Bats in Your Backyard  

continued

Little Brown Bat

The most common bat house resident in the northern states and most of Canada is the Little Brown Bat. About three and a half inches long with a wingspan of about eight inches, they range in colour from brown or reddish brown to gray. You can sometimes spot these small bats hunting insects in the late afternoon as well as at night, as they are voracious mosquito eaters.

Little Browns often roost during the summer in buildings near rivers, lakes, or marshes, where they can fall up on aquatic insects. They mate in the fall, then hibernate, typically producing one offspring in June or July. The baby is weaned and flying in three or four weeks.

These bats are more heat tolerant than others and can rear young in temperatures as high as 40°C. They typically producing one offspring in late May, they form nursery colonies of eighty to three hundred, and the young bats are able to leave to feed. Although hundreds of individuals can reside in these roosts, mother bats can unerringly find their young by the sound of their voices. Only after a mother has verified her pup’s voice and smell will she allow the little one to suckle. After 18 days, the young ones have shed their milk teeth and can venture out of the roost to feed on solid food such as moths.

When fall arrives Manitoba bats migrate to their winter quarters. The Little Brown Bat, Big Brown Bat and Keen’s Myotis species over-winter in limestone caves located on the west side of Lake Winnipeg. The Red Bat, Hoary Bat and Silver-haired Bat migrate south to the snow line in the United States. Silver-haired bats have even been found on ships’ masts out at sea, likely having been blown off their migratory path by a storm!
Bat Hang-Outs
• Caves and crevices
• Hollow trees
• Mine shafts
• Building ledges

Bat Myth & Mystery
Bats have been given a bad rap thanks to vampire stories and movie myths, but these concerns are greatly exaggerated. Check out these bat basics:
• Bats are not blind. Although these night-fliers rely on other strong senses to help them navigate in the dark, some bats see quite well.
• Bats don’t fly into people’s hair. More agile fliers than birds, they may swoop in close to catch insects that are attracted to people.
• It’s rare for bats to pass rabies on to people. Pet owners are far more likely to contract rabies from family dogs and cats.

Bat Cuisine
All Manitoba bats are insect eaters. Some species can consume more than 5000 insects in one night! Insects on the menu include moths, beetles, cutworms, armyworms and, of course, the pesky mosquito.

Radar Stars
Bats use echolocation - bat radar - to locate their prey and other objects such as trees and buildings. Emitting high pitched calls that rebound off objects, bats can form an accurate ‘picture’ of their surroundings. Bats use their large ears like mini satellite dishes to trap more sound waves. As bats zero in on their prey, their call rate increases dramatically from around 30-60 cries to more than 100 cries per second. This helps them pinpoint the precise location of their fleeing prey. Sound intensity as loud as jet planes has been measured 5 cm from the mouths of some bats. Despite this, people generally find bat calls inaudible because they are too high pitched.

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Did You Know?
Bats’ wings are actually their hands, with membranes stretching between elongated fingers. For bats, changing direction is as simple as lifting a finger!

Build Your Own Bat Box
Bat boxes are inexpensive, easy to build and don’t need to be cleaned yearly like bird houses. Erect your new bat abode before May 1.

Follow these simple steps to build your bat box:
1. Choose the wood! Exterior plywood, cedar and pine work well, as does older wood that has been laying around your back yard. Bats need something to grip while roosting, so make sure the inside walls are rough. If your wood is smooth, add a screen or shingle to the inside of the box.
2. Cut two sides from a five foot length of 1x4 board.
3. Cut front and back from a six foot length of 1x10 board.
4. Cut top and ledge from scraps of 1x10 board.
5. Use 4-penny galvanized nails to attach the ledge to the inside front.
6. Use 6-penny nails to attach sides to front and back.
7. Place roof so it is flush with back, and overlaps sides and front by about one inch. Use 6-penny galvanized nails to attach roof to sides, front and back.
8. Use silicon caulking to seal all joints from the outside. This will keep roosting bats warm and dry.

Bats Like It Hot.
Ensure your bat house has a south exposure and paint it black. Place your bat box as high as possible – at least 5-6 metres high on a pole or tree, or on the side of your house. Then, sit back and wait for your new tenants to move in!