email england-protectedspecies@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or get in touch with a woodland officer in your local area office for advice on protected species and support to apply for licences.

Find your [Forestry Commission's Area Office and Administrative Hub contact details including, address, telephone number and email address.](#)