

Bats ... Scary or Gentle Creatures of the Night?

Have you noticed boxes on poles in the park? Ever wondered why they are there? They are bat houses, i.e. homes to encourage bats to take up residence.

Many people think that bats are creepy, scary, spooky. After all, don't they suck blood? So, why would we want to encourage them to hang around the park. The truth is that bats are really shy, gentle, intelligent and misunderstood creatures that are part of a healthy ecosystem.

According to New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection,¹ there are nine bat species that call our State home. Six of them are full-time residents:

- Little brown bat
- Big brown bat
- Northern long-eared bat
- Indiana bat (a federal and state endangered species)
- Eastern small-footed bat and
- Eastern pipistrelle.

These bats are active only in the warmer months but hibernate all winter.

The other three species are part-time residents who migrate during the cold months:

- Hoary bat;
- Red bat; and
- Silver haired bat.

None of these bat species feed on blood. They do, however, like to eat the most dangerous animal in the world: mosquitoes!² In fact, a bat can eat more than its weight in mosquitoes and like-sized insects - up to about 1,200 in an hour and 3,000 in one night. A nursing mom (yes, bats nurse their babies) can consume 4,500 such insects in a night.



¹ See https://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/ensp/pdf/bat_fact_sheet.pdf

² <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/stories/2019/world-deadliest-animal.html>

Bats “hang out” in safe places all day and come out at night to feed. They need open grassland, forest edges and water bodies to feed and drink. Brightwood Park has just the right elements for a bat habitat.

Bats are mammals – not birds. They have fur not feathers. Bats are warm-blooded and have live births. Bats generally have one baby, called a pup, in a year. Bat moms produce milk and nurse their pups about four to five weeks until the pups are able to fly and seek out food. Like most mammals, bats have bellybuttons! They are social animals and live in colonies.

Bats are the only mammal that can fly – and some fly crazy fast! A Mexican Free-tailed bat has been clocked at 100 miles per hour for short distances!³ Although bats can see, they also rely upon echolocation, i.e. reflected sound, as they fly in the dark.

Bats have a few predators such as owls, hawks and snakes. However, their biggest threat is disease. New Jersey’s bat populations were severely impacted by a fatal fungal infection called white nose syndrome. While some bats have adapted their hibernation lifestyles to help prevent infection, the number of bats in the State is greatly diminished from what it once was.

In recognition of the vital role bats play in a healthy environment, it is illegal to kill bats in New Jersey. Bats need our help to survive:

- plant a “bat garden” with night blooming flowers including goldenrod, wild hydrangea, fleabane, nicotiana, raspberry, or northern bush honeysuckle; and/or
- install a bat house.

Bat week celebrates bats the week of October 24 to 31! How will you celebrate?

For more information, check out:

- NJ DEP website: https://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/ensp/pdf/bat_fact_sheet.pdf;
- US Department of the Interior website: <https://www.doi.gov/blog/13-facts-about-bats>;
- **Bat Conservation International, www.batcon.org; and**
- **Bat Conservation and Management, [http:// www.batmanagement.com](http://www.batmanagement.com).**

³ <https://www.batcon.org/about-bats/faq/>