

Applying to become a trainer for bat competencies

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Context

Certification by the New Zealand Bat Recovery Group is required for any permits that require handling bats (for NZ Wildlife Act 1953 Authorisations).

New Zealand bats are taonga species, nationally At Risk or Threatened with extinction, and are small, delicate and thus vulnerable to injury if handled incorrectly. Therefore, anyone that handles them must have levels of competency that ensure they are handled ethically and with care. A competent handler will know how to catch, hold and release appropriately, when and how to attach monitoring devices, and understand if a bat is in torpor or not and adjust their handling appropriately. This puts onus on experienced, skilled and effective trainers to ensure proper handling occurs.

The bat accreditation process also includes competencies required to minimise the risk of felling an occupied bat roost – use of automatic bat detectors, roost emergence counts and identifying potential roost features .

An Authorised Trainer is a person who is registered as competent in a particular skill AND has been authorised by the Bat Recovery Group to teach and supervise trainees in that skill (but only if they are working under an existing Research or Collection Permit and Wildlife Act Authority, or if they are a Department of Conservation Trainer). The Trainer must be present for all training and inspect all competency activities, although for Competency 3.1 ABM surveys there is scope to do quality assurance checks remotely after the initial training has been completed.

This document outlines the requirements and process for becoming an approved trainer.

Requirements

The applicant will be assessed on:

- An understanding and experience of the ecology of New Zealand bats
- Understanding of and adherence to DOC's Bat Best Practice Manual and relevant Recovery Group Advice Notes in what they're teaching
- Breadth of experience beyond competency levels (no set level – to be assessed by the trainers and the Bat Recovery Group)
- A strong aptitude for, and/or experience of, teaching others about bats
- A commitment to maintaining their relevant experience in what they are teaching
- Effective communication skills
- The ability to say no to someone that isn't competent and shouldn't become accredited
- Demonstrate they will keep the interest of the bats and their welfare uppermost in what they teach and the decisions they are making on sight

With observation, it is intended that trainer assessors are observing the ability of the trainer to teach someone. The assessor should observe the applicant trainer a range of competencies, within a range of scenarios, with several different people and aptitudes. There is no set number on how many times they should observe someone – as long as it takes until they feel comfortable, they would trust someone to be competent to offer the appropriate training.

We have split the requirements for becoming a trainer and maintaining trainer status, into two categories:

1. hands-on competencies such catching, handling, banding, attaching transmitters and pit-tagging
2. other competencies i.e. use of automatic bat detectors, roost watches and identifying potential roost features

Hands-on competencies

To apply to become a trainer, an applicant will need endorsement from two different trainers who have observed the applicant training someone. At least one trainer must be considered an independent assessor i.e. not within the same company or heavily involved in the project the applicant is primarily working with. This builds consistency between trainers and an opportunity to share different ways of doing things (within Best Practice). It also reduces the risk of a practice that may not align with Best Practice being passed on without an independent check. We acknowledge that with such a small pool of trainers that true independence isn't possible – but if we work together on ensuring there's multiple perspectives being sought and we're stepping outside of a possible echo chamber, then the risk has been managed.

All competencies that an applicant want to teach need to be observed, although this can be shared between the two assessors if being assessed for hands-on competencies. However, high-risk competencies (attaching transmitters, applying bands, pit-tagging and wing biopsy) needs the independent assessor to specifically observe these being taught.

Other competencies

Endorsement is needed from only one trainer for the use of ABMs, roost tree features and emergence watches. This trainer should be an independent assessor (as described above).

Application process

The applicant must provide an application form which details the range of experience with the competencies they wish to apply for. The application form and endorsement from trainers must be sent to bathandler@doc.govt.nz

The trainer endorsement must be sent by the trainer which provides the opportunity for them to provide honest feedback about what they had observed.

Both the application and endorsement forms can be provided by bathandler@doc.govt.nz upon request.

The Bat Recovery Group will collate applications for discussion once a month at their monthly meeting.

If an applicant is not successful in their first application, then feedback will be provided by both trainers and from the Recovery Group on what would need to occur before another application can be made.

Expectations of trainers

Trainers teach others to keep bats safe – either from catching, handling or marking, or ensuring occupied roosts are not felled. That means they must be able to say no to someone who, even despite best efforts, are not displaying the skills needed, whether it be a trainee or a trainer applicant. This may put the trainer/assessor in an uncomfortable position, and applicants must commit to being able to have these conversations. This will usually take the form of suggesting more experience is needed, and the recommendation may be to do it with another trainer to get a different perspective or style of training.

We expect that a trainer needs to be neutral regarding who they train, for example being open to training people from other organisations.

A trainer must follow current Best Practice (this is a stipulation in all Wildlife Act permits). It is expected that a trainer needs to remain a current practitioner, so that they are always teaching the most updated techniques described in Best Practice and are maintaining the appropriate skills for which they are a trainer or competent. If a trainer has not applied the competency for 5 years or more, then they need to have a current trainer observe them do some training and discuss any changes to Best Practice in the last 5 years. There is no prescribed amount of experience needed to do a refresher – like the kiwi accreditation process, the amount of experience will rely on the current trainer providing honest feedback about whether more is needed after the first refresher.

Trainers need to hold each other to a high standard and keep each other accountable for good practice. If there is anything being taught that is different to Best Practice, or a risk to bats, then it's expected that a trainer discusses this with the specific person in the first instance or reach out to the Bat Recovery Group Leader to discuss.

Summary of requirements

Competency number	Competency	Risk Assessment	Endorsement requirement
1.1.	Use of mist nets	High	Two – shared supervision
1.2.	Use of harp traps (free standing)	Medium	Two – shared supervision
1.3.	Use of harp traps (at roost entrances)	Medium	Two – shared supervision

2.1	Handling bats – bagging, storage, measuring, weighing, sexing, aging, temporary marking, releasing	Medium	Two – shared supervision
2.2	Banding long-tailed bats	High	Two – must be supervised by independent
2.3	Pit-tagging insertion in short-tailed bats	High	Two – must be supervised by independent
2.4	Attaching radio transmitters	High	Two – must be supervised by independent
3.1	Automatic Bat Monitors	Low	One – must be supervised by independent
3.2	Undertaking roost watches/emergence	Low	One – must be supervised by independent
3.3	Identifying potential roost features	Low	One – must be supervised by independent