

Bats: Pests or Beneficials?



Bats of Alabama

Blue = Endangered

Orange = near threatened

Red = Vulnerable

1. Brazilian Free-Tailed Bat
2. Big Brown Bat
3. Rafinesque's Big-Eared Bat
4. Evening Bat
5. Eastern Red Bat
6. Hoary Bat
7. Seminole Bat
8. Northern Yellow Bat
9. Southeastern Myotis
10. Gray Myotis
11. Little Brown Myotis
12. Indiana Myotis
13. Eastern Small-Footed Myotis
14. Northern Myotis
15. Eastern Pipistrelle
16. Silver-Haired Bat

Bats!

Bats have long been looked at from a double-sided point of view. The name vampire bat alone is enough to give some people the creeps. Then, there are all the vampire movies out there where one of the vampire's abilities is to change himself (or herself) into a bat and fly off into the night. These ideas are intriguing, but obviously fictional. Then of course there is the ever present fear of rabies. Yet, only a small proportion of bats actually carry rabies and their behavior doesn't change like that of other wild and domestic animals. Individuals that contract rabies do not typically become aggressive; they simply become sick and die.

Bats do not have the best reputation but their beneficial side is characterized by the fact that a single bat can consume thousands of insects a day! That includes pest insects like mosquitoes and others. Bats that feed on fruit beneficially spread seeds, and bats that visit flowers are important pollinators. Even their guano or feces, is used as fertilizer. Although bats can become pests sometimes, control and management must be handled much differently from other pests. There are laws about killing bats and, more specifically, Alabama has two endangered species of bats which dictates that we handle bat management very carefully.

Bats normally are not pests, but when they come into homes, schools, hospitals, and other places, they begin to clash with humans. When bats roost in human dwellings, their feces can cause allergic reactions and it can also attract pests like cockroaches and others that will feed on it. This is especially a problem for places like schools that house children. Children can be more sensitive to allergens and parents obviously want their children to learn in a safe and clean environment. This is why tolerance levels for pests are so low in schools and why problems should be dealt with immediately.

What Can I Do?

As with all other pests, the first step is identification. Since bats are much larger than many other pests, it's not hard to identify if they are the source of your problem. Aside from actually seeing them, they make squeaking noises and they will leave guano on the floor. They will usually be found in the upper portions of a house or building such as on a second floor or in an attic. The next step depends on the number of bats present. If there are between 1 and 5 bats there are a couple of easy ways to handle the situation. During the night hours bats

need to hunt to feed themselves. If there are nearby windows that could be left open they will leave on their own. Many times though, they are found in attics and chimneys where there are no windows. If this is the case they can be covered with a glass or container while they are resting. By sliding a piece of paper or cardboard between the surface they are clinging to and the container, they can be trapped and individually taken outside and released.

If there are more than 5 bats, again, try to give them an escape route. The presence of 5 or more bats can be an indication that it wasn't just by accident or confusion that the bats came to be in the building. They may be looking for a new home. In both cases, it's important to locate the source of their entrance. They may be able to leave the same way they came in, in which case they will leave on their own to hunt.

Bat Prevention and Control Measures

The best tool to prevent bats from entering or reentering your home is exclusion. Exclusion refers to a variety of different methods used to block pest entry. Most exclusion measures should only be taken after all bats are out of the structure. After you have identified places where bats have come in, or could come in, screening, caulking, and wood panels can be used to patch holes and prevent entry. All entry points must be sealed or the bats will return. Although most exclusion measures should only be put in place when bats are absent, there are exceptions. When groups of bats are present and the source of entry has not been found and/or opening a window is not an option, a "bat door" is a good option to try. A bat door is somewhat like a pet door that you might install to let a cat or dog come and go into a home. The only difference is that a bat door only opens one way-out. It allows the bats to fly out of the flap but doesn't allow them to fly back in. These are not always easy to install however. If this is the option you would like to go with, it's best to contract a professional to help with your exclusion measures.

Bat Pest Control

Just like any other outdoor animal, bats have parasites that attack them. Some examples are fleas, lice, mites, and bat bugs. If bat problems are not dealt with quickly, these parasites can establish populations in structures. This is why it's important to have preventative measures in place. If parasites do establish colonies, when the bats finally leave they will seek out other sources of nutrition, such as humans and animals in the area. If that happens, a trained professional should be called upon to assess the situation.

USA 2002 Bat Stamp Pictures



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