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## The Benefits of Bats

Bats get a bad rap. Popular movies make them out to be blood-thirsty. Myths and misconceptions abound. The truth is bats are quite harmless and their presence is an indicator of a healthy environment.

Many millions of bats die each year out of human fear and ignorance. Coupled with habitat destruction and roost loss, bat numbers are declining rapidly.

A decrease in bats means insect populations can increase substantially. This means more mosquitoes, Gypsy moths, and a long list of other insect pests.

Bats are the only mammals able to fly. Nine insect-eating species of bats live in Michigan. All are nocturnal and feed almost exclusively on flying insects, including moths and beetles. The little brown bat is especially abundant throughout the state and is the most seen species.

As one of the major predators of night flying insects, bats can be important weapons in combating insects like mosquitoes that are capable of transmitting diseases. One bat can eat 600 to 1,000 mosquito-sized insects in an hour. Bats are also one of the most natural agricultural pest controls you could ever wish for. Agricultural producers benefit because they don't need to use as many pesticides.

Many states in the USA are realizing the positive tourism spin off from bats. Every summer night, hundreds of people gather to see the world's largest urban bat colony emerge from under the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin Texas. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people visit the bridge to witness the bat flight, generating ten million dollars in tourism revenue annually.

Bat droppings, called guano, is one of the richest natural fertilizers to be used in agriculture and has been used since ancient times to promote a good harvest. It is especially useful for organic gardening because it contains healthful microorganisms and elements such as nitrogen and phosphorus that work to detoxify the soil.

Don't let bat myths play on your fears. Although they may not be the cutest creatures in the animal kingdom, bats are extremely helpful and beneficial. Installing a backyard bat house is an effective and environmentally friendly way to reduce the mosquito population around your home. When you place a bat house in your backyard, you offer bats a safe place to live and you'll be able to spend time enjoying the outdoors during the warmer months.

There are two excellent websites for those that would like to learn more about bats:

Organization for Bat Conservation [www.batconservation.org](http://www.batconservation.org)

Bat Conservation International at [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

Bat house plans

<http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/bathouses/SingleChamberBHPlans.pdf>

<http://www.batconservation.org/>

21 pages of detailed instructions:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/bats/pdf/BuildingBatHouses.pdf>



Criteria for Successful Bat Houses

<http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/bathouses/bathousecriteria.pdf>

Attracting Bats

<http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/bathouses/attractingbats.pdf>