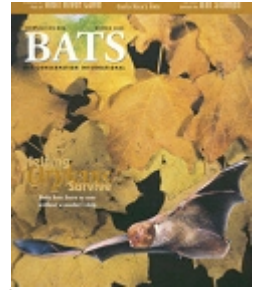


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Adding Bats to a Pest-Control Program Scott Diemer

Ah, the pleasures of a summer evening in the South. The warm, sultry air, a freshly brewed glass of iced tea, the scent of magnolia and jasmine - the sudden cry of pain and the smack of hand upon skin. Paradise has a price: Florida is home to 77 species of mosquitoes, all of them ornery.

So how can a small town with almost no budget tackle pest control? In Cinco Bayou, in northwest Florida, resident Jim Bratton had an inspiration. He knew that a few bats already lived under the Cinco Bayou Bridge near his home, and he knew that bats eat an enormous amount of bothersome insects. So why not recruit more bats to help fight insect pests?

Jim pitched his plan to the Town Council in July 2001. Four months later, the initially skeptical council had warmed to the idea of placing a bat house under the bridge to increase the bat population, but the \$5,000 cost was prohibitive for a town of about 500 people. Councilman and educator Dan Farley suggested partnering with Liza Jackson Preparatory School to defray costs.

The goal was a Bridge Lodge bat house from BCI friends Marvin and Linda Maberry of Maberry Centre Bat Homes. The super condo is a 183-pound (83-kilogram), 16-crevice structure with room for 5,000 bats. Designed specifically for bridges, Florida already has 37 installed.

Liza Jackson's K-8 students adopted the plan as a combination community service/science project and began fund-raising - and studying bats. They quickly covered the \$2,000 cost of the Bridge Lodge. Engineering fees (\$1,000) were waived, and a local marina donated installation (\$2,000).

The June 2002 dedication marked the culmination of a significant community effort at no taxpayer expense. Bats are already in residence, and the town is hoping to see a nursery colony next year. Bats are staying on the school's urriculum and the students will report each year to the BCI's Bat House Research Project.

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