

Winter is a great time to undertake Preliminary Ecological Appraisals. Allowing you to discover what ecological constraints may be present on your site, and to plan ahead for the seasonally constrained protected species surveys that can take place over spring and summer, the PEA's place you in a better position and more aligned with timescales for submitting planning applications. As a general rule, councils will not grant planning permission until all necessary protected species surveys have been undertaken, so early survey planning and organisation is key to getting those applications through in a timely manner.

Throughout the winter months, REC is able to undertake a variety of ecological surveys, some of which are detailed below.

Surveys that can be undertaken on the winter months:

- ▶ Preliminary Ecological Appraisals;
- ▶ Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys;
- ▶ Badger Survey;
- ▶ Daytime Bat Scoping Survey;
- ▶ Otter Surveys; and,
- ▶ Wintering Bird Surveys.

### **Preliminary Ecological Appraisals and Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys**

These are usually recommended as the initial starting point for ecology on most sites. The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) consists of a site walkover to determine the main habitats on site and if any protected species are likely to be present. Recommendations will be made as to any further surveys which may be needed.

Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys are more detailed than a PEA and are usually recommended on larger or more complex sites. Phase 1 surveys include a desk study (looking at what species/ habitats are known to be local) and a site walkover to map the habitats in detail and record the species present. Recommendations will also be made as to what further surveys may be required. As many protected species surveys are seasonally constrained (**please refer to our survey calendar**), it is important to get the initial walkover surveys undertaken promptly to avoid delays.

### **Badger Surveys**



Badger walkovers can be undertaken at any time of year. Undertaking these surveys over winter is beneficial as there is less vegetation and so signs of badger are more obvious. The walkover includes searching for signs of the species which include used and inactive setts, mammal paths, and latrines and snuffle holes (where they dig for food). Whilst badger licenses to disturb badgers for development are only issued by Natural England between July and November each year (to avoid the badger breeding season), knowing the locations of badger setts and the activeness of the species on the site may allow alterations in development design so as not to disturb the species, therefore alleviating delays.





### Daytime Bat Scoping Surveys (DBSS)

These can be undertaken all year round. Through the winter month's bats hibernate, though assessments can still be undertaken as to whether or not they are likely to be roosting in a structure or tree and to search for evidence of previous use (e.g. droppings). Assessments look for signs of bats (including droppings, staining, feeding remains or live bats), as well as looking for potential roosting features such as crevices in brick work, gaps under soffit boards, slipped roofing tiles, dense ivy covering trees etc.). Whilst emergence/ re-entry surveys can only be undertaken between May – September, carrying out the DBSS over winter has several benefits. Structures with no bat roosting potential can be ruled out and proceed through planning with no delays. In addition, on some occasions further surveys are not always necessary, and emerging techniques such as DNA analysis can sometimes be used to assess the use of structure by bats, and this can be discussed on a case by case basis. If further surveys are required, they can be booked in early and planned around planning deadlines to avoid delays in the planning process.



### Otter Surveys

Again, these surveys can be undertaken at any time of the year, though in the winter months there is less vegetation and therefore, signs of the species can be easier to see.

Surveys for otter usually comprise a walkover of a water corridor, scanning the banks for signs of the species. It is very rare to see a live otter, thus surveys look for signs of presence, such as otter spraint and feeding remains. In addition, otter Holts (where they sleep and rear young) and resting places can be located. Otters can have very large home ranges (with males usually going further than females) and so may have several Holts and resting places within their home range. Looking for these signs can give an assessment of likely presence of the species within the area, and therefore an anticipated impact.



As a general rule, a minimum buffer of 30 m be maintained between development and a known otter Holt. Therefore, it can be important to get the initial walkover survey carried out promptly to feed into design layouts so that delays aren't

met when planning permission is applied for.

### Wintering Bird Surveys

Wintering bird surveys are often undertaken for larger developments where it is necessary to provide robust ornithological baseline data, usually to inform an Ecological Impact Assessment (EIA) or where impacts to Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are anticipated. Our experienced ecologists carry out surveys tailored to the requirements of the project, using best practice survey methods such as Common Bird Census to include walked transects and counts of bird activity within and adjacent to the development site.



# REC



## Summary

It is important to remember that in most instances, planning permission will not be granted until all protected species surveys have been completed. Therefore, undertaking the preliminary site appraisal to plan any further surveys is essential to ensure planning deadlines are met. **Please refer to our Ecology Survey Calendar for survey timings.**

REC is also able to provide CPD presentations regarding ecological surveys and how ecology feeds into the planning process. If you would like to enquire about a CPD presentation, please contact [ecology@rectd.co.uk](mailto:ecology@rectd.co.uk)

