

## Bats – Beneficial or a Nuisance?

A while ago on the news it was announced that bats carry rabies. This is true to a very small extent. After listening to that news report, the average person would come away with the thought that most bats are dangerous and they all carry rabies. Reality is that a VERY SMALL PERCENTAGE of them carry rabies. Although many of these bats will bite humans, the major concern is that the droppings they leave behind may harbor the fungal organism that causes the lung disease histoplasmosis.

Bats feed on insects such as; beetles, wasps, ants, plant hoppers, leafhoppers, flies, moths... because they eat these bugs they are a very beneficial animal. They have been known to consume about 200 mosquitoes **an hour**. Bats are nocturnal; they leave their nests at dusk and return before dawn. Their first stop is to water and then they begin their feeding.

Bats roosts are located in attics, behind shutters and behind loose boards on buildings. If bats are roosted in your attic or outside on your home, your goal should be to only relocate them, **not kill them**. Bat houses can be bought or easily built and mounted on a nearby tree or a post. (See the internet site: [www.eparks.org/wildlife\\_protection/wildlife\\_facts/bats/bat\\_house.asp](http://www.eparks.org/wildlife_protection/wildlife_facts/bats/bat_house.asp) for instructions on building your own bat house.) Click on “Over 20 free Bat House Plans”. They will then relocate into the bat house. You still keep your bug killer, yet eliminate a roommate. After they have transferred to the bat house or after they have left for hibernation in the fall. Before spring it is important to bat proof your home, closing up any entries they had. If you are doing this in the summertime, be sure to wait until after mid-August. Exclusion is the only method to keep bats out long term. Ultrasonic devices have not been found to be effective for repelling bats from structures and using bright lights can only help, but total control should not be expected.

### Steps to Total Control

1. Determine points of entry. The locations to pay close attention to are: attic louvers, roof lines where sheeting and fascia boards meet, under fascia boards and other openings due to deterioration. The best time to inspect is from ½ hour before dusk until one hour after dusk. Keep in mind that bats will not fly in rainy or unseasonably cold weather.
2. Find any exterior structural deficiencies and inside roosting sites by inspecting during the day. Look for droppings or bats access problems. You should be wearing protective equipment when entering a bat roost due to the dust from the dried droppings, which can be inhaled. Be sure to use the following equipment to protect yourself.

## Equipment

- Respirator with HEPA filters
- Coveralls
- Heavy leather gloves
- Bright flashlight
- Bump cap

Seal all but one or two points and all other holes 3/8" or larger. Then wait three or four days for the bats to adjust. After that then seal those remaining holes in the evening just after the bats leave for their night feeding. If you have the problem of too many holes, then the installation of plastic bird netting is your answer, which can be cut to a size which will cover the opening.

3. The roost area should be treated to help control the bat ectoparasites, such as mites and bat bugs, AFTER the bats have been excluded and all entrances have been barred. Apply an appropriately labeled residual to the area. These areas either need to be inaccessible OR they can be professionally decontaminated and removed.

Bats have relatively poor vision. They rely on echolocation to avoid objects and find prey. This is very similar to sonar. They emit about 30-60 squeaks per sec with a pitch of 30-100,000 cycles. The squeaks are projected through their nose or mouth and the sound wave lengths reflect off of objects and return to their ears.

In the Pacific Northwest we have two different species of bats:

### Big Brown Bat

Size: 4 1/8 to 5 inches  
Wing Span: 12-14 inches  
Weight: 2/5 to 3/5 ounce  
Teeth: 32  
Life Span: max 19 years  
Flight Speed: up to 40 mph,  
(fastest reported for any bat)  
Hibernate: December to April  
Migration: Canada

### Little Brown Bat

Size: 3 1/3 to 3 5/8 inches  
Wing Span: 8 11/16 to 10 5/8 inches  
Weight: 1/8 to 1/2 ounce  
Teeth: 38  
Life Span: max 20 years  
Flight Speed: average 12.4 mph,  
up to 21.7 mph  
Hibernate: September/October to  
March/April  
Migration: South in the fall