

Living with Wildlife – Bat



submitted photo

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Sadly, bats are animals that conjure up fear in many people. The ironic part is that bats are extremely beneficial to humans. They consume a variety of flying insects ranging from pesky mosquitoes to beetles. Many of these beetles, if not kept in check by our bat friends, could cause significant crop damage. This means food production would suffer.

In fact, insectivorous bats can consume between 50 to 100 percent of their body weight worth of insects in one night. For a 120 lbs person that would be equivalent 60 to 120 lbs of food per day!

Most bats use echolocation to find food and avoid obstacles. This is particularly important given that some bats can fly at speeds of 25 miles per hour! Bats emit sound waves that move through the air; bounce

off objects and then back to the bat, indicating the location of the object. Although they use echolocation to find food, bats also have good eyesight.

When bats locate food they will swoop it up in mid air, using their tail or wing membrane and they then manoeuvre the food into their mouths.

A good way to observe bats and their spectacular flight show is just to sit back in a lawn chair in your yard at dusk. Before you know it you will see them zooming around enjoying supper. Don't worry, they don't want to get into your hair! Bats can be found in most neighbourhoods throughout the city, especially those with a water source close by.

Although there are several species of bats found in the area, we most commonly saw big brown bats (*Eptesicus fuscus*) and little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*) at the Wildlife Centre. The ratio was about 4 big browns for every little brown that came in.

But don't let their names fool

you, they are both pretty small, little brown bats weigh between 6-12 grams and big browns weigh between 13-18 grams. To put this into perspective two loonies weigh about 14grams.

When the colder months hit, and insects disappear bats rely on migration and hibernation to survive. Colonies can be found in caves, tree hollows, barns, buildings and even in some attics, so yes there are sometimes bats in the belfry!

A disease known as white-nose syndrome is threatening bat populations. It is a fungus that is wiping out entire colonies. Scientists do not yet know the full impact of this disease, but it will likely have significant consequences for both the bats as well as humans, since they provide such a valuable service of insect control.

For further information about bats, or other wild mammals check out www.wildlifeinfo.ca.