



# Living in Nature Series

## Bats and Bat Boxes

### Bat Facts

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

There are 5 species of bat in the Okanagan that will use bat houses

One little brown bat can eat 1000 mosquito sized insects in an hour

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

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 weighs a little more than a double A battery

Help stop the spread of White Nose Syndrome! White Nose Syndrome is a disease affecting only bats, not humans and has recently been found in Western North America. If you are a caver, disinfecting shoes, clothing and caving equipment can help slow the spread of this devastating disease.

### 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 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 sonar that the spotted bat uses to navigate in the dark and find insects is so low pitched that it is audible to humans. In spite of this, we still don't know where spotted bats roost for the winter.



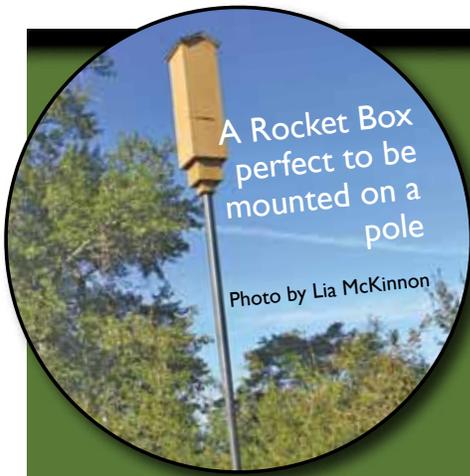
Fringed bat  
Photo by Lia McKinnon

### Bats eat bugs, not blood!

The bats of BC are all exclusively insect eaters. Worldwide there are bats that drink blood and bats that eat fruit. However, all of the bats in the Okanagan eat nothing but insects. Most bats catch insects as they fly, but some will also look for insects on the ground or in trees. The Little Brown Myotis can eat more than its weight in insects in a single night while caring for young. 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 coddling moth are a huge problem for apple orchardists, and bats eat the adults of both!

### Bats and disease

Many people associate bats with rabies, and they can carry the disease, but it is quite rare. Of the bats that are sent to the Centre for Disease Control, that are suspected of being rabid, only about 6% carry the disease. Less than half of 1% of bats are thought to have rabies. Rabies is transmitted through bites. To protect yourself it is a good idea to never handle bats and to make sure pets are up to date on their rabies vaccinations.



A Rocket Box perfect to be mounted on a pole

Photo by Lia McKinnon

### How you can help bats

Install a bat box, do a bat count reduce your pesticide use to keep their food supply healthy. Installing a bat box gives bats a place to live and helps to keep healthy numbers of bats in the ecosystem. Doing a bat count just means sitting near a roost or bat box for about 15 minutes before sunset and half an hour after sunset and counting the bats that are leaving the roost. For more information on bat counts visit [www.bcbats.ca](http://www.bcbats.ca) . Bats are so quiet and secretive that biologists don't have good information on many populations. Doing a bat count can help biologists get information on how are bats are doing and can help biologists insure that populations are healthy and lets us notice declines sooner.

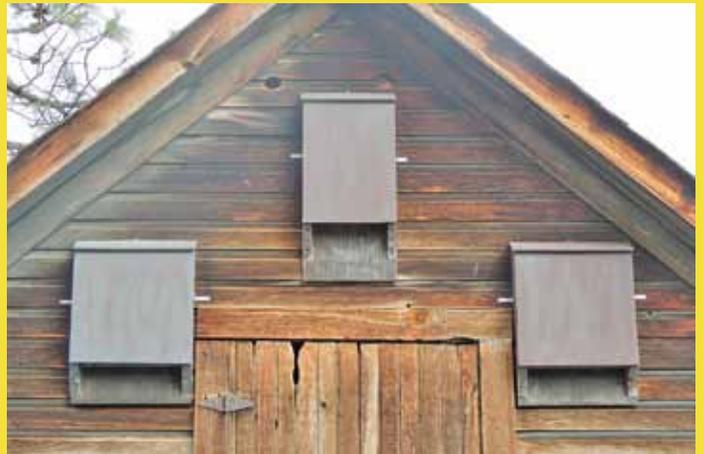
### What is a bat box?

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 bird species, the bats that will use bat boxes live in colonies. This means that one bat box can provide a home for 100-150 bats. There are several different types of bat box. The Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society uses two types of bat box; rocket boxes and four chambered nursery boxes. Both of these designs have multiple inner chambers which create more surface area for the bats to cling to and also mean that different chambers can be different temperatures. With a shaded surface protected from the sun, and other chambers warmed by the sun, the bats, like goldilocks, can find a space that is just the right temperature. Small holes in the inside of the box make it easy for the bats to move from one chamber to another as the day warms up.

### What to think about when putting up a bat box?

When you are thinking about places to put your bat box, some things that you want to think about are

- 10 to 20 feet off the ground
- 20 to 25 feet from perches for aerial predators, like owls
- It should face south or east and receive at least 6 to 8 hours of sunlight a day
- Should not be mounted in a spot with bright light



Rocket boxes mounted on a building Photo by Eva Rosinger

For more information:  
Go to [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org),  
[www.bcbats.ca](http://www.bcbats.ca), [www.whitenosesyndrome.org](http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org)

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society, BCGovernment, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, your local government, Ducks Unlimited, Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society, and the Stewardship Centre for BC.

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Helping private landowners protect and enhance natural areas on their lands.

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