# SCOVESTON FORT SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST



# YOUR SPECIAL SITE AND ITS FUTURE

'Your Special Site and its Future' is part of our commitment to improve the way we work with Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) owners and occupiers. In it, we explain what is special about the wildlife on your site, and what care is needed to look after it into the future.

All SSSIs are considered to be of national importance and we recognise the crucial role that owners and occupiers play in their management and protection. We need you to share your views and knowledge of this site with us, to help safeguard it.

We hope that you will find 'Your Special Site and its Future' interesting and helpful. Please contact us if there is anything about the site and its management that you would like to discuss.

# What is 'special' about Scoveston Fort Site of Special Scientific Interest?

Scoveston Fort has the following special feature:

# Hibernating population of Greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*:

This SSSI is highly significant as it is one of the largest hibernation sites for greater horseshoe bats in Wales

This distinctive bat gets its name from its horseshoe shaped nose-leaf. The larger of the two horseshoe bat species occurring in Britain, today it is confined to a small number of summer breeding colonies (maternity roosts) and their associated hibernation sites (hibernacula). Their range is restricted to southwest Britain, including only five sites in south Wales, three of which are in Pembrokeshire.

Scoveston Fort is a grade 2 listed building and is highly suitable for hibernating bats. It has been monitored since 1975. Since 2005 it has consistently met the qualifying criteria of 50 hibernating greater horseshoe bats. There are often over 100 greater horseshoes present during the winter, with a peak of 196 in 2022.





Left: Magazine ('Carponier Magazine' - CM & 'CM perimeter Tunnel' - CMT) with accessible wall cavities (Right)

Greater horseshoe bat is listed on Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and Annex II and IV of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (1992).



Entry tunnel to Caponier 4



Hibernation roost within lower levels

A number of other species also regularly hibernate within the site including lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*, barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus*, brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*, *Pipistrellus* spp. and *Myotis* spp. bats.

Winter grazing around the Fort is of benefit to the greater horseshoe bats when they emerge to feed, as it supports dung beetles and other invertebrates. Hedgerows leading away from the Fort are important flight-lines and feeding corridors for the bats, which can be unwilling to cross open areas. The site and its surroundings are free from artificial lighting, so bats are able to forage unhindered.

The surrounding countryside is important for the special interest of the site as this provides the feeding area for the bats.



Winter grazing on the SW field

#### What do we want Scoveston Fort to look like?

The following is a description of how we would like to see the features at Scoveston Fort SSSI.

This significant roosting site will continue to support a winter hibernation roost of no less than 50 adult greater horseshoe bats, or at least 90% of the mean of the previous two years counts, which ever figure is the greatest. Other bat species will continue to use the site for summer, winter and transitory roosts. Colonies of all species of bats are stable or increasing, and viable in the long term.

The roost's good structural condition will be maintained, and improved where possible, to optimise the conditions suitable for the success of this species. Roost access routes will be maintained open, the roost will be secure and free from unnecessary disturbance. Trees and scrub within the fort will be sympathetically managed as required.

A balanced quantity of scrub within the fort will offer a varied canopy layer which allows areal hawkers like the greater horseshoe to capture a range of prey. This, combined

with the adjacent horse grazed pasture provides a range of foraging opportunities suitable for greater horseshoe bats.

The field to the south-west of the Fort has not been re-seeded for decades which has encouraged a diverse sward favouring a range of invertebrate species. This continued management, plus continued sympathetic grazing is recommended to encourage insect prey species for bats throughout the year. Winter feeding studies have found easily accessible dung flies and geotrupes (dung) beetles boost survival rates in greater horseshoes and grazing close to the site is key to support hibernating bats.

It is recommended that the surrounding land be managed to ensure connectivity of woodland, scrub and linear features with the site and pastures suitably managed to provide foraging areas. This will ensure that Scoveston Fort will continue to provide a key locality for the hibernation of the greater horseshoe bat.

# What management is needed on Scoveston Fort SSSI and why?

Although Scoveston Fort SSSI is an excellent place for wildlife it will only remain so if the necessary management continues. Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) priority is to work with you to ensure that this management is carried out. We place a great importance on our relationships with owners and occupiers, because without your help, it will be impossible for us to safeguard the special features on your land.

Horseshoe bats favour flight lines which follow linear features which connect foraging and roosting locations.

Greater Horseshoe bats are known to forage during mild winter conditions to sustain their fat levels until spring, this can significantly influence winter survival rates. Therefore, management which favours the abundance of insect prey should concentrate in areas close to the hibernacula. Artificial lighting which illuminates roosts, connecting features or foraging areas has been found negatively to affect numbers of greater horseshoe bats. It is recommended that conservation efforts focus on both the improvement of foraging/commuting habitats and the creation of dark areas.

Disturbance of hibernating bats can also significantly impact the survival rates of bats over the winter period. Securing the site in ways which reduce unauthorised disturbance is also of high conservation importance.

#### How would we like connectivity to look at Scoveston?

Connectivity of linear features from the fort to Honeyborough Woodland to the south, which links directly with Milford Waterway SSSI would be advantageous. Additionally to Pembroke wood to the west with direct connections to Castle Pill tributary and Pembroke woodland to the north and east, which forms part of Better Woodlands for Wales as part of the Glastir Woodland Scheme and links to Westfield Pill Nature Reserve.

# What does this mean in practice?

There are several different factors that affect whether the special features of Scoveston Fort SSSI thrive.

These are the ones we regard as most important:

# • Availability of roosts

The viability of the bat populations at Scoveston will depend very much on the availability of suitable roosts in the area. Therefore NRW staff must be aware of any changes to known and potential roosts, either through deterioration or planning applications and must also be aware of opportunities to create roosts where possible.

#### • Maintenance and repair works

As with all bat roosts, there should be no modification to the roost, exposure to fumes or harmful / irritant chemicals, disturbance (by people or animals) or excessive noise, without prior consultation with NRW.

#### • Structure maintenance

The structures within which the bats roost may need repair or maintenance in future. This may disturb the bats. All such works should be carried out after consultation with NRW in order that the roost is not adversely affected but dependent on the owner's wishes, it may be possible to enhance the suitability of the site for bats.

#### • Site security

Appropriate measures to prevent unauthorised site assess should be implemented and maintained as necessary. This may include palisade fencing in the area of the drawbridge. Reinforcement of the access tunnel gate, and localised grilling of entrances to favoured roosting chambers. It is noted that this is a listed building however there are methods of achieving this that would not impact the structure and have been tested on similar sites.

#### • Habitat management

The internal areas of the fort have become significantly overgrown and requiresympathetic management following expert consultation. Connectivity to the fort across surrounding fields is relatively poor and a plan for hedgerow planting to rectify this is recommended. Suitable grazing regimes for surrounding farmland is encouraged to favour abundance of invertebrates such as large moths and beetles, dung fly and ichneumonid wasps. Cattle are the most suitable grazers for these grasslands as they produce the best dung for dung beetles. It is recommended that livestock is not treated with Avermectins. Deadwood supports complex food chains and provides features for roosting sites and habitats for invertebrates. Additional benefits include soil stability, nutrient cycling, a variety of structure and age class. Deadwood therefore should ideally be left where it falls and standing dead trees should be allowed to fall naturally. Consult with NRW prior to tree work.

# • Disturbance

The owners require access to the structure for maintenance purposes. NRW and Pembrokeshire Bat Group visit the roost for monitoring purposes. Visits may also be required to undertake site management works. Access into the structure may cause disturbance to the bats and should be kept to a minimum. Winter monitoring visits should be carried out no more than twice per winter.

# • Lighting

Availability of bat fly-ways and feeding areas on surrounding land: Greater and lesser horseshoe bats require sheltered unlit cover as they leave the roost to feed at night. All works involving any potential lighting should be carried out after consultation with NRW in order that the roost is not adversely affected.

# • External Factors

Owing to the distances that bats can travel, changes in land management at considerable distances from the site could have implications for these bats. Changes in planning, lighting and noise disturbance as well as surrounding land use should be brought to the attention of NRW to avoid adverse effects on bat populations.

#### Finally

Our knowledge and understanding of wildlife is continually improving. It is possible that new issues may arise in the future, whilst other issues may disappear. This statement is written with the best information we have now but may have to change in the future as our understanding improves. Any information you can provide on the wildlife of your site, its management and its conservation would be much appreciated.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of your SSSI, or have any concerns about your SSSI, please contact your local NRW office. Details of your current local office can be found on the NRW website or by calling the number below.

Your local team is: Pembrokeshire

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