

Neighborhood Wildlife Stewards

Teaching our Highlands neighbors how to live safely with wildlife and keep the wildlife wild.

Look skyward on a summer day and you'll see swallows hawking for insects. After sunset, as the sky darkens and nature's shift changes, the swooping flight of swallows yields to the skittering, erratic flight of bats. Bats are all around us at night in the warmer months, catching untold numbers of insects just as swallows and other birds do during the day.

Issaquah Highlands provides good bat habitat with its ponds and forest. The stormwater pond near Central Park is a real hot-spot. Walk around it in the fading evening light to see numerous bats. Bats prefer to hunt over water because of the abundance of insects, and because they drink by skimming the water surface. They usually shelter nearby. Our most common local bats shelter in trees during the day; in crevices, holes, or camouflaged against bark. Such habitat became scarcer with the building of our neighborhood.

A local Camp Fire group, the Issaquah Metlife Community Family Club, stepped in to help. Ten black, pole-mounted bat shelters were installed on Kathy's Trail and in the wetlands near the fire station. This was a true community effort, with donations from IH contractors, Tuefel, Home Depot, and King County. The houses were installed as the centerpiece of a big Arbor Day celebration in April 2005 with the help of volunteers from the Wetlands Committee.

In other areas bat shelters are painted white to keep the bats from overheating, but in our cool climate the experts at Bats Northwest recommended full sun and black paint. Your observations of bats entering or leaving these shelters could be of scientific value, and will let us know whether the shelters are sited correctly. Please report sightings to Bats Northwest and the Neighborhood Wildlife Committee.

In addition to our community efforts, you can help bats on your own. Cats often catch bats. Keeping your cat indoors not only protects wildlife from your cat, it protects your cat from coyotes, raccoons, and other hazards. Avoiding the use of pesticides will prevent the accidental poisoning of bats and birds. You could also put up a bat shelter so bats emerging at dusk will patrol your yard for mosquitoes before winging further afield.

Another way to attract bats is to plant flowers that are pollinated by night-flying insects; stock, moonflower, four-o'clock, and mint are possibilities. These are all highly scented during the evening hours to attract pollinators. The large, night-pollinating moths they attract can be fun to watch, too. Some people who spot them hovering around flowers at night mistake them for hummingbirds.

Help our community continue its tradition of appreciation and stewardship for wildlife by joining us at the next meeting of Neighborhood Wildlife Stewards. We'll meet Tuesday, August 11th, by the firehouse at 8 p.m. for a bird and bat walk. Adults and children are welcome. For questions, contact Cathy Macchio at wildlifestewards@gmail.com. See you there!

August's topic: Bird and Bat Walk

Time and place: 8:00 p.m. on August 11th at the Firehouse

Written by:
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