



Living in Nature Series

All About Bats

Bat Facts

There are 16 species of bat in BC and 14 of those can be found in the Okanagan.

A Little Brown Bat can eat 1000 mosquito-sized bugs in one hour.

Blind as a bat? Bats don't see in colour, but they have better night vision than humans and they also augment their vision with echolocation.

Bats can live more than 30 years.

The smallest bat in BC is the Western Small-footed Myotis – they have a wing span of 22cm (about the same as a chickadee) and weigh less than a nickel.

The largest bat in BC is the Hoary Bat – they have a wing span of 40 cm (about the same as a swallow) and weigh a bit more than an AA battery.



Big Brown Bat

Photo: Cori Lauson

Mysterious Night Flyers

Unless you are sitting outside in the evening and you see bats swooping through the air, it is easy to forget about them. They don't have the bright colors and beautiful songs of some of our birds. In fact, they are so stealthy that there is a lot we still don't know about them.

The Spotted Bat, which is one of our largest and least stealthy bats, wasn't discovered in Canada until 1979! The echolocation sounds that Spotted Bats use to navigate in the dark and find insects is very low-pitched compared to other bats and is actually audible to human ears. In spite of all this though, we still don't know where Spotted Bats roost for the winter.



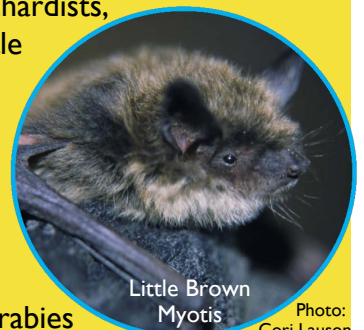
Fringed Bat
Photo: Lia McKinnon

Bats eat bugs, not blood

The bats of BC are all exclusively insect eaters. Other bats in the world can drink blood and eat fruit, but all the bats here eat nothing but insects. Most bats catch insects as they fly, but some will also look for insects on the ground or in trees. Most bats' favourite food is moths, which makes them great allies for the farmers in the valley, since many caterpillars are pests on crop plants. For example, cutworms are a major grape pest and codling moths are a huge problem for apple orchardists, and bats will eat vast quantities of both! The Little Brown Myotis can eat more than its weight in insects in a single night while caring for young.

Bats and disease

Many people often associate bats with rabies and although they are able to be carriers, this is very rare. Less than 0.5% of bats are thought to have rabies and even when probable cases are tested, they only come back positive about 6% of the time. Because rabies is transmitted through bites however, it is still a good idea to never handle a bat and to make sure your pets are up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations.



Little Brown Myotis

Photo: Cori Lauson

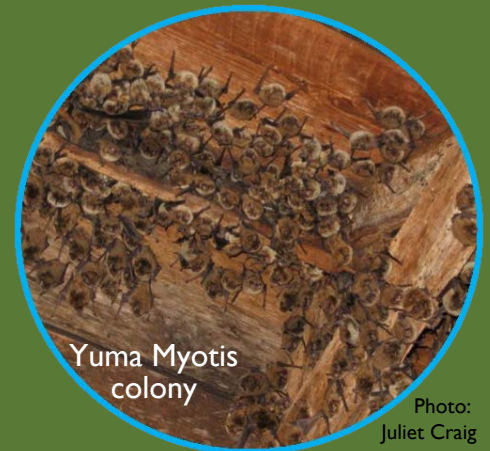
Help stop the spread of White Nose Syndrome! If you are a caver or climber, disinfecting your shoes, clothes and equipment after climbing or caving in new places can help slow the spread of this devastating disease

Bats & White Nose Syndrome

Bats across North America are being gravely threatened not just by human activities but by a new disease called White Nose Syndrome. (WNS). This fungal infection from Europe causes bats to wake up during their winter hibernation and groom the spores off their fur. The repeated awakenings uses up their winter fat stores too quickly and most bats who catch it will slowly starve to death before the spring. WNS has not yet reached Western North America but in the East, the disease has caused 70-100% mortality in most colonies it infects. WNS cannot be caught by humans, but we are almost certainly the ones who brought it over to our bats in the first place.

What about bat boxes?

Bat boxes are a lot like bird houses; they both aim to create safe spaces for either bats or birds to rest and raise their young. Unlike most birds though, bats live in colonies and are quite loyal to one roost, which means they don't search for a different home every year. This means that if you put up a bat box without a bat colony nearby, you may not get bats in it. Bat boxes are most successful when installed as an alternate roost for a colony of bats in an unwanted nearby location like an attic. Putting up clusters of bat boxes in different areas also can allow bats to choose different boxes at different times of year and lets them move around if one box gets too hot or too cold. Best management practices for bat boxes can be found at www.BCbats.ca.



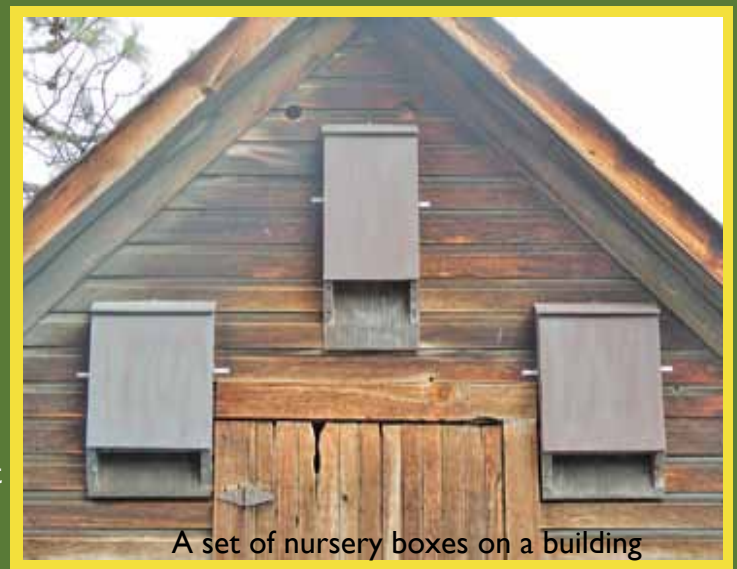
Yuma Myotis colony

Photo: Juliet Craig

How do I help bats?

Even if a bat box may not be the best fit for your property, there are still many things you can do!

- Volunteer to help with bat counts! Counting bats as they leave their roosts helps biologists understand their population numbers. The BC Community Bat Program or the Bat Education & Ecological Protection Society in Peachland are good places to start
- Educate others about bats. Many people are still afraid of bats and don't realise how helpful they are.
- Conserve bat habitat. Bats, like many other species, are threatened by loss of habitat. They need roosting habitat like cliffs and forests, foraging habitat with lots of bugs, and watering areas like creeks and wetlands



A set of nursery boxes on a building

Photo: Eva Rosinger

For more information, visit www.osstewardship.ca/bats
www.batcon.org
www.bcbats.ca
www.whitenosesyndrome.org

Other sources of information also include:
 your local and provincial governments, the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, and Ducks Unlimited

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OSS is a nonprofit organisation that exists to help private landowners in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys care for, enhance, and protect the natural wildlife habitats on their owned and managed properties.

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