

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife celebrates “Bat Week”

Bat week starts 10/24 and is designed to raise awareness about the need for bat conservation and to celebrate the role of bats in nature. Learn about recent efforts by MassWildlife and volunteers to give bats a boost and learn how you can get involved.

Bats are often misunderstood or even feared. But these fascinating flying mammals play a critical role in our environment and many bat species are in decline. Massachusetts is home to nine species of bats, five of which are considered endangered. One of the greatest threats to bats is White-nose Syndrome, a fungal disease that has devastated populations of bats that spend their winters hibernating in caves and mines. Other threats include habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change.



Bat box at Mill Brook Bogs WMA. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife photo.

Despite the threats, there are ways to help bats. Get ready to celebrate Bat Week at the end of the month by learning about what is being done and what you can do to protect the bats in your backyard!

Massachusetts bats get a helping hand from volunteers

Last year, MassWildlife launched a new effort to construct and install bat houses to raise awareness about the important role bats play in our environment and get more bat houses out on the landscape. Properly constructed and strategically placed bat houses can be an important tool in supporting bat survival. So far, MassWildlife has installed 30 bat houses on Wildlife Management Areas and private lands and more will be installed over the next year.

It can take up to two years for bats to move into a bat house, and even then, typically only about 15% of bat houses are ever occupied. Over the summer of 2021, volunteers made visits to

almost all of the bat houses and found that 16% were occupied and another 26% of the locations showed potential for future occupancy. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped collect these promising results! MassWildlife hopes to continue this monitoring effort next summer.

How you can help bats

One of the best ways you can support bat conservation is to put up an artificial roost, like a bat house. Bat houses give females a safe, warm place to raise their young. Since most female bats only have one pup each year, bat populations grow very slowly.



Close-up of the bat box before installation. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife photo.

Additionally, due to habitat loss and degradation, it is becoming harder for bats to locate natural roost sites. Installing a bat house on your property can provide a safe environment for bats, while ridding your yard of pest insects, like mosquitoes, moths, and beetles. Bat houses can be purchased or you can build your own. You can find a Guide to

Bat Houses on MassWildlife's website, including plans for building a bat house, installation tips, and advice for attracting bats to your bat house.

Other ways to help:

- Educate yourself and others to help dispel myths and fears about bats. Read the Massachusetts Wildlife magazine article *Bat Myths Debunked*, to learn more about the fascinating and beneficial features of bats.
- Be a citizen scientist and spread the word about reporting bat colonies to MassWildlife.
- Protect habitat for bats. If you have old, dead, or dying trees on your property, leave them standing as potential roost sites for bats.
- If you must exclude or evict bats from your home, ensure the process is safe and humane by following MassWildlife's recommendations found in the *Massachusetts Homeowner's Guide to Bats*.
- Reduce pesticide use to ensure there are plenty of insects for bats to feed on.
- Create a bat-friendly landscape in your backyard by adding water features, such as a pond, and night-scented flowers.