

# RMBL Bat Information

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Most bats that inhabit Colorado are healthy, and the ones you see flying around at night probably aren't rabid. According to Bat Conservation International, "Bat rabies account for approximately one human death per year in the United States." According to Gunnison Public Works, no human in Gunnison County has been reported to have been infected by a bat. Three bats were reported to have been infected with rabies, and the bats tested for rabies are the same bats reported to be behaving oddly (see *Warning signs* below). A random bat behaving normally, even when in close proximity to humans, has an extremely low chance of having rabies. And unlike rabid dogs, raccoons, and coyotes, which may demonstrate uncharacteristically aggressive behavior, a rabid bat is extremely docile, weak, and inactive (Klug et al. 2011). Due to successful dog and cat vaccination programs, rabies is now the **second rarest disease** in the United States and Canada, behind polio" (Shedd 2007).

## Signs of Normal Bat Behavior

Many bats roost in roofs, attics and sheds, without people knowing the bats are there. Bats will be in Gothic cabins. Bats also roost in trees, mines, caves and attics, or under rocks, roofs and siding. Bats have remarkably accurate control of their flight and they are usually active at night. Left alone, bats are harmless, will actively avoid humans, and are highly beneficial *keystone species*, benefitting humans and the environment by acting as a natural source of pest control (Klug et al. 2011). Bats in Gothic belong to the genus *Myotis*, with a body size approximately equal to the size of your thumb.



An individual *Myotis* spp. in Gothic. Photo: Jaclyn Aliperti

Something to note is that bats have two types of roosts: a *day roost*, where they sleep during the day, and a *night roost*, where they rest for brief periods of time (usually 30 minutes to a few hours) in between foraging bouts during the night. Females usually roost in groups of 3 or more individuals known as maternity colonies, while males usually roost alone. Bats are easily disturbed, so do not be alarmed if bats roosting on the front porch or siding of your cabin fly around when you walk up to them; they do this as an escape behavior, then may take a few minutes to reorient themselves and find their roost again since they are not well-adapted to maneuvering in sunlight. It is also normal to see one or a few bats clinging to the ceiling or other cabin structures in the evening, as they are likely just digesting there in between feeding rounds.

## Signs of Potentially Abnormal Bat Behavior

If a bat is acting abnormally, it may be sick or injured. The following may suggest abnormal bat behavior, and a greater chance of a bat being sick:

- Bats are usually very scared of people and will fly away when you approach them. If the bat loses its natural wariness of people and does not or cannot fly away upon approach, there might be something wrong. If a bat is found on the ground or on a flat, horizontal surface during the day, this is considered abnormal. However, remember that an active bat that was disturbed during the day is not abnormal, and that even an inactive bat found during the day may be injured, not sick. Also, bats seen during the day may have just been excluded from their roost by people or may be juveniles who are learning how to access their roost.
- As rabies progresses, sick bats lose muscle control and coordination, stop eating and drinking, and show signs of paralysis.

### **RMBL's Bat Policy:**

Bats have inhabited Gothic cabins for the past 90 years. RMBL is in the beginning stages of installing bat houses to encourage bats to house elsewhere, but they will likely continue to inhabit Gothic cabins. We do not know of a bat in Gothic that has tested positive for rabies. Housing in Gothic is full most of the summer. If people have a bat in their cabin, we generally will not be able to accommodate requests to relocate to other cabins. If a bat free cabin is desired, please look for alternative housing opportunities offsite. If you need to cancel your housing spot during any time during the summer, please note that you will be subject to RMBL's cancellation policy.

If you find a bat in your cabin, there are several courses of action that you could take. In most cases, the bat is healthy, found a crack in the foundation of your cabin through which it could enter, and is using it as a day or night roost. Getting the bat to escape and plugging up the entrance hole should do the trick.

- Check to gauge if the bat is acting abnormally (read signs of normal and potentially abnormal bat behavior above). If you are unsure, contact one of RMBL's scientists who have experience working with bats: Jackie Aliperti ([jraliperti@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jraliperti@ucdavis.edu)) or Rick Williams ([willcha2@isu.edu](mailto:willcha2@isu.edu)). You may also contact Rob Schorr ([robert.schorr@colostate.edu](mailto:robert.schorr@colostate.edu)), head of the Colorado Bat Working Group.
- If you have no reason to believe the bat is unhealthy, wait for the bat to leave, or open a cabin door or window to encourage the bat to leave, and then plug up any obvious cracks or holes in the cabin (if you had a window open earlier or have a gaping hole in your cabin siding, this was an obvious point of entrance). Be sure to keep all lights off when you're encouraging the bat to leave; lights or flashlights will only disorient the bat, and it will fly in circles and have a hard time finding the exit.
- You may submit a work crew request (in the mailroom in the Administration Office) to ask the facilities crew to block the point of entry the following day –that way, the bat is discouraged from using your cabin as a repeated roost site.
- Do NOT touch a bat (or any wildlife) if you are not trained and vaccinated to do so. Do NOT use a broom, shovel, or bucket to swat at or contain the bat. If necessary, you may choose to safely contain the bat by wearing lightweight leather gloves and shooing the bat into a shoebox by following the steps below:

**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.



- If you believe you have been exposed to a sick bat (such as a bite or scratch) contact a local healthcare physician. The RMBL staff in the Administration Office can help you find a physician if you are not sure where to go. Clean the area with soap and water and apply alcohol or iodine. Bat teeth are small and very sharp, so the wound may be no more than a pin-like puncture.
- One option would be to visit the Gunnison Valley Hospital to receive rabies vaccinations. The RMBL Administration office will help you to find a physician who has the rabies vaccination in stock. Please know that vaccinations are expensive and you are receiving vaccinations at your own risk.
- If you are confident the bat seems sick, you may contact the Gunnison Public Health Department: 970-641-0209, 225 N. Pine Street, #E, Gunnison, CO. If you contact the Gunnison Public Health Department they will want you to capture and destroy the bat so that they can get it tested for rabies. Make sure you do not freeze the bat before it is tested. If the bat tests positive for rabies you will need to undergo rabies treatment at the Gunnison Valley Hospital. You can also choose to undergo rabies treatment even if the bat is not captured. We are always interested in knowing the results of any tests done on bats and would appreciate you letting the Director of Finance and Operations know if you choose pursue having a bat tested.

### Useful Resources

**Shedd, Warner.** *Owls Aren't Wise & Bats Aren't Blind: A Naturalist Debunks Our Favorite Fallacies about Wildlife.* Crown, 2007.

**Bat Conservation International –Bats and Human Health:** <http://www.batcon.org/resources/for-specific-issues/bats-human-health>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Rabies:** <https://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>

**Colorado Bat Working Group:** <http://cnhp.colostate.edu/cbwg/>

**Wisconsin Humane Society Wildlife Rehabilitation Center –How To Safely Contain a Bat:** <http://savinglives.wihumane.org/site/DocServer/foundbat.pdf?docID=2881>