



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Dealing with Bat Droppings

WARNING: When cleaning up after bats, we strongly recommend you avoid the use of chemical cleaning products, including standard products you would use at home, as these may inadvertently cause more damage to historic material than bat droppings. Cleaning up after bats should focus on removing urine and droppings, not stains or scarring – these should only be handled by conservation cleaners who have experience of vulnerable historic materials.

Health and Safety

All UK bats feed on insects. Their droppings are made up of the remains of insect exoskeletons so they contain no moisture and crumble to dust. In small numbers bat droppings do not normally cause any problems and are not considered a health risk. However large concentrations may require some attention. Any health risks can be avoided by following simple precautions and maintaining basic standards of hygiene.

RISK	PRECAUTION
Gastro-intestinal infection from accidental hand-to-mouth transfer	Hands should be washed after exposure to bat droppings and urine, and gloves worn when cleaning
Dust inhalation from dry bat droppings	Avoid inhaling dust from dry bat droppings. When cleaning up quantities of bat droppings, a dust mask can be used to reduce the risk of inhalation. Dispose of the droppings in sealed refuse bags
Allergic reaction	Parasites that live in bat droppings can cause allergic reactions in some people. Reactions are rare and no particular precautionary measure is advised. Medical advice should be sought if you become concerned that you are reacting to the droppings

Cleaning

Bats tend to excrete urine and faeces as they leave and enter both buildings and roosts, so deposits can be concentrated around these locations. However, depending on their flight patterns, bats may excrete all over and throughout the building.

Bat faeces settle mainly on horizontal surfaces and are clearly visible; they are sometimes confused with mice droppings. Urine is more difficult to see, but fresh droplets will appear darker as the moisture is absorbed. In time these areas may turn lighter, as the moisture evaporates, leaving a bloom of salts. You may also be able to smell it.

Apart from forming unsightly deposits and stains, bat urine and droppings may cause damage to historic surfaces by contamination of soluble salts and alkaline solutions. The effects are currently being studied and more information will be available in 2014. See [Living with bats](#) for further information.

As they are protected wildlife, it is illegal to destroy bats or their roosts (see [Legal protection and bats](#)). Therefore, any cleaning methods must avoid harming or disturbing them. The best way to minimise damage caused by bat urine or droppings is to prevent contact with historic surfaces by protecting them (see below). Where this is impossible, regular careful cleaning can reduce the build-up of urine or droppings and consequently any harmful effects they might have.

Here are some ways you can do this:

- ❖ Protect surfaces
 - Lay disposable paper beneath the roost to catch the urine or droppings. Catering 'banquet roll' is ideal. This is easily and cheaply available and should be changed regularly.
 - Cover all monuments and furnishings with dust sheets. These can be changed as required depending on when the building is open. They should be changed and washed regularly.
 - Plastic sheeting can be detrimental to surfaces and should not be used
- ❖ Dry cleaning by careful vacuuming or gentle brushing
 - Regularly dust and vacuum up urine and droppings. The frequency depends on the amount of deposits.
 - Take exceptional care with more delicate objects such as monuments. The area should be vacuumed using a hog's hair bristle brush to direct any dry, loose debris into the vacuum hose. The vacuum hose should not come into contact with the object surface as this could cause damage. A dust mask should be worn during this to prevent dry urine or droppings being inhaled.

- ❖ Wet cleaning using minimal amounts of water
 - After vacuuming, the floor should be regularly wiped with a slightly damp mop, rinsed frequently in clean water. This will help reduce the damage done by urine and reduce the pungent aroma. This process should not saturate the floor since excessive water could react with soluble salts, leading to further discolouration and potential decay.
 - In a similar way, furniture such as pews can be wiped with a damp lint-free cloth.
 - Do not attempt to wet clean important historic artefacts or structures, such as church monuments, alabaster panels or brasses without seeking professional advice, as in some cases wet cleaning can cause irreversible damage.

- ❖ Seek professional advice
 - Bat urine and droppings may result in dark staining and can be particularly disfiguring, especially if on pale materials such as marble. More complicated cleaning processes may be appropriate, but these should only be carried out by a conservator with experience of cleaning historic materials. You can find a conservator through the Institute of Conservation Register (www.icon.org.uk).

Equipment and materials

In general:

- Rubber or latex gloves
- A round, long handled, soft-bristled brush, available from decorator's or artist suppliers e.g. hog's hair brush
- Refuse bags

Dry clean:

- Vacuum cleaner with hose attachment
- Dustpan and brush
- Dust masks

Wet clean (water):

- Clean water
- Mop
- Lint-free cloth
- 2 buckets: one for clean water and one for squeezing and rinsing dirty cloths and mops

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