

## Bat Advice From ADF&G Alaska Citizen Science Program

I don't have any magic advice for you to attract bats to your place. Unfortunately you can't bait them in; a bucket of donuts will attract a bear, but I know of no such attractant for bats. However, I can offer a few thoughts that may be of use to you. You may be interested in providing a bat house to increase the density of bats living in your immediate vicinity. In general, watercourses, ponds, lakes, and open meadows adjacent to woodlands are attractive areas for bats. The open areas and water features mean that insects will be abundant and flyways will be relatively clear of obstructions; the mixed forest provides cover and roosting opportunities. Bats want an open flyway to exit and enter their roosts, and need some good maneuvering room to hunt. If your home is already near a water feature or open space, your chances of attracting bats will be improved.

Bat houses may increase the density of bats living in the immediate vicinity – but we have precious little information on occupancy of bat houses in Alaska. We have only been getting confirmed reports of occupied bat houses for the last few years. And we (ADF&G Alaska Citizen Science Program) is seeking any and all new information from citizens about their own experiences with bat houses. Information about occupied and vacant bat houses is of use to understanding the range of nominal conditions for bat houses in Alaska.

You may be interested in providing a bat house to increase the density of bats living in your immediate vicinity. Temperature is critically important for roosting bats - especially here in the far North. I'd recommend choosing a location with a generally southern exposure; the warmest locations will be those facing Southeast, South, Southwest, or depending on the location of your property, even West and Northwest. You may choose to put up a couple of bat houses facing different directions: One facing South, and another facing South-west or West for example. Providing a couple of houses with a range of temperature conditions can either be an experiment for you to figure out which location(s) the bats prefer, or it will give resident bats a range of available temperature options for changing weather conditions.

In Alaska I suggest a dark brown or black stain or paint to increase the amount of heat absorbed from the sun. Use only water-based stains/paints, not oil-based. Mount the bat house high on the side of a building with a clear flyway in front - avoid obstructions and branches and bright night-time lights. If you don't want to attach it to your building, you can use the trunks of deciduous trees (meeting all the other qualifications). Many bat house experts recommend using a metal pole for mounting your bat house instead of a tree. Their logic is that the pole makes it easier for bats to find the house and that it provides protection from possible predators. However, pole mounting means that the thermal environment of the bat house will be extremely variable, and more likely to get cold.

Mounting on the outside of a building provides the most thermally favorable and stable situation. But also, I think trees can be good options here in Alaska - especially in Southeast. Common wisdom is to put them up high - greater than 12 feet - but I've had bats roost in the siding shingles of our old cabin just a few feet above the deck. It was a warm, warm spot.

The last piece of advice is to be patient - if your houses haven't attracted occupants after two years, experiment with putting them in different locations.

Here are some web pages from Bat Conservation International on building bat houses - and plans for a couple different designs: <http://www.batcon.org/index.php/get-involved/install-a-bat-house.html>

And here are some pre-made bat houses from the Organization for Bat Conservation:

<http://store.batconservation.org/bathousesandfreebathhouseplans.aspx?gclid=CL6w5vbkk6wCFQtrhwodMil3qg>