



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PROTECT YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD BATS?

Whenever possible, retain all large and dead trees and branches as they provide critical roost sites for bats. Plant several trees if possible as they also provide protection from predators, extreme day-time temperatures and support more insects. You can also join a Bat Roost Monitoring Program to learn more about bats and how we can help to conserve them. Do not disturb bats when they are roosting, especially in winter when they are in torpor as it can raise their body temperature and unnecessarily waste valuable fat reserves that they need to survive. Keep your domestic cats inside as they are one of the main predators of microbats. Alternatively, you can use a Catbib which stops cats catching and or killing birds and wildlife. Visit [www.catbib.com.au](http://www.catbib.com.au) for more information.

If you find a sick or injured microbat, contact [www.adelaidebatcare.com.au](http://www.adelaidebatcare.com.au), [www.faunarescue.org.au](http://www.faunarescue.org.au) or Native Animal Network of South Australia Inc [www.nansa.org.au](http://www.nansa.org.au)



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# MAKING FRIENDS WITH BACKYARD BATS



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## DID YOU KNOW THAT BATS LIVE AND FEED IN YOUR URBAN BACKYARD?

There are around 1,200 species of bats around the world, inhabiting every environment except for the poles. In Australia all bats are native species - none have been introduced! There are two kinds of bats, Megabats which are the Flying-foxes or native fruit eating, blossom and nectar-eating bats and Microbats, which are much smaller insect eating bats, we have about 63 microbat species in Australia.

Microbats are nocturnal, cryptic animals that feed at night time and are rarely seen by the public. Many bat populations are in decline, listed as threatened or endangered. Many people do not realise that native bats exist let alone live or feed in our urban backyards. During the day they need a safe place to shelter with the right light conditions, temperature and humidity. Bats use roosts which can be tree hollows, cracks or crevices, under bark, caves, your house roof, window frames or old sacks hanging in your shed. If you need to remove or exclude bats from your home, there are some great resources on the Australasian Bat Society Website [www.ausbats.org.au](http://www.ausbats.org.au)

Bats are beneficial to have around your property as they help to control insect populations. Microbats are insectivorous and can eat a third of their own body weight in insects in one night. Some species are capable of catching up to 500 insects an hour, which equates to an insect every



8 seconds. Most microbats catch insects in the air and eat them whilst in flight. They accomplish this by directly catching in their mouth or by scooping them up in their wing or tail membrane and transferring the insect to their mouth. Other species land on the ground or vegetation to catch insects, a technique called 'gleaning'.

Bats are a protected species like all of our Australian native wildlife and it is against the law to kill, injure or disturb their habitat. Some bats can carry the disease Australian Bat Lyssavirus which is closely related to the Rabies Virus and is transmitted by their saliva, an important reason not to handle them.

Artificial lights can have both a negative and positive impact on bats. Lights can attract small insects which are a food source for microbats but they can also make them more vulnerable to predators. It is best to avoid installing lighting around bushland areas as it affects the area the bats forage in. If lighting is necessary, the illumination should be pointed downwards as much as possible to avoid the light spilling into adjacent habitat.

### BOXES FOR BATS

In many urban areas a lot of the older trees that contain hollows have been removed for development to take place, which leaves fewer places for hollow-dwelling animals like possums, parrots and bats a place to breed and rest safely.

Artificial boxes can be made or purchased and attached to a tree for microbats to have a dry and safe day-time roost. A bat box is a simulated natural hollow and typically has a narrow entrance slit at the bottom to exclude predators, a landing plate extending below the entrance, an internal cavity to hold a typical-size group of bats (1-50), sawn grooves on the internal surfaces so bats can grip and move about easily inside the box, and an identification number on the bottom of the box is useful for monitoring box usage. For more information on bat box design visit the Australasian Bat Society Website [www.ausbats.org.au](http://www.ausbats.org.au)

### INSTALLING BAT BOXES -

Microbats being insect eaters prefer roosts near water as this is where insects are in greater abundance, although bats are known to fly several kilometres between roosting and foraging sites. Boxes need to be placed high enough in a tree to prevent vandalism and protect bats from extreme flood events and predators. Trees with a minimum diameter of 30 cm are a good sturdy tree for a bat box. Place the bat box at height of 6m above the ground. It is worth putting up several boxes on one tree as some species live in dense colonies and prefer to have many roosts within a short distance to each other. Bats can also move roost sites daily and choose one with a

more suitable temperature each day. A selection of boxes facing all major compass points allows bats to vary their needs for temperature control throughout the seasons. Bats do however, primarily prefer NE to SE facing if you are limited for choice. Putting up bat boxes in your backyard is a valuable contribution to the available roosts in your area.

