

Bats Are More Common Than You May Think

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

When it comes to the list of critters that freak people out, bats probably rank #3 right behind snakes and spiders. Snakes will likely always be #1 on that list, but if people encountered bats as often as they did spiders, I suspect that bats might be #2. But just like those snakes and spiders, bats are very valuable. We have a lot of bats in our area of several different species. But since they are nocturnal many residents never encounter them unless one winds up in their house.

We have several species of bats documented from Geary County, at least four and likely a couple more. Some are migratory and pass through, perhaps only spending a day or two in transit. Others are breeding species, like the Red Bat. But the Red Bat is basically solitary and roosts in trees. Most people will never see one, but if you do, they are beautiful, in their own batty way! Some, like the Big Brown Bat, are very common, are nesting species, and are in fact most likely year round species; something you probably didn't want to hear!

Much of what mankind knows about bats was based on tradition and folklore for many decades. The last twenty years has brought a great deal of new information to our knowledge of bats and there has even been a fair amount of bat research being done right in our own region. So toss your fears and myths aside and let's learn more about these important little bug zappers that we often share our own homes with!

For years there was the assumption that most of the bats we saw were Little Brown Bats (more correctly called Little Brown Myotis) But what we have learned in recent years is that Little Browns are far rarer than we once thought. Most of the bats that we interact with around our buildings are actually Big Brown Bats. Keep in mind that the terms little and big are very subjective. Neither one of these bats are very big. The Big Brown, at most, is going to weigh just a bit over an ounce! When you think about where these bats may enter your attic, think about a mouse with wings. If a mouse could get through an opening, so could these bats.

Big Brown Bats will form loose nursery colonies in the spring which may contain from a few bats to dozens. They give birth to one or two naked and blind young. The young will be capable of flight at three to four weeks of age and will be weaned at four to five months of age. Although they form loose colonies, these won't normally be packed together like some of the species that we find in caves. They go into hibernation fairly early, usually by early to mid October. Periods of warm weather in the late fall, winter or early spring may bring them out of hibernation for a few days.

Getting bats out of a building can be a challenge and is often best done in late summer or early fall before hibernation. You have to determine, through observation, where they are entering the building, wait for them to leave in the evening and then seal the opening so they can't get back in. In some cases netting has to be laid flat against the building so the bats can crawl out and leave but not get back in. In cases of large colonies or in commercial buildings, professional firms sometimes have to be brought in.

Bats are extremely beneficial animals contributing greatly to keeping flying insect populations from getting worse than they are. The rabies risk is real, but often over exaggerated. If you want more information on excluding bats from a building, please contact me at the Extension Office!