

HELP FOR BATS

Bats, like many other mammals, can contract and spread rabies through a bite. Because of this, Walden's Puddle is no longer able to rehabilitate them in Tennessee. However, according to studies, less than one half of one percent of bats actually carries rabies and even those rarely become aggressive. To avoid problems, never attempt to handle a bat. Like any animal, it may bite if injured or frightened.

The world's only mammals adapted to true flight, bats are probably one of the most beneficial and least understood. There are nearly 1000 species of bats and they are found on every continent except Antarctica. Some are smaller than hummingbirds and some, like the giant fruit bats, can have wingspans of up to 6 feet. There are 44 known species in the United States. Nineteen of these occur in the eastern US and 16 species can be found in Tennessee.

Bats are primarily nocturnal, although they can sometimes be seen flying about in the early evening before sunset. Occasionally, on warm winter days, they will even fly in daylight hours. Bats have perfectly good eyesight (so much for the old expression 'blind as a bat') but use their sophisticated system of echolocation to navigate and hunt. So acute is their ability to echolocate that they are able to avoid obstacles no wider than a thread and capture tiny flying insects, in complete darkness. All bats that live in Tennessee feed on night-flying insects and are the only major predator to fill this roll. Each bat will eat more than 50% of its own body weight each night, which could add up to about 3000 mosquitoes!

The presence of bats in an attic or garage does not necessarily constitute a health hazard. In fact, a bat roost increases property values in China, as they are thought to bring good luck and happiness! If the colony is small, it is usually wisest to leave it undisturbed and enjoy the free reduction in mosquitoes. If you need to evict them, simply wait until any pups are old enough to fly; around September in our area. Watch for the bats to leave to locate their entryway.

Cover the hole with mesh screen that is attached on the top and two sides, leaving the bottom free for the bats to crawl out and fly away. They won't be able to get back in and will have to look elsewhere for a new roost.

Unfortunately, worldwide populations of bats have been dramatically reduced. Several species are close to extinction and in the U.S.; five are on the Endangered Species List. Two of these, the Indiana Bat and the Gray Bat are found in Tennessee. Humans seem to be the only animal having a significant impact on the bat population. Adverse effects by humans include destruction of habitat, direct killing, vandalism, use of pesticides (on insects) and other chemical toxins and disturbance of maternity and hibernating colonies. The effects of WNS (White-Nose Syndrome) are devastating entire populations of certain species.

Bats in this area must either migrate or hibernate in the winter. This is generally November through February, when there are no insects to eat. Upon entering hibernation, they must survive several months on limited stores of fat. Each disturbance and subsequent arousal from torpor costs the bat almost 30 days worth of body fat. Hibernating bats are extremely sensitive as even one disruption could cause them to die of starvation before spring arrives. A single disturbance of a maternity colony during the months of May through August could cause hundreds of flightless baby bats to fall to their death in panic.

So give them their space and they will provide years of free pest control and hours of evening entertainment on the back porch as you watch the dipping, zipping flight of these truly amazing mammals!

To encourage these wonderful little creatures to your backyard for a mosquito feast, try installing a wooden bat house. This will also help insure they will roost in their own home instead of yours. Visit Bat Conservation International at www.BatCon.org for specific instructions for building and placing a bat house.

For more information on bats visit these following websites:

- [Tennessee Bat Working Group](#)
- [Organization For Bat Conservation](#)
- [Southeastern Bat Diversity Network](#)
- [Fly By Night](#)