

What To Do About Bats in the Roof

Bats are environmentally important native animals, but they do not belong in your roof! They don't damage buildings, invade food or carry diseases, but because droppings and dead bats cause odour problems, it is important to seal bats out – not in! Trapped bats can find their way into living rooms, so read these instructions carefully and ask for assistance and advice from the National Trust. *Do not plug holes unless bats are out.*

Humans have taken over many of bats' original habitats and feeding grounds. Bats are simply trying to use what is available to them now, in a very changed environment. **Only insect-eating bats live in buildings.** Fruit bats roost in caves and thick bush. If you farm, garden or don't like mosquitoes, remember that a bat eats over 1,000 insects per hour – and not only mosquitoes, but also crop and garden pests!

In houses with Spanish tile roofs, bats are usually not in the attic space but under the tiles. In this case, bats can be allowed to stay if the droppings are not falling on a patio or deck.

Bats leave their roost every night to feed, except in very bad weather. Watch all sides of the building at sunset. Bats usually emerge from only one or two holes (usually on the west). Leave these holes open and plug all the minor unused holes you see. Then, put a “one-way valve” on the main exit holes.

Use a piece of 3” diameter PVC pipe as a one-way tunnel. Bats slide out, but can't climb back in. Secure the pipe over the hole and seal all the edges. The best time to install the device is at dusk, after most bats have left the building. This prevents panic if hundreds of bats are trying to fly out of the new exit. Be sure the inside end of the pipe is even with the interior wall or floor, so bats can drop through from the inside of the building. If bats are using a missing soffit vent, the pipe can be pre-mounted on a square of plywood.



Continue to watch at dusk for a few days to be sure they are not using other openings to get back inside. Allow several days for all the bats to leave. If the weather is bad, this may take up to a week. All the holes must be plugged permanently AFTER the bats are out. Use screen, wood, cement, caulk, or whatever is right for your building. Spray foam in a can is not recommended because it dries up in the heat and crumbles away. Bats don't chew new holes, but they can squeeze through very tiny cracks. Call 917-BIRD or 949-0121 for free advice about removing bats from your roof or visit www.nationaltrust.org.ky or www.caymanwildlife.org or email info@caymanwildlife.org

REMEMBER, NEVER EVICT BATS DURING JUNE, JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER OR THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF NOVEMBER WHEN BABY BATS WOULD BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR MOTHERS AND LEFT TO DIE. THIS IS CRUEL AND UNWISE. BATS HAVE ONLY ONE BABY A YEAR. AN ENTIRE GENERATION WOULD BE LOST, AND DEAD BABY BATS WOULD NOT SMELL GOOD IN YOUR HOUSE.

For difficult corners and angles an exclusion device can also be made from softer materials. These are still in the design stage, but have been used successfully. Every exclusion is a little bit different, so call the National Trust if you encounter any unusual situations or difficulties. Another method that works in areas where a pipe cannot be mounted is to tape or staple a piece of screening loosely over the main exit. This should be cone-shaped and works like a fish trap. It should hang down two feet below the hole. Seal the top and sides, but leave the bottom open. The bats will come out under the screen, crawl to the bottom and fly away. When they return they shouldn't be able to re-enter. Watch for at least three nights to be sure this is working properly. Screening works best on a smooth surface. Bats are learning in recent years to land on the screening and go under it, so this method only works if it is carefully monitored. If you hear squeaking and bats are stuck and can't get out, loosen the netting. It may take several adjustments to get it right. Sometimes several different colonies of bats are in separate compartments that are not connected inside the roof. In this case, use a separate exclusion device for each compartment.

Watching carefully after the exclusion will show you if bats have found a new way inside. They can squeeze through very tiny cracks. Bats that roost in houses are usually Velvety Free-tailed Bats, but rare species sometimes find their way into roof spaces too. Some of these are found only on a few Caribbean islands, and one is only on Grand Cayman! It is important to protect these rare species, but our common bats also need protection. Large bat colonies eat *tons* of harmful insects and are an important part of Cayman's ecosystem.

There is never a reason to poison bats. Attempts to do this are hazardous to humans and unnecessary. Since bats will not take bait, poisons used on them must be breathed or absorbed through the skin. These types of poisons are not healthy for children, pets, old people, or anyone else! Some bat poisons are deadly to people. Burning sulfur or commercial bat repellent products (usually just mothballs!) doesn't work very well. More bats will move in if all the openings are not closed. Killing bats only adds to the difficulties.

An important part of moving bats out is to give them a place to go. Provide housing for our valuable bats so they don't move into your neighbors house! Buy or build a bat house and install it a few weeks before you plan to do your bat exclusion. Be a good neighbor and provide the bats with a safe, permanent home. Free plans for building your own bat houses are available from the National Trust, or completed bat houses may be purchased.