

MOUNTAIN NEWS

HAMILTON, ONTARIO

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2008

Increase in mosquito population means more bats as summer ends

Two rabid bats found on the Mountain this year

An increase in the mosquito population last week in Hamilton has resulted in more conflicts with bats. Hamilton Public Health Services has found two cases of rabid bats so far this year, and is highlighting the risk of human infection.

"Two dead bats were found on the ground on Concession Street," said Bill Dowd, Humane Wildlife Control president, of the rabid bats found in the city so far this year.

"We seem to have this dual fascination with bats," said Mr. Dowd. "On one hand, we fear them because of their scary looks and 'blood-sucking' reputation. On the other hand, we're fascinated by them, too, and they do help control pesky mosquitoes and the West Nile virus" he said.

Bats this summer will be fed well on a diet of mosquitoes and other insects — up to 3,000 per night. As a result, survival and birth rates are up and more baby bats living in attics and roofs will gain access to living spaces.

With five confirmed cases of rabid bats in Hamilton last year, we're likely to see yet more cases this season. Hamilton has one of the highest bat populations among cities in Ontario and Quebec.

Bats have very small teeth and bites can go undetected, especially if you're bitten while sleeping. Bats are the most common carriers of rabies. Health units advise anyone finding a bat in their living space or who have come into contact with a bat to seek immediate medical attention. Rabies can cause severe illness and death if not treated promptly, and health units err on the side of caution.

Bats can fit through a hole the size of a dime and can easily gain entry to attics, walls, crawlspaces, roofs and sheds. Bats feed on a 24-48 hour cycle. Plugging a hole after bats leave at night may seal half the colony in and cause building damage and disease.

Their droppings (guano) and carcasses can cause severe odour, damage and contamination of property and heating and air conditioning systems. If inhaled by humans, bat guano can cause an incurable respiratory disease called histoplasmosis. The very young, very old and those with impaired immune systems are at greatest risk for severe illness.

Colonies can range in size from a few to several hundred, depending on the space and availability of food sources.

Bed bugs are a growing problem in Hamilton. Bats are common carriers of bed bugs, which multiply and look for other hosts, such as pets and people, when they roost in buildings. They are extremely difficult to eradicate and bites can cause serious itching and welts.

Health units do not recommend people remove bats themselves because of potential health risks.

Brown bats are very difficult to detect and should be removed before temperatures get colder or they will go dormant for the winter. Proper sealing will ensure they do not return.

Humane Wildlife Control Technician Brandon Crawford, Holds a healthy, live bat that was removed from a mountain home.

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Technician healthy, from a