

Mosquitoes Beware: Bats Have Your Number

For immediate release

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Prince George, BC. Did you know that a Little Brown Myotis can eat 600 mosquitoes in an hour? Not only do bats devour mosquitoes, but the bats of BC also eat other night-time insects that are considered pests to the agricultural and forest industries. “Smaller bat species eat the smaller insects, while larger bat species eat larger beetles and moths, including cucumber beetles, June bugs, stinkbugs, and Spruce Budworm,” says Tina Watters, Omineca Community Bat Program coordinator. “We have at least 15 species of bats in BC, and they all provide free and natural insect pest control services for the community.”

The BC Community Bat Programs would like to remind residents that in August, bats start to leave their summer roosts and sometimes end up in unusual spots, like entryways, on exposed walls, on the ground, in covered deck areas, or even flying into a house if the door is left open in the evening. Please remember to never touch a bat with your bare hands, whether it's dead or alive.

Bats are important wildlife that are protected under the BC Wildlife Act. It is illegal to exterminate, directly harm, or harass bats.

Bats don't breed like mice. “Females only have one pup per year,” says Watters. “Pups are born in June, learn to fly and start hunting for bugs in July, and start to leave their maternity colonies in August and September.” Bats have to fatten up enough to survive all winter without eating. About half of the pups don't make it through their first winter.

“Young bats like to stay up all night and don't necessarily come home!” says Watters. “Sometimes bats end up sleeping in exposed spots during the day.”

Bats should be left alone if they are roosting in areas safely away from pets or children. Bats will fly off in the evening to continue foraging for insects. “Let the bat hang out for the day,” says Watters.

If you must move a bat, wear thick gloves and long sleeves, and use a small trowel, box or cotton cloth bag to gently capture and relocate a bat to a tree nearby. Release the bat at head-height or higher, on a tree where pets and curious children won't disturb it.

Although less than 1% of bats in BC carry rabies, it is still important to avoid any contact.

“Talk to your children to make sure they understand to never touch, play or try to rescue bats.” says Watters. If you suspect a bite or scratch from a bat: 1. Immediately wash the area with soap and water for 15 minutes; and 2. Contact your public health or your doctor immediately.

For more information on rabies, please refer to the BCCDC website <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/rabies>.

Cats can hear bat echolocation calls at night, and often successfully hunt them. If your cat comes into contact with a bat, please call your veterinarian immediately to see if rabies boosters are needed. Always vaccinate your pets against rabies.

The BC Community Bat Program recommends that cats be kept indoors in the evening when the bats are active. “Bat pups are learning to fly at this time of year, and they are easily caught and killed by cats,” says Watters.

If you have bats roosting on your buildings, the BC Community Bat Programs can offer information, provide best management practices, and support. For information on safely moving a bat and to report bat sightings, landowners can visit the BC Community Bat Program’s website (www.bcbats.ca), email omineca@bcbats.ca, or call 1-855-9BC-BATS ext. 26.

The BC Community Bat Programs are supported by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the Forest Enhancement Society of BC, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Government of BC. Locally, we are also supported by the City of Prince George.

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Contact:

Tina Watters, Regional Bat Coordinator
Omineca Community Bat Program

E. omineca@bcbats.ca

T. 1-855-922-2287 ext. 26

C. 403-505-2915

Paula Rodriguez de la Vega, Provincial Coordinator
BC Community Bat Programs

E. info@bcbats.ca

T. 1-855-922-2287 ext.20

C. 250-809-8152

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bcbats>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/gotbats/>

PHOTOS:

Bat on wall by BC Community Bat Program. "Bats are leaving their summer roosts and can sometimes be found roosting out in the open. Please leave bats alone if they are in an area where pets and children will not disturb them."

Child and bat by Lesah Curatolo. "It's important to teach children to appreciate bats, but also to teach them to never touch a bat. Contact the BC Community Bat Program for information on how to move a bat safely."