

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

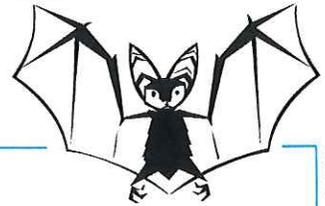


Illustration by Chris Hill

Bats: How to Kindly Remove Unwelcome Guests

In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.

Bats are intriguing mammals that seldom cause problems for humans. On the rare occasions when bats do create conflicts, we should take care in removing these animals humanely.

Misunderstood Creatures

There is nothing to fear from the presence of these graceful creatures.

Bats are very beneficial to have around because they consume large numbers of insects each night during flight. Bats are nocturnal and use echolocation to find their way as they fly in the dark. They also have excellent sight to find prey. They migrate annually and usually have one baby each year.

Humans are bats' biggest threat, along with habitat degradation and pesticide use.

If conflicts with bats do occur, they can be safely, humanely, and effectively resolved.

Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Conflicts with bats usually concern a bat either accidentally entering living areas or roosting in buildings or homes. Bats typically roost in

higher places—thus the term “bats in the belfry”—so the attic is the most common place to find them. If you should accidentally encounter a bat, remain calm and remove children and pets from the area. Bats are not normally aggressive and will try to avoid contact with humans.

If a bat is in your home while you are sleeping or while children or mentally ill persons are present, call your physician as well as your local board of health, animal-control officer, or state department of public health for assistance. Do not let the

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bat get away. But if a bat has entered your home and you're certain that it has not had contact with anyone, allow it a way out by opening all windows and closing interior doors.

Bats often fly in a U-shape when they are confined indoors, so it is advisable to keep as near to the walls as possible when moving around a room. Bats will most likely land somewhere they can hang, such as in curtains or on a houseplant. Be sure to examine the room carefully to determine how the bat

entered the area, and seal the entrances you find.

Bats often enter rooms through an open window or door, but they can also enter through places such as chimneys, openings in interior walls that lead to attics or basements, or openings in outer walls of the house. If you find one bat inside your home, check and make sure there is not a bat colony living somewhere else in the house. Bats do not make or enlarge holes but, rather, use preexisting openings to enter buildings. They can enter a

hole as small as a half inch wide!

Look outside at higher points on the structure. A hole that is used by bats is often discolored from body oil residue.

You can also find out where bats are roosting by watching for them at sunset when they emerge to feed.

If you have located a bat colony in your home and you decide to exclude the animals, first find all the points where they are gaining entry. Seal all these entryways with hardware cloth or sheet metal, except the largest or most often used. Once all but one of the entryways are sealed, attach bird netting or flexible plastic strips with staples or duct tape over the last opening (leave the bottom open) to create a one-way exit. The bats will leave to feed and not be able to regain entry. Leave the one-way exit in place for several nights to be sure that all bats are gone, as not all bats leave the roost every night. After all bats

have left, permanently seal the remaining hole.

The months of May through August are not a good time to try to solve bat colony problems because it is likely that young bats will be present and they can't leave the roost. The ideal time is winter, after the bats have left to hibernate. Before this, you can try to harass the bats into leaving by lighting the area continuously and using fans to cool the attic, which can make the temperature inhospitable to them.

Public-Health Concerns

Although bats have been commonly associated with the transmission of rabies, the incidence of rabies in bat populations in the Northeast has been estimated to be less than one-half of 1 percent. Bats with rabies generally are not aggressive and do not bite unless provoked. Read the MSPCA's *Issues and Answers* on rabies for more information.

THE LIVING WITH WILDLIFE MISSION

The MSPCA Living With Wildlife program aims to protect wild species, now and in the future.

The program promotes peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities by helping to resolve human-animal conflicts in a humane, nonlethal, long-term, and cost-effective manner.



Areas that contain large accumulations of bat or bird droppings may harbor histoplasmosis fungi spores, which can cause infection in humans. To prevent exposure, avoid soil contaminated with bat droppings. If it is necessary to be in such areas, wear gloves, work boots, and a face mask or self-contained breathing apparatus, and

keep exposed clothing in a bag until washing.

For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit www.livingwithwildlife.org, or e-mail lww@mspca.org.