

Bats and their living quarters

by Darren Kruger – darrenk@antic.net

The majority of people don't like bats. There are persistent myths that bats carry rabies, that they suck blood, that they get tangled in your hair. Only the three species of vampire bats - all natives to Central America - suck blood. And bats really don't get tangled in your hair - they very much prefer to avoid humans. Not only are bats not bad, but there are benefits to having them around and can be one of the best friends you can have for your backyard. You'll also have the benefit of seeing these beautiful creatures fly around. If you have not had the joy of seeing a bat fly, you will be amazed at the bats agility and turning ability. And do not worry that they will bug you - they are very scared of people and you will never have to worry about them attacking you.

These small flying mammals can consume up to 1200 insects a piece per hour. That's a lot less mosquitoes biting you! There are over 900 species of bats around the world, making up 20% of all mammals and the only mammal that has the ability to fly. A bats diet consists mainly of insects that can be harmful to humans as well as gardens. Mosquitoes aren't the only insect that bats eat - they have a wide diet that includes many of the moths that are the adult form of the worms that like to eat your plants, gnats and midges. Bats clear bugs out of your garden in a secondary way, too - many insects can hear the bats and leave the area to avoid being eaten. So, more bats equals less bites on you and more broccoli in the garden.

Their guano is also a good thing. Bat poop is a low odor source of phosphorus and nitrogen, great for fertilizing the garden. Some species of bats are even capable of pollinating your garden. Since bats and birds have different diets, you will never have to worry about your favorite birds competing for food and flying away. While they eat some of the same insects - like the mosquitoes that Swallows consume - they keep different hours. There won't be any squabbling over bugs, and there are certainly plenty to go around! Unfortunately due to urbanization,

these wonderful creatures' natural habitat, is becoming threatened and are being destroyed day by day. As we are invading their areas all the more, they need to find alternative lodging very quickly in order to survive. This makes your roof a very logical solution to their problem. A wonderful and proven alternative than killing them, is the construction of bat hotels in an area or even in your backyard. The bats' guano is used to treat the newly constructed and vacant bat hotel, which enables the bat to move into the hotel quicker and inhabit his new home faster as the scent is familiar to him. Establishing them in their new hotel can take up to a month whereafter thorough inspection would be done in your roof to confirm whether all the bats have moved out. After the inspection, your roof would be sealed off to prevent any future inhabitation by bats, so that you can go on with your life without further hassles, and they can do the job they were created to do - protecting you from dangerous insects. So if you have bats in your garden, you should feel blessed that they have chosen your backyard! They are not a curse, they are there for YOUR benefit!



BAT REHABILITATION & RELEASE

FreeMe - FreeMe is a Rehabilitation Centre for indigenous sick, injured or orphaned wildlife based in the north of Johannesburg. The public can bring wildlife to them for specialised treatment, care and rehabilitation until they can be released. At FreeMe, bats have become a part of the seasonal influx of babies and a large part of director Margi Brocklehurst's life, besides her numerous other responsibilities.

Tel: 083 558-5658

GPS COORDINATES :
S 26.0321 E 28.0405

BAT INTEREST GROUPS:

- KZN Bat Interest Group
- Cape Bat Interest Group

WILDLIFE & BAT TOURISM

Ngwenya Lodge, adjacent to the Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga. If bats have grabbed your interest then why not arrange to go bat watching at Ngwenya Lodge? At least six species of bats, including Angolan free-tailed bats, Sundeval's leaf-nosed bats,

Mauritian tomb bats, Banana Bats and Wahlberg's epauletted fruit bats roost in significant colonies at Ngwenya Lodge. Contact Dr. Brian Whiting, director of Winchester Marketing and a director of the share block company at Ngwenya Lodge



NATURE CONSERVATION AWARENESS:

Bats Without Borders: Working together to secure a future for bats in Southern Africa. We are a not-for-profit organisation working across southern Africa to conserve bat populations and biodiversity by engaging with children, adults, students, researchers, communities, decision makers, conservationists, land managers, agricultural industry and private and public institutions



EcoSolutions: EcoSolutions operates the Urban Owl Box Project and the Raptor Centre at Broederstroom. We provide owl boxes, bat boxes, barbet logs, bird feeders and eco-gift hampers, and install the same at homes and schools throughout Gauteng, North West Province and the Western Cape.

Drumblade Conservancy: We aim to create awareness of the uniqueness of the Drumblade area, our indigenous flora and fauna, and ensure its re-establishment and protection for future generations

'It is unfortunate that the average person has a deep prejudice against the bat. Without looking or thinking for himself, he accepts a lot of absurd tales about the winged one, and passes them on and on, never caring for the injustice he does or the pleasure he loses.

The bat is the climax of creation in many things, highly developed in brain, marvellously keen in senses, clad in exquisite fur, and equipped, above all, with the crowning glory of flight.

He is the prototype and the realization of the Fairy of the Wood we loved so much as children, and so hated to be robbed of by grown-ups who should have known better. I would give a good deal to have a bat colony where I could see it daily and would go a long way to meet some new kind of bat.'

*Ernest Thomas Seton,
Wild Animal Ways, 1923*

