

Why put up a Bat House?

Cayman Islands' bats are a valuable natural resource. They control many types of insects including mosquitoes, moths, beetles and other crop and garden pests. Bats pollinate native plants, and they drop seeds in our forests that help keep them healthy and beautiful. Yet, due to lack of information, people have killed bats and destroyed their habitats in the belief that these beneficial native animals are "vermin."

Bats are not related to rats and mice. They are not rodents. Bats will not chew wood or wires or make their own entry holes into buildings. They do not invade human food stores. They do not have large litters, but bear only one pup per year in the late spring or summer. Bats here carry no diseases and are not a danger to pets or people.

The Cayman Islands have nine species of bats, some eat insects, some eat nectar and pollen, and some eat fruit. Each species specializes in a certain type of food. ***The bats found in roofs and bat houses are insect-eating bats only.*** Fruit bats don't live in Cayman Islands' roofs and are too big to fit in the crevices of bat houses.

Insect-eating bats live in large colonies of several hundred individuals. They do not build nests or create their own living space, but must find an existing cavity that suits their needs – and this is often a roof space. Bats are losing their natural habitat. They are now forced to live closely with people where they are easily found and can be destroyed by vandals or people who do not understand their value. They need our help to survive. Putting up bat houses helps to replace some of the homes they have lost due to the clearing of forests and repeated disturbance of caves. It also provides them with a safe refuge after years of being unwelcome guests in roofs.

Bat houses will not attract bats to your roof. If there are openings in the roof, bats will find them and already be there! To remove bats from your roof safely and humanely, call the LIME Wildlife Hotline at 917-BIRD or the National Trust at 949-0121 for free instructions or referral to professionals who can do the job for you.



An important part of moving bats out of a building is to provide them with another place to go. To avoid stressing bat colonies by constant, repeated exclusions, buy or build a bat house before you exclude your bats. Install your bat house a few weeks before you plan to move the bats. This is far better than having them move into your neighbor's roof or another part of your roof! Be a good neighbor and provide the bats with a safe, permanent home. A single bat house can hold hundreds of bats!

Many people who don't have a bat problem in their roof space simply enjoy having a bat house in their garden. Besides being of ecological benefit to the whole country, bats in your garden provide natural pest control for you including mosquitoes AND garden pests like caterpillars! Gardeners collect a steady supply of fertilizer by placing trays under bat houses. (It is very strong, so be sure to compost or mix with soil before using.) For children or youth groups, bat houses are an interesting and educational project. Studies have shown that children, when given the opportunity, become very enthusiastic about bats, and even prefer them to dinosaurs!

The Bat Conservation Project sells pre-made bat houses when available. (We need volunteer carpenters!) We also supply free bat house building plans for "do-it-yourselfers" and will make a free visit to your site to help identify the best place to put your new bat house.

Bat houses are still experimental in the tropics. The Cayman Islands are in the forefront of bat house research with more than 50 inhabited bat houses on Grand Cayman. The more bat houses we put up, the more we can learn about the special needs of unique tropical bat species.

There are five bat houses in the Botanic Park. These are part of our on-going research project as to temperature and orientation preferred by local bats. Information provided by these and other bat houses around the islands will help ensure that these valuable and beneficial animals will not be lost.

We do not want to add the name of our country to the infamous list of places like Israel and Guam. These countries have lost their bats and now must rely heavily upon pesticides or abandon farming altogether due to the unforeseen problems of crop pests that have multiplied out of control when their bat populations crashed.

For further information call the LIME Wildlife Hotline - 917-BIRD. Visit www.caymanwildlife.org or www.nationaltrust.org.ky or email Info@caymanwildlife.org

