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Bat Conservation in Canada

Juliet Craig



Crouching in a low, hot attic, balanced on the rafters, I shined my red-filtered flashlight into the crevice between the chimney and roofline and watched as about 15 bats clambered deeper into the recess. I reached into the crevice and gently eased a bat into my hand. The little brown myotis clicked as I placed her carefully in a small cloth bag and shuffled my way backwards along the ceiling joist.

Fellow biologist Mike Sarell and I climbed down the ladder and told Ellie, an older resident of the Kootenay region of southeastern British Columbia, Canada, that she was hosting a small colony of little brown bats. Ellie, after seeing a poster on the Kootenay Community Bat Project, had called us to report the bats in her attic.

We showed Ellie the captured bat and she wrote down the data as we weighed and measured the little brown. "It's so tiny," she exclaimed, "and not scary at all." We've gotten reaction's like that dozens of times in our efforts through the Kootenay Community Bat Project, a local initiative to identify bat species and work with residents to conserve and enhance bat habitat. The program is funded in part by Bat Conservation International's North American Bat Conservation Fund.

Initial apprehensions are usually transformed to appreciation and respect during our visits to homes that host bats. Many residents who are adamant about getting rid of the bats when they call us eventually decide either to leave them where they are or install bat house for them.

One of the primary goals of the Kootenay Community Bat Project is to raise awareness about bats and their conservation. We provide educational programs to schools and youth groups to counter the myths about bats. Community members come out in droves, armed with drills and caulking guns, to build bat-houses at our local workshops.

During the summer months, Mike and I explore barns, sheds, attics, bridges and other structures to identify local bat species and roosting sites, and to help residents like Ellie to develop a roost conservation plan.

With Ellie, we discussed attic modifications, such as laying down plastic or sealing off a portion of the attic to limit any negative impacts from the colony. We also provided information on safely excluding the bats by waiting until the bats leave for the winter, winter, installing a bat house nearby and sealing the roost site.

We started this communitiy initiative in 2004, and it has grown dramatically through the enthusiasm of volunteers, who report bat sightings, accompany us on site visits and help with other aspects of the project. Even our website (www.kootenaybats.com) was created entirely by volunteers.

As we got up to leave, Ellie asked if we'd like to see her other bat colony out in the shed. So we grabbed a ladder and off we went. What we found brought a twinkle to our eyes: Townsend's big-eared bats. "This is a rare species," I excitedly told Ellie. "This is the largest colony known in the entire area!"

I dug out information on Townsend's big-eared bats for Ellie and explained how important her colony is to the conservation of the species in our province. Though she first talked of excluding the bats from the shed, our enthusiasm was infectious. Ellie and her husband decided to maintain the roost site, In fact, they even requested a

photo of the bats so they could put it on their wall, along with their other “family” pictures.

Public attitudes about bats are changing in the Kootenay – one family at a time.

BCIâ€™s North American Bat Conservation Fund supports important projects like this one around the United States, Mexico and Canada. You can help. Contact our Development Department at development@batcon.org.

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