

# I've Found a Bat! What Should I Do?

**Situation:** You've found a bat either inside your home, school, or workplace, or outside clinging to the side of a building, on a tree, or lying on the ground.

**Why this happens:** If a bat is **in your home** or other structure, likely points of entry include an uncapped chimney, open and unscreened (or torn screen) windows, uncovered vents, a door that has been propped open – even briefly – or holes, cracks or gaps in the siding, overhangs, or roof. Bats do NOT chew their way into a building – the entry points they utilize are pre-existing.

Bats enter buildings for many reasons. In the late fall, winter, and spring, the bat may have been attempting to hibernate in the attic but became dehydrated or sick and unintentionally found their way into your living quarters while searching for water or warmth. If it is late summer, the bats born this year are on their own for the first time and a young bat may have been looking for a place to rest for the day and ended up inside your home by mistake. **If a bat is found outside** hanging on a wall or tree, it may be injured or sick, or it may just be a migrating bat that has stopped to rest. If a bat is found outside **on the ground**, it is probably injured, sick, or exhausted. And a mother bat that becomes grounded may be unable to take flight because she is carrying her "pups" (babies) -- in our area this is a possibility for mother Eastern Red Bats, Hoary Bats, and Silver-haired Bats.



*This is a Big Brown Bat. Despite the "big" in their name, they are surprisingly small (and adorable!).*

## **FAQs and Humane Solutions**

### ***"What do I need to know about bats and rabies?"***

Rabies is a virus that many mammals, such as dogs, cats, raccoons, etc. may *potentially* "carry" (it will eventually make them sick and ultimately it will kill them), but few in Wisconsin actually do. Although only a very small percentage of bats have the rabies virus, it is still something to take seriously. The rabies virus is passed through the **saliva** of a rabid animal, most commonly through a bite or scratch. *You cannot get rabies from urine, feces, or blood.* You cannot get rabies from looking at or just being in the presence of a bat or any other animal. For more information about the rabies virus, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov) website.

### ***"If rabies isn't that common, then in what situations involving a bat should I be concerned about a possible rabies exposure?"***

**A "possible rabies exposure" means that there was a known bite or scratch from a bat, or that circumstances existed where a person may have been bitten or scratched without their knowledge, such as a bat was found in a room where a person was sleeping, or a bat was found in a room with an infant or child or with someone who is incapacitated or inebriated, or found in a situation where a pet may have been bitten or scratched by a bat.** If there is a chance that a person or pet may have been exposed to the rabies virus, then the bat should be *safely* contained (see "How to Safely Contain a Bat", below) – please DO NOT harm the bat in any way. Then **contact your local public health department** to report the possible rabies exposure and get their advice. If you are in Milwaukee County, you may call us for advice in containing the bat and we'll let you know if we think you should bring the bat to us. If you are outside of Milwaukee County, you should contain the bat if you are able to safely do so and contact a local, licensed wildlife rehabilitator and your public health department.

### ***"Help! I found a bat in my house! What should I do?"***

**Do not panic** and **do not** grab a tennis racquet or broom! Keep calm and know that this bat is scared and attempting to find a way out of the building she accidentally found her way into.

**1. Find the bat.** Bats will usually try to land on something they can grasp with their tiny feet such as curtains, or trim molding near the ceiling. If the bat is flying, do not try to catch the bat in midair as this can injure the bat and may increase the potential for you to have direct contact with the bat. It is best to watch and wait until she lands. If you are unable to locate the bat - determine if there was a known or possible human or pet exposure (see previous paragraph). If there was an exposure (bite, scratch, or direct contact with the bat), or suspected exposure, you should contact your doctor or local public health department right away for advice.

**2. Safely contain the bat** (see "How to Safely Contain a Bat" below).

**3. Contact your local licensed wildlife rehabilitator.**

If you are in the area that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has designated as the Southeast Region, which is Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha, Walworth, Kenosha, and Racine Counties\*, then call the Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at 414-431-6204. If you are outside of Milwaukee County, you can find your closest licensed wildlife rehabilitator here. (\*Note: in response to the confirmation of White-nose Syndrome in Wisconsin, the WI DNR has implemented very specific regulations for the rehabilitation of cave-roosting bat species in the state. We CANNOT legally admit bats from outside our region. If you are outside of our region, we will refer you to the closest rehabilitator in your region).



*This little cutie is an Eastern Red Bat. Despite the negative stereotypes, bats are very beneficial due to the vast number of insects they eat.*

### **"If I bring you a bat that I found inside my house, what will you do with it?"**

Upon the bat's arrival at our wildlife hospital, we will talk with you to determine if we believe there has been any risk of possible rabies exposure. If there is a risk of rabies exposure, we contact the public health department for the municipality in which the possible exposure occurred. The health department will then contact you, and anyone else who may have been exposed. We will quarantine and care for the bat while we await instructions from the public health department. Unlike dogs and cats, there is no reliable observation period established for wildlife to determine whether an animal is rabid. If the health department determines a rabies test is necessary due to a known or possible exposure, we are required to euthanize the bat (there is no "live" test for rabies) and prepare the specimen for submission to the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene in Madison. Obviously, saving animals' lives and getting them released again to the wild is central to our mission, but we value human life and health, too! **Rabies is fatal if not properly treated BEFORE any signs or symptoms appear!!** If no test is required, we continue to care for and rehabilitate the bat\*, with the intent to release it back to the wild once he or she is ready. (\*Note: in response to the confirmation of White-nose Syndrome in Wisconsin, the WI DNR has heavily regulated the rehabilitation of cave-roosting bat species in the state. Talk to one of our rehabilitators for details about what this means for a particular bat you bring in and the tremendous amount of effort for their care they will receive).



*Here we're hand-feeding mealworms to a Big Brown Bat in care at our wildlife hospital.*

### **"I found a bat OUTSIDE. What should I do?"**

If you think the bat may be injured AND/OR is on the ground, you may safely contain the bat (see "How to Safely Contain a Bat" below) and contact your local wildlife rehabilitator. If you are in Milwaukee County, call the Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at 414-431-6204. If you are outside of Milwaukee County you can find your closest wildlife rehabilitator [here](#) or call us for a referral.

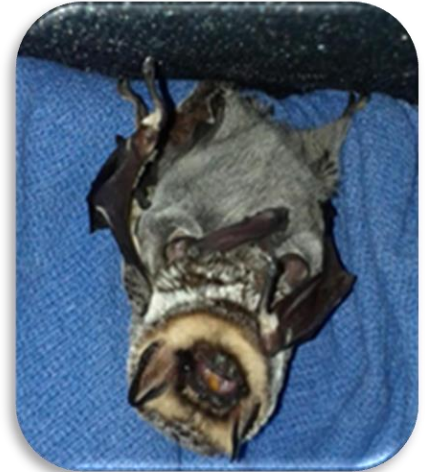
If the bat appears to be uninjured and is hanging on a building, tree, or other vertical surface, we recommend you contact your local licensed wildlife rehabilitator before you contain the bat. If it is relatively warm outdoors and it is during migration in spring or fall, this bat may be resting during the day and migrating at night. The rehabilitator may recommend that you leave the bat alone and check back early the following morning to see if the bat has left during the night. However, depending on the situation, they may instead recommend you safely contain the bat for transport to a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, so it's best to speak with a wildlife rehabilitator directly.

### **"I discovered that there are bats in my attic (or eaves). What should I do?"**

If you have bats in your attic or eaves, please visit [Bat Conservation International](#), [Bat World Sanctuary](#), or The [Wisconsin Bat Program's exclusion page](#) for detailed information on how bats may be entering your home, and if you choose to take action, how to humanely exclude them from your home. If you don't own the property, we strongly recommend you contact your landlord as well.

[If you decide to hire a company](#) to exclude bats from your home, know that in the state of Wisconsin **it is illegal to exclude bats during the breeding season (May through August) without first consulting with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**. Responsible bat excluders do exist, so call around to make sure you are hiring an excluder that follows the law and treats the bats with kindness and respect. If a company informs you that they will kill the bats or are willing to exclude bats during months when it is illegal – do NOT hire this company and instead report them to the DNR by calling 1-800-WNDR-TIP.

Also, if you plan to exclude bats, while this is humane during certain times of the year, know that you are still essentially kicking them out of their home – they will have to find a new roost, and this can be difficult for them. We suggest you consider providing human-made bat houses as an alternative housing option. Information on how to build (or buy) a proper bat house and how they should be placed can be found on the [Bat Conservation International](#) and [Bat World Sanctuary](#) websites.



*This Hoary Bat mom was found injured on the ground with her two nursing pups. She is holding both of them in this picture. We are pleased to report that this family was rehabilitated and successfully released!*

### **"There are bats living on the outside of my house behind my window shutters. What should I do?"**

The easiest and most humane thing to do is to leave them alone. As long as your house is secure, there is no chance for them to enter your home – bats do not create entry points; they merely utilize pre-existing ones. Your shutters are essentially functioning as bat houses, giving these marvelous little flying-insect eaters a secure place to hide and rest. If you absolutely need the bats to leave, follow the suggestions for humane exclusion provided at the web sites shown in the paragraph directly above.

### **"How can I help bats?"**

Bats do need our help: more than half of the species in Wisconsin are listed as "state threatened" species. Their numbers are at risk for many reasons including habitat loss, overuse of pesticides, and most recently, a disease called White-nose Syndrome, caused by an invasive fungus which has killed MILLIONS of bats in the last few years (learn more about White-nose Syndrome [here](#)).

- Keep your pets, even indoor-only pets, up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations to help protect your pet and the bat if you should find a bat inside your home or if your pet finds a bat on the ground outside.
- Ensure your living quarters are bat-proof. Preventing bats from entering your living space will prevent a possible rabies exposure for your family and help protect the life of any bat that wanders into the living space of your home from the possible need for rabies testing.
- Install a bat house – See free bat house plans and mounting and location recommendations (proper bat house design and placement really does matter!) on [Bat World](#) or [Bat Conservation International](#).
- Share your appreciation and knowledge about bats with others! These beneficial creatures are plagued by human persecution caused by myth and mystery. This lack of understanding on our part leads to fear which often, in turn, leads people to cause these wonderful animals harm. Tell other people how awesome they are!
- **PLEASE DONATE** to the Wisconsin Humane Society's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, one of just a handful of authorized bat rehabilitation centers in the state.



*Bats must be nimble and aerobic fliers to catch their dinner of insects in flight.  
Photo credit: Erik Huebler*

# How to Safely Contain a Bat

**Please do NOT harm or kill the bat!** Besides the fact that bats are living creatures capable of feeling fear and pain, should the bat need to be tested for rabies, the bat's brain must be intact and undamaged in order for the test to be done. So ultimately, to protect the people and pets involved, it is important that the bat is not injured or killed.

**Do not handle the bat directly!!** But you should still wear lightweight leather gloves during this process as an additional level of protection from physical contact.

**Get a shoebox** or some other container of similar size and a flat piece of cardboard or similar material that will completely cover the opening of the box. Using a pencil or pen, poke a few air holes in the sides of the box, but make sure there are no holes in the box larger than a dime and no gaps between the lid and the box.

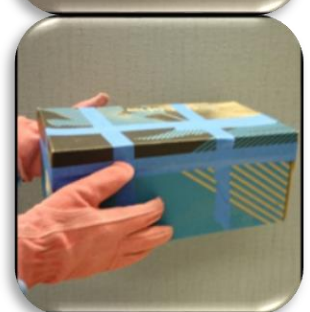
**Find the bat.** If she is flying around, wait until she lands. Bats will usually try to land on something they can grasp with their tiny feet such as curtains, or trim molding near the ceiling. Do not try to catch the bat in midair as this can injure the bat and may increase your chance of touching the bat. It is best to watch and wait until she lands.

**Without touching the bat,** place the box over the bat to enclose her between the box and the surface she is clinging to. She may make some screeching or hissing noises – this is okay – she's just scared!

Next, gently slide the flat piece of cardboard between the box and the surface she is on to trap the bat in the box. We flattened the lid of the shoebox and used that. Once contained, tape the lid or flat piece of cardboard **securely** to the box.

*\*Note: in response to the confirmation of White-nose Syndrome in Wisconsin, the WI DNR also requires you place the box into another box or bag for transport.*

**\*\*If you are in the Southeast Region according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which is Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, Waukesha, Walworth, Kenosha, and Racine Counties, then please bring the contained bat to the Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Milwaukee during our [open hours](#). **If you are outside of the Southeast Region or are unable or unwilling to contain the bat, we urge you to contact your local public health department immediately or call us at 414-431-6204 for a referral.****



©Wisconsin Humane Society, 2020

The Wisconsin Humane Society is a charitable organization that depends entirely on donations to fulfill its mission to make a difference for animals and the people who love them. Your support for the WHS Wildlife Rehabilitation center makes possible the distribution of information like this to thousands of people who request it each year and makes possible the care of over 5,000 injured, sick, and orphaned wild animals from our community each year. You may

[donate](#) online or by mailing a check to the following address:

WHS Wildlife Center, 4500 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53208