



# WYOMING'S BAT SPECIES

## Essential allies to rural landowners

By Lucy Diggins-Wold

**B**ats may be the most misunderstood of all mammals, despite the fact they play an important role in seed dispersal and pollination of many plant species worldwide. Bats are also a major predator of night-flying insects.

The truth is, there are many error-riddled published articles and other media about bats. I'll attempt to correct some of these errors.

Bats are not mice nor are they rodents. They are so unique in the taxonomy world they are assigned their own Order, Chiroptera, which means hand-winged.

There are at least 1,105 species of bats, including 45 species in North America, with 18 bat species documented in Wyoming – 12 resident species, four peripheral (species on edge of their typical habitat) species, and two accidental species.

Worldwide, bats pollinate plants and disperse seeds. Their feces, or guano, are used in many countries for fertilizer, including the United States.

### Dine on Insects

Bats are not blind, and they are the only mammal that can truly fly almost 40 miles per hour, upside down, sideways,

and then squeeze through a hole the size of a quarter. If that doesn't "wow you" as a rural landowner, it might wow you that insectivore bats consume enormous quantities of insects, including many pests in barnyards and backyards.

For example, pallid bats dine on large quantities of crickets and grasshoppers. Big brown bats consume cucumber beetles and their larvae. Silver-haired and long-eared bats eat many insects in our forests and help keep insect populations in check. Just one little brown myotis bat can devour 1,200 insects in one hour, and a nursing mother little brown bat consumes more than 4,000 insects a night!

### Consider a Bat House

Rural landowners might consider providing habitat for bats by building a bat house. Like all wildlife, bats need food, water, shelter, and space. While bat houses are not a substitute for natural bat habitat, they can provide adequate habitat for a handful of Wyoming bat species that are relatively abundant and general in their roosting and foraging needs. These include little brown myotis, the pallid bat, long-eared myotis bats, and the big brown bat.

There is no guarantee bats will use the bat houses you erect, but, with patience, you might prevail. There are many different bat house

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*Bat biologist Diane Probeski holds a Yuma bat in the Henry's Fork wetlands near the Wyoming and Utah border.*

designs available, but not all bat house plans and designs are suitable for Wyoming's bats.

Wildlife biologists with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) recommend a publication called *Better Bat Houses in Wyoming*, available at any regional office of the WGFD. In addition, Bat Conservation International has an incredible website with information on bat boxes, bat ecology, and bat conservation at <http://batcon.org>. An example of one of their boxes is shown on page 5.

Knowing which species are using the area is helpful if you decide to build a bat box. Get a good mammals guide or ask your local wildlife biologist. Determine if the bats are roosting males or if they are females looking for a nursery colony. The design of your box will be different.

### **Designs are Species Specific**

Whatever type of bat box, it should address all of these functions: design, construction, paint, placement, timing, patience and experimentation, maintenance, and monitoring. Be patient and research the bat species on

your property for the correct bat box design.

Finally, if you do have bats roosting in your buildings, don't panic. They are only here for the spring and summer months and must migrate to warmer climates in the fall. The WGFD publication *Living With Bats in Wyoming* is a free publication available at any WGFD regional office and has information on what to do if bats are found in your buildings and safe removal without killing them or their young pups.

Although bats do contract diseases like rabies, histoplasmosis, and West Nile virus, the cases are few in Wyoming, especially rabies. Bats have been falsely blamed for being major carriers of rabies due to misinformation spread in the early 1960s. Your chance of contracting rabies from a bat is extremely remote.

So, put a lawn chair on the porch and watch these nighttime predators of pesky insects in your barnyards and backyards. Maybe even go one step further and put up a bat house. You will enjoy their antics and see fewer bugs buzzing by your porch light.

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