

Living with Bats in an Attic

Location: Community building, Denman Island
Colony size: 700
Species: Yuma Myotis, Little Brown Myotis,
Long-eared Myotis



"Sharing our building with bats is easy as they are silent neighbours. It's easy to forget that they are there" - C. Hunter, Denman Island Spinners and Weavers

History

Built in 1912 and enlarged in 1936, Denman's old school housed students until 1990. Now the Marcus Isbister Old School Centre is a busy hub for three community groups as well as the Denman Free Store, Recycling Centre and Saturday Market. Renovations in 1993 led to the discovery of a large bat colony. Protecting this colony became the focus of one of the Centre's tenants, the Denman Conservancy Association.

"Bats are amazing creatures that are under great stress for their very survival. I feel a special obligation, and honour, since these colonies have chosen our building for their home" - D. Critchley, Islands Trustee

Initially, conservation efforts focused on community education about bats and the annual guano cleanup. In addition, the bats were mist-netted outside the school for species identification. Initial DNA analysis in 2013 revealed four species including Big Brown Bats, but since re-roofing, just the three Myotis have been confirmed.

With the beginning of the Denman Hornby Bat Project in 2016, the Old School has become a summer evening tourist attraction.

Management actions

A plywood floor has now replaced the temporary tarps installed to cover the rafters and facilitate the annual fall guano cleanup. Re-roofing was scheduled to occur when the bats were absent. At that time, new "bat access" entrances were put into the old soffit area, but bats still use holes around the old wooden soffit and fascia boards. To improve bat access, new bat entrances are planned and will be tested before these old boards are replaced.

"The attic is separate from the lower level, thus allowing full use of the former school space for a variety of community activities. This unusual combination of uses provides a unique opportunity to educate members of the community about these seldom seen mammals" - L Bell, former Islands Trustee

Contributions to bat conservation and research in BC

The Old School's major contribution to bat welfare, other than housing the colony, is community education. Bats exiting the Centre put on quite a display and some bats, especially juveniles, occasionally wander in open windows or doors. Visitors and regular community group users have learned how to live with and appreciate bats in our community.

"Helping to steward the bats in the Old School is a real pleasure as well as an important responsibility" - J. Balke, Biologist, Denman Conservancy Association

"It's great to leave an evening meeting and see all the bats flying around" - G. Michin, Chair of the Old School Management Committee