

Bats In Your Backyard

Information on Oregon's most common species

When many people think of bats an image of large blood sucking beasts appear, yet this image has no basis in reality and is mostly derived from old horror movies and folklore. Ironically the largest of bats eat only fruit and nectar, while the true blood sucking bats are very small and rely entirely on extracting minute amounts of blood from sleeping livestock or other game rather than humans. A more accurate image of most North American bats would be one swooping into a cloud of bugs consuming 600-1,000 per hour. This bug control function is an asset to any ecosystem and provides a very beneficial role for humans, riding cities and farmlands of bugs that are both annoying and economically damaging. Thus being educated about these creatures is very important for both the sake of the environment and yourself!

Species Profiles



Big Brown Bat

Big brown bats are North America's most common type of bat, they are found everywhere except parts of Florida and Texas. Like the name would suggest, big brown bats are one of North America's biggest bats, generally reaching a 13-14in wingspan by adulthood. These bats may be identified by their light to dark brown color, large size, steady flight pattern and small ears.

Because of their taste for pests such as wasps and mosquitoes big brown bats are highly beneficial. Providing a bat house is a good way to attract this particular, and in fact, big brown bats are the most common user of bat house in the North.



Little Brown Bat

Little brown bats are commonly mistaken for their larger relatives, however there are some key differences that make these creatures unique. Having a wingspan of only 9-10in they are

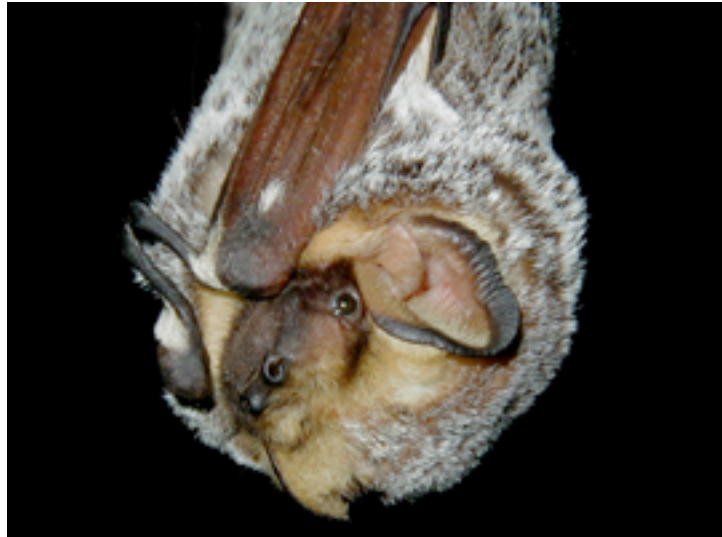
much smaller than the big brown bat. They also have a different color pattern, generally being lighter tan than dark brown. At night they can be identified by their quick and erratic flight pattern. This species generally feeds on wasps, moths and beetles, using their interfemoral (tail) membrane to scoop the insects up before grabbing them with their mouth. Like the big brown bat the little brown bat roosts in colonies and will often use bat houses.

Hoary Bat

This bat is larger than the big brown bat reaching a wingspan of 14-15 in. They can be identified by their swift and direct flight pattern, small rounded ears and gray/white fur. While flying, they are audible through their constant “chattering,” a noise they use to communicate with other bats.

This is not the same noise they use for echolocation, however. Strangely enough, despite the fact they communicate with one another during feeding times, they are not social animals and will not roost in groups until breeding

season. An interesting fact about these bats is that they are the only mammals native to Hawaii, a testament to both their longevity as a species and their abundance throughout North America. Unfortunately not much is known about their feeding habits, although mosquitoes have been found in the stomachs of some deceased bats.



Silver Haired Bat

The silver haired bat is a medium sized bat with black hair and silver tips. As adults their wingspan will typically reach 11-12 inches.



Like most of the other bats mentioned here, silver haired bats are found all throughout the US, except in the very southern most parts. When they feed it tends to be very low to the ground and slow, an easy marking point for identification. They generally feed in woodlands or in streams, so it is unlikely to see them in a city setting. One interesting note about these bats is that they tend to follow the same foraging route every night, making it much easier to study these bats once their typical feeding grounds have been located.

Living with Bats

Although the roles bats can play for humans is important, it should not determine which bats deserve the most attention and conservation. All bats provide necessary roles for their respective habitats; and without them it threatens the functionality of the ecosystem in which they live. There are several ways you can help bats in your area, some of which also attract other animals including birds, proving that a bat friendly backyard is also a wildlife friendly backyard. At the same time, however, most people do not want bats actually living in their home, and it is important to remember there are effective ways to remove them that are both safe for your family as well as the bats. The following sections describe the various ways to attract bats, as well as effective ways to get rid of them.

- **Provide a water source**

Because many bats both drink and feed over water providing a natural water source is a great way to attract bats you your home. This can be accomplished by constructing a small pond in your backyard, something easily done using a backyard pond kit. If unable to provide a natural water source, encouraging your city to take excellent care of local water sources is very important. Allowing local animals access to clean water is crucial, and making sure local streams and rivers are well maintained and trash free makes them more enjoyable for everyone.

- **Roosting Sites**

Although many people feel dying trees are ugly they provide very important habitats for many kinds of animals. As long they do not threaten the safety of your home consider allowing dying trees to remain in your backyard. Holes in decaying trees provide roosting sites to bats and birds. Creating a dynamic habitat in your backyard is also a good way to provide roosting sites for bats. This can be as easy as piling logs in an unused corner of your yard or planting more tall growing trees.

- **Gardens**

A great way to attract bats as well as to make your backyard more aesthetically pleasing is to plant fragrant flowers. Flowers such as, sweet rocket, nicotiana, soapwort, chives, mint, marjoram, lemon, and primrose are all plants that will attract night flying bugs to your backyard, which make easy meals for the bats. Letting your grass grow out is also a great way to attract bat food to your yard. While many people may cringe at the thought of an overgrown yard, its important to remember that your home, while good for you, displaces many animals who would otherwise live there and making an effort to provide homes for these animals is an important part of living sustainability.

- **Lights**

Just as fragrant plants attract bats to your yard, installing a Mercury light will increase the amount of night flying insects to your yard. This helps to attract more solitary bats to your yard.

- **Chemicals**

While using chemicals agents to rid your yard of pesky bugs may make for a quick fix ultimately it cannot rid your yard of all bugs and causes a grave threat to many of those bug's natural predators. If a bat or a bird consumes a sprayed bug they can ingest toxic chemicals that can make them very ill or kill them. Do not use toxic chemicals in your yard! There are many safe home remedies or pre made mixes that are just as effective as harmful chemicals. Or take the time to research the insect's natural predator and see if there are ways to attract it to your backyard.

- **Getting rid of a bat stuck in your home**

If a bat has accidentally flown into your home there are several steps you can take to remove it. First, remember that a bat flying around your house is probably not sick and will not attempt to fly into your hair or clothes for the purpose of biting you. Generally, sick bats will be on the ground so they are the most important bats to stay away from. A bat stuck in your home is confused and may fly erratically or try to defend itself from you if you swat at it. Becoming aggressive and scared does nothing but increase the likelihood of being bitten or killing the bat. Opening all doors and windows will help increase the chance the bat will find its way out. Once you have watched it do so close everything so that it may not find its' way back in. If you are anxious to remove it use a

light towel or blanket to grab the bat and take him outside. If it seems scary try to think of the bat as a bird and treat him with the same amount of kindness.

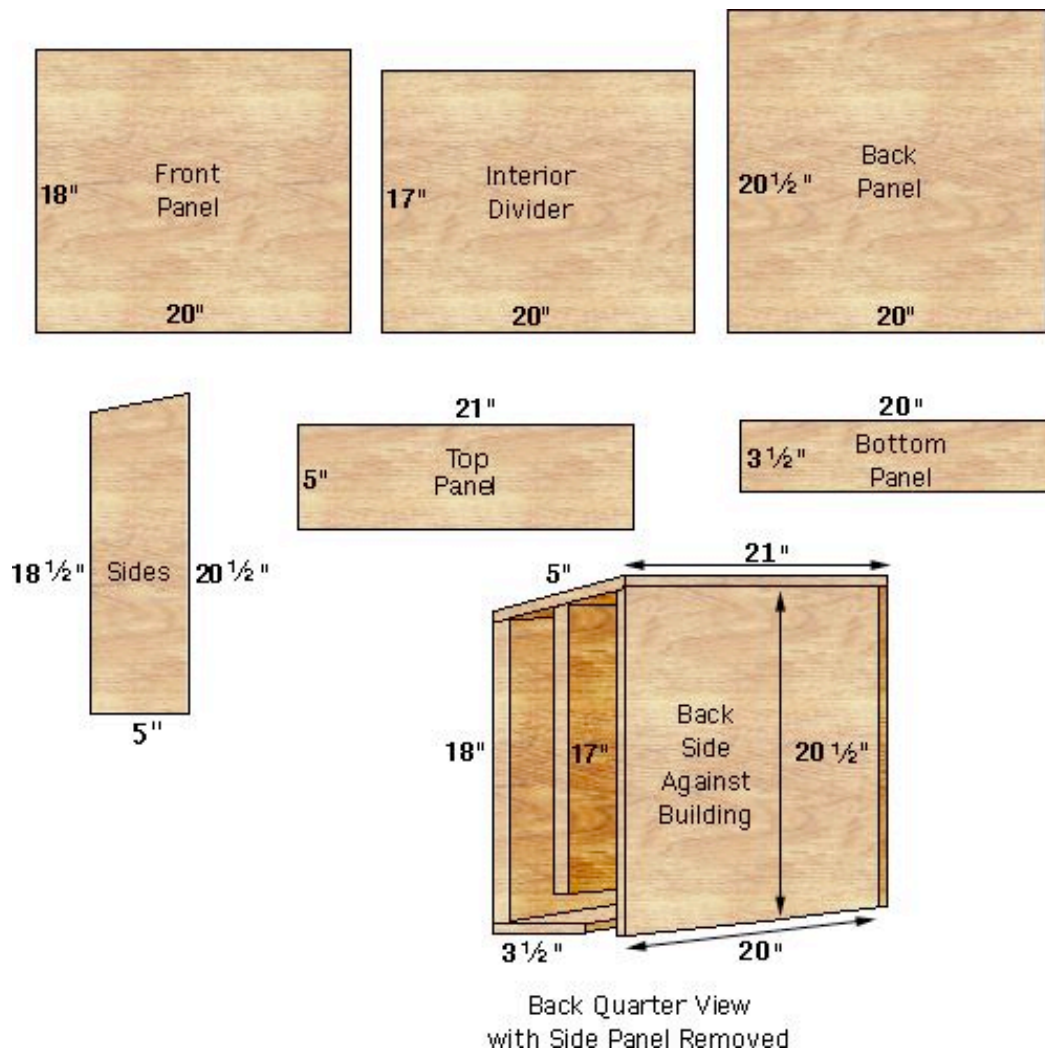
- **Getting rid of unwanted tenants**

While under normal circumstances bats would not have any association with humans, increased habitat loss forces them to find shelter in unusual places. An unused attic may seem like an ideal home for a bat, but unfortunately for them the human homeowners may disagree. If there are bats living in unwanted places there are several options for safe removal. Firstly do NOT attempt bat removal during the months of June, July or August. This is the main time in which bats are caring for flightless young and if you attempt to evict the mothers the babies will starve to death and die. This is very cruel and should never be attempted. The months prior to and following June, July and August, however, are excellent times to remove bats because it ensures all unwanted tenants will have the ability to fly away. The most effective way to rid your home of bats is to prevent them from returning into your home, rather than forcing them out. A short time before dusk recruit some family and friends to help watch your house. Once the bats start flying out to go eat, monitor what areas they are flying out from. In order to make sure you have identified all entry and exit locations watch them for a couple of days. Remember, while it may seem urgent to rid your house of bats, they were harmlessly living there before you discovered them and they would not cause any harm by being there a few more days. Being patient will also ensure you permanently removed all bats, rather than temporarily thwarting them. Once you have established all exit points install bat houses next to them. (The bat houses provide alternate housing, which may encourage the bats to leave without any additional work from you). Allow the bats a week to get used to the bat house. After a few days shape a piece of hardware cloth or wire into a cylinder and place it over the hole. The bats will easily be able to leave your home, but will be confused by the cylinder and unable to reenter. Placing a square piece of cloth over the hole and only taping down three sides can also do this. Once again the bats can easily find their way out, but have a much more difficult time coming back in. After about a week all bats should be gone. Once they are gone, permanently close the openings to prevent future tenants.

Bat Houses

Not all bats will roost in bat houses, but for the ones that do, providing bat houses is an important way humans can help alleviate the problems associated with habitat destruction. And in the event of eviction, bat houses provide important new homes for otherwise homeless bats. Bat houses can be constructed from scratch or purchased pre made. The most important components to a bat house are a long narrow chamber, a landing pad, and protective roof. Without the proper mixture of these components a bat is too susceptible to cold and predation. A successfully bat house is at least fifteen feet high and faces south or south east, to maximize sunlight exposure. If you do establish a successful bat colony in your backyard networks like the Organization for Bat Conservation gladly accept observations and data regarding the use of your bat house by bats. Information such as this is helping in expanding our knowledge of bat protection.

<http://www.alaskaoutdoorjournal.com/Ecology/Images/bathouse.jpg>



For more information on bat species, bat houses, or bat conservation the resources below are highly recommended and helped a great deal in creating this webpage.

Adams R. 2003. Bats of the Rocky Mountain West. Boulder Colorado. University Press of Colorado. 289 p.

Mies R, Williams K. 1996. Understanding Bats. Marietta, Ohio: Pardson Corporation. 32 p.

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