

Bat House Facts



Cal Butchkoski, PA Game Commission



WHY INSTALL A BAT HOUSE?

Many people install bat houses in the hopes of attracting bats to help control insect populations. As a major predator of night-flying insects, bats can reduce unwanted pests in the lawn and garden. A single *big brown bat* can eat several thousand insects in one evening! Others install them to provide a home for bats they are trying to evict from attics, barns or shutters. In addition to the reward of insect control, regardless of the reason, adding a bat box to your yard can help maintain the delicate balance of nature.

WHAT BAT SPECIES WILL I ATTRACT?

In Delaware the most common bat species that will be attracted to your bat house are the *little brown bat*, *big brown bat*, and the *tri-colored bat* (formerly eastern pipistrelle). Their occupancy will range from early spring into the fall, with most young being born in June.

HOW DO I OBSERVE MY BATS SAFELY?

While bats are roosting they are quite easy to observe with a flash light and binoculars if needed. An established colony will be tolerant of humans as long as the house or mounting post is not disturbed and direct light is not kept on the bats for more than 10 seconds. When counting bats you may have more luck watching them emerge at dusk. Checking the house after adults have emerged in the evening will allow you to see if the colony have pups that are too young to fly. Young, flightless pups stay in the box while their mothers feed.

HOW MUCH MAINTINENCE IS REQUIRED?

None for the first several years, eventually caulking or re-painting may be needed to maintain the temperature and decrease drafts. Cleaning an open-bottomed bat house is only necessary if insects try to nest. These activities should be done in the off season when bats are not present.

WHERE DO I INSTALL MY BAT HOUSE?

- Houses can be installed on a post/pole or mounted on a wall.
- Bat houses work best when they receive 6-8 hours of sunlight (preferably morning sun on the east or south facing side of your house).
- All bat houses should be mounted at least 10 feet above the ground (12 to 20 is even better).
- Bats may find houses more quickly when located near a forest or water, but should be mounted no less than 20 feet from the nearest potential perch for aerial predators (such as owls and hawks).
- Detailed instructions on how to build a bat house or where you can purchase one, along with some frequently asked questions can be found at www.batcon.org.

WHEN SHOULD I INSTALL MY BAT HOUSE?

- Houses can be installed anytime, but are most likely used their first summer if installed in the early spring.
- When excluding a colony of bats from your living area, be sure to install a bat box 2-6 weeks prior to exclusion. Waiting until September 1st will ensure the likelihood that bats and their young will survive.
- Never exclude bats from your home if flightless young are present. They will die if their mothers cannot reach them. Desperate mothers may try to reach their pups through windows or doors.



Healthy Big Brown and Small Footed Bat, Alan Hicks, NY