

Salt Spring Community Bat Program Newsletter

May 2020

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THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS AND FUNDERS

The Salt Spring bat conservation program has been supported by generous donations from community members, for which we are very appreciative. The bat program also receives funding from the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program, the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, and the Forest Enhancement Society of British Columbia.

THANK YOU TO LAURA MATTHIAS

Well-known Salt Spring conservation biologist Laura Matthias is leaving the bat program for now. Laura initiated the Salt Spring Bat Program in 2014, and she was instrumental in the acquisition, protection, and restoration of ecosystems across Salt Spring Island. We are indebted to Laura for her leadership in environmental protection and we wish her well in her new role. She will be greatly missed.



Bat art by August Specht

COVID ERA BAT ASSISTANCE

In 2019 Salt Spring Bat biologists made 67 site visits to farms and other properties to help with bat conservation. The bat program will continue in 2020 while observing public health restrictions. Biologists are available for telephone/email consultations and can provide (unaccompanied) habitat assessments, can drop off bat boxes, and collect dead bats and guano samples placed outdoors for pickup.

COVID RISK TO BATS

Wildlife require protection from COVID-19 just as people do. Contact between people and wildlife should be avoided. All research involving contact with bats has been suspended throughout Canada.

BATS AS A DISEASE SOURCE

In Canada you are five times more likely to die from viruses inhaled from mouse droppings in your basement, attic, shed, or barn than from contact with a bat. There is no evidence that any North American bat species carries the COVID-19 virus. Bats as a group do not host disproportionately more human disease viruses than other groups of mammals and birds relative to number of species. Some bats carry rabies (about

0.1 percent in Western Canada), but animal rabies cases detected in Canada have been twice as prevalent in carnivores (raccoons, foxes, skunks, etc.).

BAT DNA PROJECT

Thanks to a generous donation from a community member, Salt Spring biologists **Laura Matthias** and **Carrina Maslovat** were able to undertake a groundbreaking bat DNA project in partnership with the University of Victoria. The goal of the project was to develop molecular probes that can inventory bats from trace evidence, environmental DNA, that is found in ponds and elsewhere. This cutting-edge research will greatly enhance bat monitoring technology.

BAT COUNT PROJECT

Although there were 214 evening roost emergence bat count sites in BC in 2018, only two received more than four bat counts. A project conducted on Salt Spring by **Taryn Muldoon** tested the reliability of counts by checking the variability in bat numbers over a large number of nights (13 nights). Taryn counted bats at a mixed colony of Little Brown Myotis and Yuma Myotis, and found peak numbers in early to

mid -July, after which the numbers tapered off rapidly. We greatly appreciate the time, effort, and diligence that Taryn devoted to this project. Taryn has moved to Nova Scotia to study at the university and we wish her all the best.

LIKE TO COUNT BATS?

If you have a bat colony from which the bats emerge single file in the evening and are thus countable, consider participating in the annual bat count. We can provide mechanical tally counters, and details are available here: <https://bcbats.ca/index.php/get-involved/participate-in-the-bc-bat-count>

BAT BOX INVENTORY

A 2019 survey of Salt Spring bat boxes by bat program biologist Laura Matthias recorded 48 bat boxes, and of those that were accessible for examination, found that fifty percent were occupied by bats. Note that new bat boxes may be unoccupied for several years, and some bat boxes may be occupied only occasionally, or never, if suitable natural roost sites are available nearby.

REGISTER YOUR BAT BOX

The province is collecting bat box information to further research, and you can participate by registering your bat house here: <https://www.bcbats.ca/index.php/bat-houses/register-your-bat-house>

NEW BAT BOX GUIDELINES

New provincial guidelines <https://tinyurl.com/y8fegghx> suggest careful planning of bat box installation due to potential overheating. Sun baked bat boxes may aid fast pup growth, but some boxes may be prone to excessive temperatures and excessive humidity. The installation of several bat boxes is recommended to give bats a choice of temperatures, as would be found within a barn or attic. Bat program personnel are happy to provide advice to landowners on bat habitat enhancement, including bat box siting. Multi-chamber bat houses are available at no cost if bat roosts in buildings are being closed due to renovation. If you have an occupied bat box, we can assist in identifying the resident species. Salt Spring Bat Program 4-chamber bat boxes are manufactured and installed by ecologist **Chris Drake**, Coast Alive Recreational and Ecological Services.

ACOUSTIC SURVEYS

In 2019 the Salt Spring Bat Program conducted bat acoustic surveys with electronic bat detectors at 25 sites, and we wish to acknowledge the invaluable help of **Rodney Polden**. Salt Spring bats can be heard here: <http://capewest.ca/wavbat.wav> Recordings of the ultrasonic calls are slowed to make them audible. Other Bat surveyors included Laura Matthias and Arlene and Peter Ommundsen.

DEAD BATS WANTED: WHITE NOSE SYNDROME UPDATE

More than 46 bats in Washington State have now tested positive for the fungal disease white-nose syndrome, which has killed millions of bats in eastern North America. Salt Spring bat surveys provide a baseline of bat health that will help evaluate the impact of this disease if it arrives here and will help focus mitigation efforts. Although white nose fungus is not transmissible to humans, **dead bats should not be handled with bare skin** and any skin contact should be reported to the medical health officer. To report dead bats please email saltspring@bcbats.ca or phone 1-855-922-2287 ext 16.

DONATIONS WELCOME

Donations are eligible for charity receipts and can be earmarked to the Salt Spring Bat Program, made to the BC Conservation Foundation (www.bccf.com) by selecting SALT SPRING BAT PROGRAM from the fund choice menu. Or via mail: BC Conservation Foundation, #206 – 17564 56A Avenue, Surrey, BC, V3S 1G3.



Bat art by Biho Takashi