

St. Margaret's Gone Batty!

Bats

On the north shore of Hastings Lake, just east of Sherwood Park, Alberta, sits an old church built in 1912 from local white poplar logs. Old buildings need constant chinking and upgrading to keep out both the weather and the local creatures. One particular creature was insistent that this log church would make a wonderful home.

Little brown bats have enjoyed life in the attic and under the shingle sidings of St. Margaret's church for many years. The colony had everything it could want: a beautiful lake nearby and surrounding woods providing a bountiful supply of food. The Friends of Deville St. Margaret's Society wanted to preserve the old church on the lake, but in order to receive government funds as a Historic Site, they had to get rid of the bats. But the bats also deserved to keep their home of many years.

The Society decided to try and save the bat colony. They took on the challenge to build bat houses and try to keep the bats on site despite the church being refurbished.

Step One – The attic of the church was sealed off in fall 2000 after several frosts eliminated the flying insects and after the bats had migrated. A 2-foot space was left unsealed to allow some bats to use the attic the following year – just in case they decided the bat houses weren't for them.

Step Two - In spring 2001, local Brownies and Society volunteers made 6 bat houses and painted them black. Bat droppings from the church attic were mixed into a "paint-able" solution and applied to all the bat houses.

Four bat houses were hung on trees in the church-yard. The trees were chosen because they were in sunny locations and had no branches for at least 4 metres from the ground. This gave the bats lots of space to swoop in and out of the houses.

Two bat houses were mounted on the west side of the old church directly below the primary entrance used originally by the bats to get into the attic. When the bats returned later that spring, all of the bat houses were used by at least a few bats.

Step Three – In October 2001, after the bats migrated, the old shingle sidings were stripped off the church and all remaining exterior nooks and crannies were sealed.

Every year since, the bats have used all six bat houses. The relocation was a great success. A Watchable Wildlife sign was erected in the church-yard so that visitors to St. Margaret's church can learn about little brown bats and know that they still live nearby.