

The Time of Bats

Springtime is when a variety of bats emerging from hibernation or migrating back to the Northwest from warmer climates make their presence known through night feeding. For a fantasy-minded person, images of blood-sucking, fang-proud, rabies-infected flying vampires come to mind. Such myths for those of us with a bit more practical musings, give due this vital neighbor.

Bats are important to a healthy ecosystem. Both beneficial and harmless, in our global region they are “primary predators of night-flying insects” like mosquitos and gypsy moths, eating hundreds in a short time.¹ In more tropical areas around the world, they actively pollinate “plants such as bananas, peaches and mangoes,” spread seeds and some species do drink the blood of livestock. A flying, nocturnal mammal, 15 different species call Oregon home. Twelve of the 15 are found on the west side of the state.² The most common are little brown bat, *Myotis* spp., long-legged bat, *Myotis volans*, and big brown bat, *Eptesicus fuscus*.³



Little brown bat, *Myotis*. spp.



Long Legged Bat, *Myotis volans*



Big Brown Bat, *Eptesicus fuscus*

Bats need what all mammals need – food, water, shelter. They require “the right temperature, a pesticide-free environment and a roosting place where the bats will not be disturbed.” Happy bats help keep insects in check and provide for evening birding. Attract insects to your area by planting spearmint (invasive, keep in planter box), nicotiana and phlox. Install bat boxes and roosting areas within a mile of open water ~ a stream, pond or marsh. And, forego the insecticides, they not only kill bugs, they kill bats that eat them.⁴

Housing: as we have witnessed a decline in natural habitat areas in urban areas conducive to bat life, creating and maintaining bat boxes will encourage bats to join the neighborhood more permanently. Bat houses/roosts can be built from scratch or purchased. Boxes will last longer and remain hospitable to tenants when painted and

¹ [Create Roosts for Bats in Your Yard](#), S. Chambers and N. Allen, The Wildlife Garden, EC 1555, Reprinted May 2003, Accessed 4 May 2012.

² Ibid

³ [Pacific Northwest Bat Gallery](#), Bats Northwest, Accessed 4 May 2012.

⁴ [Create Roosts for Bats in Your Yard](#), S. Chambers and N. Allen, The Wildlife Garden, EC 1555, Reprinted may 2003, Accessed 4 May 2012.

caulked to keep out inclement weather. They must be situated in specific areas to maximize sun warmth, painted a specific color to ensure adequate year-around temperatures, safety from predators located 15–30 feet above ground in areas with a variety of vegetation such as those mentioned above.

People must do their part to safeguard bat health. Bats are suffering great losses due to white-nose syndrome. Early 2006, in upstate New York, a caver reported seeing bats with “unusual white substance on their muzzles” and “several dead bats.”⁵ Winter 2007, bats exhibiting erratic behavior, sporting white noses coupled with hundreds more dead found in caves evidenced this epidemic. Five and a half million hibernating bats have died to date. The now known fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, invades the skin of bats and is contagious. Our cautionary note ~ when visiting bat caves late spring through early fall, be sure to wipe down shoes as well as launder clothes well before and after visitation.

Another way to keep bat populations healthy and thriving is to not disturb them while hibernating November through April. Bats awakened during hibernation periods lose 10 to 30 days worth of fat reserves putting them at risk of starvation.⁶ Avoid disturbing nursery colonies/roosts, caves, tree snags or anywhere else known to house bats during the summer. Do not touch or attempt to handle bats as they will defend themselves by biting. Should a bat join you at home inside or up in the attic consult your local Extension Program for safe and healthy ways to remove them. Also, reference Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s [Living with Wildlife: Bats](#). Bats are an important member of a healthy ecosystem. Get to know what they need, how to provide it and invite them to stay awhile by creating a safe and nurturing environment in which to live.

⁵ [White-Nose Syndrome: A devastating disease of North American bats](#), US Fish & Wildlife Service, Accessed 4 May 2012.

⁶ [Living with Wildlife: Bats](#), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Accessed 4 May 2012.