



NUISANCE BATS

July 2006

Bats in attics or walls:

Background: Brazilian free-tailed bats and big brown bats are the most common species found living in houses. Usually staying only during the summer months, some may remain through the winter if the space stays warm. The main problems associated with bats are odors caused by buildup of bat guano and stains on outside walls near the exit hole.

What to do: Homeowners can usually handle this problem without outside help, though people with limited physical capabilities may have to hire a professional nuisance animal control operator.

Step 1. Find out how the bats get in the house:

Station people around the house at dusk to watch for bats leaving to feed. It should be easy to spot the location(s) where bats are exiting, often from under loose shingles, siding, or eaves, openings around the chimney, and through open vents or louvered gables.

Step 2. Exclude the bats: When the opening is located, you need to make a "one-way door" for the bats that will let them exit at dusk, but prevent them from getting back in. Bats should not be excluded from a home from May-July 15 as flightless young bats may starve to death after their mothers are excluded from the house and as they may be difficult to find, a bad smell problem may result. Heavy plastic sheeting is needed to construct the "door".

- A. Cut a piece of heavy plastic large enough to cover the hole and hang down about 1 ½ feet below the opening.
- B. Attach the plastic to the building on the top and sides using duct tape or tacks leaving the bottom open and loose enough to be pulled away from the building about 1 ½ inches.
- C. Leave the "door" up for a few days to make sure all bats have left the building.

Step 3. Close the opening: Block the opening using whatever method is appropriate (caulking, steel wool, replacing broken boards, nailing down shingles, etc). If the bats were leaving through an open vent or louvered gables, cover this opening with ¼" mesh hardware cloth screwed into the frame with the mesh on the outside of the vent.

Step 4. Make sure all openings are closed: Often there are multiple openings used by bats to get into a house, so repeat steps 1-3 until no bats are seen leaving the house in the evening.

Bats in living spaces in a home:

Background: Bats found inside living spaces often enter through open doors, windows, or unscreened chimneys. If there is a colony living in the attic or walls, young bats sometimes wander into parts of the house used by people.

What to do: Closing interior doors and leaving exterior doors and windows open in the room will give the bat a chance to leave on its own. During the day bats may be sleeping and unwilling to leave. In this situation, it may be captured by sliding a plate underneath the bat while placing a bowl over it, trapping the bat between the two. It can then be safely released outside the home. If there has been a possible rabies exposure (see below) leave the bat alone and call your local animal control officer to capture the bat and submit it to the Arkansas Department of Health for testing.

Common Questions:

Will the bats leave if I put up a bat house?

Bats won't leave on their own, but usually will use a bat house if excluded from their current roost using the recommended technique. This will allow the owner to enjoy having bats nearby for insect control, while reducing the risks involved in living with wild animals. Install the bat house a few weeks before exclusion in order to give the bats time to check it out.

Are there bat repellents?

There is one chemical, naphthalene, that is approved by the EPA as a bat repellent. Commonly found in mothballs, if it works at all, will only repels bats for a short period of time. Proper exclusion is the best long-term solution to this problem.

Should I worry about rabies?

Like all mammals, bats can carry rabies, but only ½ of 1% of bats have this disease; skunks and foxes are the most common wild animals found with rabies in Arkansas. Exposure to rabies can happen if a bat bites you or if infectious material, such as saliva, gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. You can not get rabies from just being near a bat or its guano. Since bats have small teeth, not all wounds are obvious and if you find a bat in your room when you awake or in a room with an unattended child, mentally impaired, or intoxicated person, seek medical advice. The bat should be killed (do not harm the head) and submitted to the Arkansas Department of Health for testing.

What can I do about the guano?

If a bat colony has been using a house for a long time, there may be a large accumulation of guano underneath the roost which the owner may want to remove because of the unpleasant odor. In general only properly equipped pest control operators should move large amounts of bat guano as it may be infected with a fungus that can cause histoplasmosis, a respiratory disease. Disturbing the guano can spread this fungus around and increase the risk of exposure. Although the majority of people in Arkansas have already been exposed to this fungus, most do not suffer any ill effects but infection can lead to serious illness for those with compromised immune systems or existing respiratory problems.

Can I kill the bats?

In general bats should only be killed if a potential rabies exposure has occurred and the bat submitted to the Arkansas Department of Health. Many people get bit trying to capture or kill bats and it is usually safer to exclude them from the house with a one-way door. It is illegal to kill bats or other wildlife (except mice and rats) with chemicals or poisons.

Where can I find out more about bats?

Bat Conservation International, PO Box 162603, Austin, TX 78716. Their web site address is <http://www.batcon.org>.