

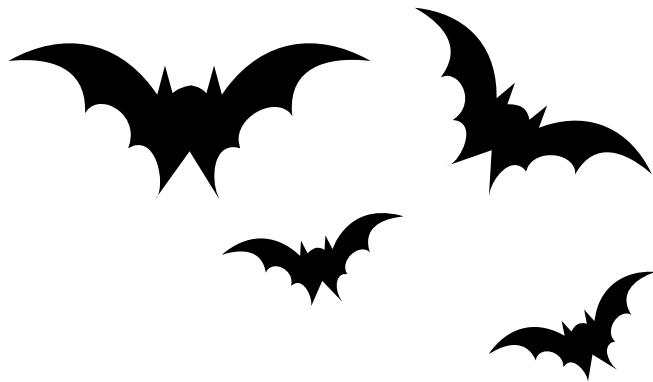
BATS

Bats in the United States are regarded for the most part as beneficial animals; they assist in maintaining the balance of nature by eating enormous quantities of insects. The majority of the approximately 30 bat species recorded from Texas feed principally on insects. Vampire bats are extremely rare in the United States. The prevalence of rabies in insectivorous bats and the occurrence of bat-associated human deaths have created concern regarding the public health significance of bats. On the basis of frequency of submission to the Texas Department of State Health Services for rabies testing, the life history of two important bat species will be discussed.

LIFE HISTORY

Brazilian free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) are colonial and extremely abundant over much of Texas during warmer months, harboring in caves and in and around buildings. These bats normally migrate in September and October, spending the winter in Mexico or farther south. Young are born singly during the later part of June and are hung in masses in nursery caves, concentrations of which are found in the Edwards Plateau region of Central Texas. In addition to caves, this species uses a wide range of man-made roosting sites. Colonies of several thousand may frequent the following places: tile roofs; air spaces between inner and outer walls; areas beneath such attachments as signs, gutters and drain pipes; dams; and bridges. These bats leave their daytime retreats at dusk and feed until dawn.

Red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*) are solitary, tree-inhabiting species, which are common throughout Texas during the summer months. Although seldom found in numbers, this bat frequently comes to human attention due to its striking rust color and to the relatively exposed nature of its daytime resting stations in such trees as the pecan. Also, since the females carry their two to four young until they are able to fend for themselves, the load frequently becomes too much and they fall to the ground to be picked up by curious pets or children.



CONTROL

Wholesale destruction of bats is **not** advocated. However, it should be kept in mind that these animals are a major part of our wildlife rabies problem. Bats, by law, are defined as high-risk animals for rabies as are skunks, foxes, coyotes, and raccoons. Therefore, children should be warned against touching or playing with them. When a bat bites or has direct contact with a person or a pet, an attempt should be made to capture the bat for rabies testing. The bite victim should consult a physician or, for pets, a veterinarian.

Bat bites are not always visible. Therefore, in situations in which a bat is physically present and there is a possibility of an unapparent exposure (for example, a person awakens to find a bat in the room with him/her or a bat is found near an infant or toddler), the bat should be captured and submitted to a rabies laboratory for testing. If rabies cannot be ruled out by laboratory testing, people with a reasonable probability of an exposure may be recommended for rabies postexposure treatment or, for domestic animals, a requirement for euthanasia **or** a booster vaccination(s) and quarantine.

The fact that bat colonies exist close to human dwellings represents a potentially dangerous situation. Also, the odors, unsightly droppings, and ectoparasites make bats objectionable. The final answer to this problem is usually structural modification of buildings to prevent bat entry. Bat-proofing a building may only require closing a few small entrances to roosts after the bats have left on their nightly feeding flights or when they are absent during winter months.

**Texas Department of State Health Services
Zoonosis Control**