

WHY ARE BATS VALUABLE?

Bats have very critical role in the health of our ecosystems. Insect eating species consume vast quantities of insects and play a key role in the delicate check and balance of insect pests. For instance, the Big Brown Bat can consume over 1000 mosquitoes per hour, and numerous feeding studies conclude that they drastically reduce crop and forest pests including ground beetles, scarab beetles, cucumber beetles, snout beetles and stink bugs (Whitaker, 1995). Many plant species, including the Giant Saguaro cactus, rely on bats for pollination.

WHY ARE BATS IN TROUBLE?

According to Bat Conservation International, bats are in serious trouble. Currently, 50% of American bat species are beginning to decline and very little money is provided for bat research and conservation.

There are several reasons for their decline. One is the public's overall negative perception of bats. North American bat species do not "suck" blood, are not blind and do not become entangled in human hair. Although any mammal is capable of transmitting rabies, of the 30,000 annual deaths from rabies worldwide, 99% are from contact with dogs, not bats. Bats are vulnerable to extermination because many species of bats roost in colonies which makes it easy to poison, burn or dynamite them while they sleep. Additionally, they are losing their natural habitat to human development. Although for their size, bats are one of the longest living mammals, they are also one of the slowest reproducing mammals, often only having one pup per year.

White-Nose Syndrome

This winter tens of thousands of bats in NY, MA, VT, CT (and possibly PN) have died from something called White-Nose Syndrome (WNS). Although Little Brown Bats have been hit the hardest, many other species are also dying, including northern long-eared bats, small-footed bats, eastern pipistrelle and the Indiana bat (which is protected by the endangered species act). Mortality reached 80-100% in several of the New York caves. WNS is decimating the bat population and biologists are racing the clock to understand WNS and how it is being transmitted. The exact cause of death is uncertain, but affected bats have a white fungus on their muzzles.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

~Hang a bat house~

Provide a home for these gentle shy animals, and enjoy the added benefit of insect control. For complete detailed descriptions on building and placing your own bat house visit: Bat Conservation International (BCI) at <http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/BatHouseCriteria.pdf>

Helpful Tips:

- ❑ Bats houses should be placed so they receive *at least* six hours of direct sun. (The temperature inside the bat house needs to remain between 80-100°F for as long as possible. A dark coat of paint can help increase the temperature.)
- ❑ Bat houses should be placed at least 12 ft off the ground, but 15-20 ft is ideal.
- ❑ Houses mounted on poles or sides of buildings work better than those placed on trees or metal siding.
- ❑ Bats prefer to roost with in ¼ mile of water.
- ❑ Place houses 25 ft from branches, wires or other potential aerial predators perches.

~Educate others about bats~

(Information obtained from **Bat Conservation International** www.batcon.org)
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Common New England Bats



Little Brown Bat

Myotis licifugus

Size: 3.5" L and 9" W

Color: Brown backs and light buff underside

This is New England's most common bat. They have fur on their toes and pointed ears, and are active during the summer months, often flying before dusk. Their flight pattern is erratic and often accompanied by audible squeaks. During the summer they roost in caves and barns and hibernate during the winter months. They often forage over water, consuming 1200 mosquitoes and midges per hour.



Eastern Red Bat

Lasiurus borealis

Size: 4.5" L and 12" W

Color: Males- orange head; females- buff colored.

They are active in the summer, but migrate south for the winter. Their flight pattern is fast and definitive and they often produce audible chirps. Eastern Red Bats prefer to roost in trees in the woods. Unlike other species that roost in large colonies, Eastern Red Bats are solitary, coming together only to mate and migrate. Females have 3-4 pups per year. They eat flying insects and beetles and can live up to 12 years old in the wild.

Large Photo: Bob Gress/Small photo from BCI



Big Brown Bat

Eptesicus fuscus

Size: 4.5" L and 12" W

Color: dark brown back and brown undersides

They have a fast and straight flight pattern and can be seen earlier in the spring and later in the fall than other species of bats. During the summer Big Brown Bats often roost in barns, attics, beneath bridges or in tree hollows and in the winter they hibernate. They often form maternity colonies of hundreds of individuals. While feeding on insects, Big Brown Bats usually consume at least 1/3 of their weight in food each night.

Large Photo: Bob Gress/Small photo from BCI