

## Directorate of Public Works-Environmental

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### **Scout builds bat houses for Fort Hood** By Christine Luciano

Boy Scout Michael Ledlow with Troop 223 was in search of a service project that could get people involved and help the community. After a couple meetings with the Fort Hood Natural Resources Branch, the search ended when Ledlow learned from Fort Hood wildlife biologist Charles Pekins that there was a need for bat houses on the Installation. Ledlow and his troop devoted hours into researching, planning, and building eight bat houses for areas inside and outside the cantonment area.



The 17-year-old's service project is part of his quest to earn an Eagle Scout Badge - the highest rank a Boy Scout can achieve. "It's fairly rare," said Ledlow, adding that earning an Eagle Scout Badge requires scouts to provide service to a worthy institution, which could be a religious institution, a school, or the community.

Ledlow met with Pekins a couple months ago to get guidance on building the bat houses. Pekins provided Ledlow a publication by Bat Conservation International, an organization with over 20 years of research and design, which provided criteria for successful bat houses.



Over the next several weekends and weeknights, Ledlow and his Scout troop spent over 150 hours to build the eight bat houses that were two feet tall by fourteen inches wide, painted a medium brown, and had a metal roof. Ledlow was able to avoid any costs of materials for his project, because of generous donations from Lowes and Home Depot.

“These bat houses will provide a safer and better site than motor pools and Mission Oriented Unit Training sites,” Pekins said. “It’s critically important for Soldiers to train with the current war in Iraq, and these bat houses will prevent bats from interfering in the Soldiers’ training.”

The bat houses will be put up at the Natural Resources office, in motor pools, and out in the range to provide a more comfortable site for hundreds of forest species bats. "If you put bat houses up near by, there is a great chance they will not sneak in buildings," Pekins said.

Later this summer the Eagle Scout board will review Ledlow's project and decide if he will become eligible to earn his Eagle Scout badge. Ledlow said he's just happy to be able to give back to the community and help the bats on Fort Hood. "I wanted to give back to the community," he said. "I just thought it would be a good idea."

If you encounter a bat in your home or workspace, the best thing is to leave it alone. If you do find a bat trapped in a building or on the ground absolutely leave it alone, and call Animal Control at 287-2732 or Natural Resources at 287-2885 to come safely remove it. By absolutely no means should anyone pick up a bat with their bare hands or swat at it. "Swatting it may injure the bat and make it more likely to bite someone in self-defense," Pekins said. "It is against state law to injure, possess, or kill a bat."

## **Bats have received a bad reputation and myths have evolved but **here's the truth about bats:****

### **Myth: Bats are blind.**

Fact: Bats share the same senses of sight, hearing, smell, and feeling that we experience. They can see quite well and are certainly not blind, but have very good vision. Some of the fruit eating bats in the tropics use both sight and smell to find food. North American bats use sight and hearing. When it is very dark at night and the bats cannot see too well they will use echolocation, high frequency sounds produced in the bats voice box to process what is around them.

### **Myth: Bats have rabies**

Fact: A giant myth is that all bats have rabies. Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system, and in humans it is fatal. But in a wild population of bats less than 1/2 of 1% of all bats have rabies. The most prevalent rabies cases are from skunks, raccoons, dogs and cats. If a bat flies near you, you cannot get rabies. To get rabies you have to be bitten by an animal, and you cannot get it from blood, urine, or feces. Simply leave a grounded bat (or any other mammal) alone and one greatly reduces their chance of acquiring rabies.

### **Myth: Bats are blood sucking creatures.**

Fact: There are 1100 species of bats, and out of those bats there are only three species that are blood lappers and are out of those three only one is known to lap blood from mammals, including humans occasionally. Vampire bat species are found in Mexico and Central and South America.

### **Myth: All bats live in dark caves.**

Fact: A majority of bats do live in caves but some bats live under leaves, loose bark, bridges, inside tree hollows, and buildings. Fort Hood has seven species of bats, and about half of them live in the forests and the other half live in caves. There is a bat called the Red Bat that roots amongst tree leaves, hangs with one foot during the day and wraps itself with its wings thereby imitating a leaf in the tree canopy while it sleeps during the day.