

Going Batty!

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I maintain a list of topics that I want to write about in this column. Some of the topics on the list are good, really good. But they keep getting pushed back later into the summer because of issues that keep popping up that I receive phone calls about! The current topic is bats. Not the kind that you use in baseball, but the ones that fly around at night using echolocation to find insects and eat them!

Bats, along with snakes, spiders and many other creatures that give people the jitters are greatly misunderstood and fraught with myth and legends. Bats are native to Kansas. They are inherently good and likely better than many other creatures at eating mosquitoes! We used to say that most bats left the state in the winter, but we are finding that many bats do in fact overwinter in Kansas regularly and in larger numbers than we once thought!

There are 15 species of bats known from Kansas but really only about three from the Geary County area, and likely only two species account for most of the encounters we have locally. Bats do have sharp teeth and will bite in self defense, but if you leave them alone, they won't attack or bite you. They may appear to fly at you, but they are often just trying to get away from you. They can carry rabies but it is not common. I sense that most people who are frightened of bats are frightened because they are creatures that aren't encountered regularly and they've heard, like snakes, all the horror stories!

Bats exist in close proximity to humans on a regular basis. Red bats are solitary and live in trees. They are a beautiful bat if you ever get a chance to see one. The big brown bat is the one that we encounter most often in homes and buildings. They are somewhat social and will form nursery colonies of a few to several bats. They like warm areas so will often seek out the attics of buildings. The areas where they have nursery colonies are usually not the same places that they will overwinter. Hibernation locations can be in unused building, storm drains, caves, etc.

They are raising young right now. They give live birth to one or two young and since they are a mammal, the young nurse and are wholly dependent on their mother. They grow fast and are capable of flight in about three weeks, are weaned at four to five weeks and at two months they are approximately adult size. By mid summer they have most likely left nursery sites and will start being found in a variety of locations.

There are no sprays or devices that will keep bats out of your house or move them out of your house. Exclusion is the only option. Bats are small, they like tight places and can go through amazingly small openings to get into an attic. Sometimes the only way to know where they are getting into your house is to go out in the evening and wait for them to start to come out to feed. Once the location is found, wait until late summer to block the entrance(s). If you do it this time of year, you'll have a panicky mother bat trying to get back to her baby!

Bat houses are often mentioned as an alternative to keeping them out of your house but there's a lot of debate about how functional and helpful they really are. If you find you have a larger colony than you are comfortable with you will likely need to bring in professionals to get them out and keep them out.

Ultimately bats are very beneficial, although often unwanted, residents in our neighborhoods. Tolerance and a little preventative action to exclude them from your house are probably the best approach. For more information on bats stop by the Extension Office or go to <https://tinyurl.com/y3japs5f>.