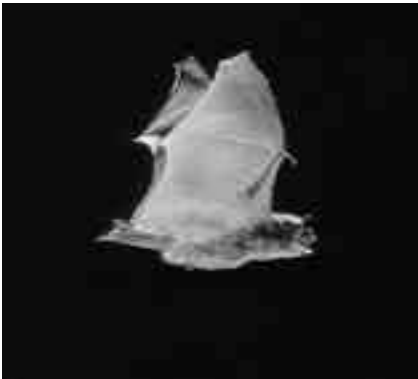


Bats in Your Backyard

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 wingspread 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 fill 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 choose roosting sites with high, stable temperatures.

In late summer, as Little Browns prepare to hibernate, some colonies travel as far as 322 kilometres to their chosen cave or mine, where they will stay for the next six to eight months.

Along with providing a bat house, try wrapping a piece of corrugated sheet metal, about twenty-four by thirty-six inches, around a tree that gets appropriate amounts of sun. This arrangement has attracted nursery colonies of these bats, who may roost between the metal and the tree.



Big Brown Bats

At four and one-half inches in length and with a wingspan of about twelve inches, the Big Brown Bat is somewhat larger than the Little Brown Bat. Its range includes Canada and most of the United States, except the extreme southern portions of Florida and Texas. After the Little Brown Bat, these are the most likely bat house residents.

Colonies of Big Brown Bats often roost in chimneys, under eaves, or in building walls, as well as behind loose tree bark and in tree hollows. These bats feed on a variety of insects, swooping over meadows and pastures and among the trees and streetlights of towns and cities.

Mating in fall and winter, Big Brown Bats produce one or two young a year. In late May or early June, they form nursery colonies of 20-300, and the young bats are able to fly within a month of birth. They are known to abandon roosts when temperatures rise above 35°C.

References:

The Complete Bat, James Robertson, 1990.

The Bat House Builder's Handbook, Merlin D. Tuttle & Donna L. Hensley, 1993, Rev. 4197.

Beastly Abodes, Homes for Birds, Bats, Butterflies & Other Backyard Wildlife, Bobbe Needham, 1995.

Knee High Nature, Fall, A Guide to Nature, Activities and Fun, Pat Wishart & Dianne Hayley, 1994.

Got Bats in Your Belfry?

Unwanted bats can be evicted from a house or cottage before June 1 without the risk of trapping babies inside. The best way to evict bats is to deny them access to the building after they have left to feed. Openings as small as 1 cm should be sealed.

Watch at dusk for a few evenings and see where the bats exit. Look for dirty smudges around and droppings below regular entrances. Leave a couple entryways open for several days so the bats will get used to these openings. Finally, across the remaining openings hang a flap of material like heavy plastic, cloth, or steel screen (hardware cloth). Leave the bottom edge free. This way bats can get out but cannot get back in. These holes can be sealed permanently when all the bats are out. It is important not to touch grounded or injured bats. Don't forget the evictees will want a place to go, so hang a bat box before you begin the eviction process.

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Evening Guests - Bats in Your Backyard!

Richard Helbig

What is it about bats that make us tremble with fear? Through folklore and superstition we associate bats with vampires and blood. But, as we go from bat fiction to bat fact, we find that we couldn't be further from the truth! Bats are actually shy, gentle creatures, beneficial to humans and an essential part of Manitoba's ecosystem.

The Who's Who of Manitoba

There are 6 species of bats native to Manitoba:

- Little Brown Bat
- Big Brown Bat
- Red Bat
- Hoary Bat
- Silver-haired Bat
- Keen's Myotis

The Little Brown Bat is the most commonly seen bat in Manitoba. It only weighs about 8 g which is as much as 2 nickels and a dime. A true acrobat, the little brown bat catches bugs with its wings, slides them to its tail and flicks them into its mouth!

The Secret Lives of Bats

Bats are not rodents - but they are mammals. In fact, almost a quarter of all mammal species are bats! Bats

are the only true flying mammals, using soft, leathery wings for aviation. Some species of bat can reach speeds of over 100km/hr. These agile animals can even pick off darting insects in mid-flight.

Look for bats under the cover of darkness! Roosting upside down all day, bats come out at dusk to drink water and hunt. Throughout Manitoba, bats are most commonly seen flying in clearings and by rivers and lakes from May to the beginning of August. Their erratic flight path and high-pitched squeak will distinguish them from night-flying birds.

Bat pups are born in the spring and remain in the roost, which serves as their nursery, while their mothers 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 overwinter 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!



Bats in Your Backyard



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 3000 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.



Go to Bat for Bats!

Destruction of habitat, spraying of insecticides and disturbance of roosts by activities such as spelunking are contributing to rapidly dwindling bat populations. Bats that are woken prematurely in the winter may use up their winter

fat and starve to death. To make matters worse, bats reproduce very slowly. Adult females have only 1-2 young per year. In comparison, many small mammals have litters of at least seven or more. You can help the bat population by setting up a bat box near your house or cottage.



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!



continued

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 overhangs 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!

