

What To Do About Bats in the Roof

Bats are environmentally important native animals, but they do not belong in your roof! They do **not** damage buildings, do **not** invade food and do **not** carry diseases, but droppings and dead bats cause odour problems. It is important to **seal bats out – not in!** Trapped bats can find their way into to living areas, so read these instructions carefully and call the LIME Wildlife Hotline 917-BIRD. *Do not plug holes unless bats are out.*

Humans have taken over many of bats' original habitats and feeding grounds. Bats are simply trying to use what is available to them now, in a very changed environment. **Only insect-eating bats live in buildings.** Fruit bats roost in caves and thick bush. If you farm, garden or don't like mosquitoes, remember that a bat eats over 1,000 insects per hour – and not only mosquitoes, but also crop and garden pests!

In houses with Spanish tile roofs, bats are usually not in the attic space but under the tiles. In this case, bats can be allowed to stay if the droppings are not falling on a patio or deck.

Bats leave their roost every night to feed, except in very bad weather. Watch all sides of the building at sunset. Bats usually emerge from only one or two holes (usually on the west). Leave these holes open and plug all the minor unused holes you see with a material that blocks light and air so bats will find and use this “one-way valve” on the main exit holes.

Use a piece of 3” diameter PVC pipe as a one-way tunnel. Bats slide out, but can't climb back in. Secure the pipe over the hole and seal all the edges. (More detailed instructions in document “Building and Installing a Bat Exclusion Device.” The best time to install the device is at dusk, after most bats have left. This prevents panic if hundreds of bats are trying to fly out of the new exit. Be sure the inside end of the pipe is even with the interior floor, so bats can drop through easily. If bats are using a missing soffit vent, the pipe can be pre-



mounted on a square of plywood. Continue to watch at dusk for a few days to be sure they are not using other openings. Allow several days for all the bats to leave. If the weather is bad, this may take up to a week. All the holes must be plugged permanently AFTER the bats are out. Use screen folded into black plastic (pieces of a trash bag), wood, cement, caulk, or whatever is right for your building. Spray foam is **not** recommended. It dries and crumbles in the heat. Bats don't chew new holes, but they can squeeze through very tiny cracks. Download the PowerPoint on this website for detailed photos and instructions or contact info@caymanwildlife.org or info@nationaltrust.org.ky

REMEMBER, NEVER EVICT BATS DURING JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER OR THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF NOVEMBER WHEN BABY BATS WOULD BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR MOTHERS AND LEFT TO DIE. THIS IS CRUEL AND UNWISE. BATS HAVE ONLY ONE BABY EACH PER YEAR. AN ENTIRE GENERATION WOULD BE LOST, AND DEAD BABY BATS WOULD NOT SMELL GOOD IN YOUR HOUSE.

For difficult corners and angles an exclusion device can also be made from softer materials. These are still in the design stage, but have been used successfully. Every exclusion is a little bit different. Call the LIME Wildlife Hotline – 917-BIRD if you encounter any unusual situations or difficulties. Another method that works where a pipe cannot be mounted is to tape or staple a piece of clear plastic or netting loosely over the main exit. This should be cone-shaped and works like a fish trap. It should hang down two feet below the hole. Seal the top and sides, but leave the bottom open. The bats will come out under the screen, crawl to the bottom and fly away. When they return they shouldn't be able to re-enter. Watch for at least three nights to be sure this is working properly. Screening works best on a smooth surface. Bats are learning in recent years to land on the screening and go under it, so this method only works if it is carefully monitored. If you hear squeaking and bats are stuck and can't get out, loosen the netting. It may take several adjustments to get it right. Sometimes several colonies of bats are in different compartments that are not connected inside the roof. In this case, use a separate exclusion device for each compartment.

Watching carefully after the exclusion will show you if bats have found a new way inside. They can squeeze through very tiny cracks. Bats that roost in houses are usually Velvety Free-tailed Bats, but rare species sometimes find their way into roof spaces too. Some of these are found only on a few Caribbean islands, and one is only on Grand Cayman! It is important to protect these rare species, but our common bats also need protection. Large bat colonies eat *tons* of harmful insects and are an important part of Cayman's ecosystem.

There is never a reason to poison bats. Attempts to do this are hazardous to humans and unnecessary. Since bats will not take bait, poisons used on them must be breathed or absorbed through the skin. These types of poisons are not healthy for children, pets, old people, or anyone else! Some bat poisons are deadly to people. Burning sulfur or commercial bat repellent products (usually just mothballs!) doesn't work. More bats will move in if all the openings are not closed. Killing bats only adds to the difficulties.

An important part of moving bats out is to give them a place to go. Provide housing for our valuable bats so they don't move into your neighbors house! Buy or build a bat house and install it a few weeks before you plan to do your bat exclusion. Be a good neighbor and provide the bats with a safe, permanent home. Free plans for building your own bat houses are available on www.caymanwildlife.org or completed bat houses may be purchased.