

# Going Batty: Bugs on Bats

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## Bats in Nebraska

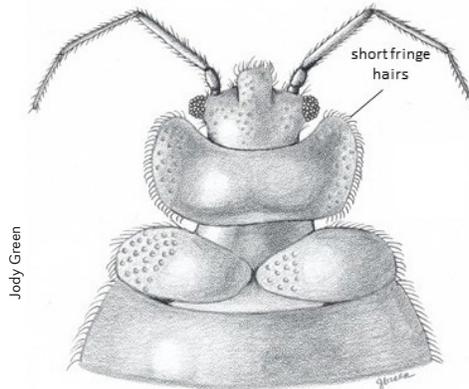
Bats are a likely, yet uninvited houseguest in many homes in Nebraska. Of the 13 species of bats that occur in Nebraska, very few are found in or near structures. Bats are nocturnal animals that feed solely on flying insects such as mosquitoes, beetles and moths.

When they get into homes they become a nuisance by their movement and noises, which can be heard in wall or attic voids, and their droppings, called guano, can build up and make a mess. They can also be a public health pest because they are associated with transmitting rabies and histoplasmosis to humans.

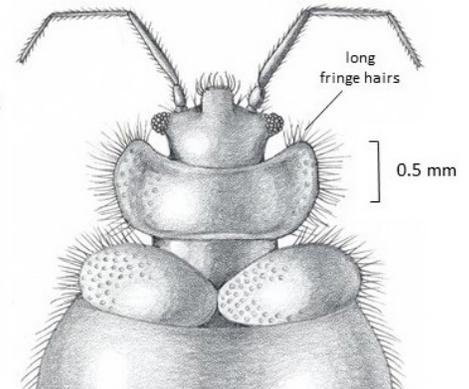
One thing not often mentioned are the ectoparasites of bats, such as the bat bug. Bat bugs are similar to bed bugs in their appearance and blood-feeding behavior, but there are significant differences in terms of prevention and management.

## Bat Bugs and Bed Bugs

Bat bugs and bed bugs are in the family Cimicidae. Both bat bugs and bed bugs are characterized as being small, brown, oval-shaped, bugs with flattened bodies. They are wingless with segmented antennae, and a piercing-sucking mouthpart tucked under their bodies. Often they are compared to the size and shape of an apple seed. Both bugs require a blood meal in order to



Bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*)



Bat bug (*Cimex adjunctus*)

Illustration of the difference between the bed bug and the bat bug.



Adult bat bugs (magnified)

grow, develop and produce offspring.

As the name implies, the primary host of bat bugs are bats, whereas the primary host of bed bugs are humans. In the absence of a primary host, however, bat bugs will feed on humans given the opportunity. Bed bugs come into our homes by hitchhiking on our belongings and bat bugs enter the structure from hitchhiking on bats.

## Physical Differences

At first glance, the bed bug and the bat bug look identical, but with the use

of a magnifying lens, there are slight physical differences between the two. Both bugs are covered with hair, but the bat bug has much longer hair, particularly behind the head on the part of the body called the pronotum.

## Behavioral Differences

Bed bugs typically feed on their host while the host is sleeping and can go for months without being noticed, hiding in cracks and crevices around bed frames, headboards, box springs and mattress seams.

Bat bugs are strangely found out in the open, walking about on furniture, along window sills, fireplaces or on top of the bed covers. Bat bugs are found on the top floor of homes and apartments because bats tend to roost higher up in attic spaces, chimneys or decorative shutters. Bat bugs enter living areas through cracks and gaps around vents, windows, light fixtures, attic doors and ceiling fans.

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## If You Find a Bug

Do not panic! Capture the bug without squishing it and place in a plastic bag or clear jar with a lid. Stick the container in the freezer to keep the bug intact so all hairs can be observed. Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County offers free pest identification. Samples can be dropped off at 444 Cherrycreek Road in Lincoln, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Submitting a photo without magnification is often too blurry for a positive identification.

## Control Methods

Bat bugs prefer to stay close to bats and only wander away when dislodged or when hosts leave the roosting areas. The number one reason for finding a bat bug in the home is because there are bats roosting in the structure. The solution is to remove the bats from the areas to eliminate the host/food of the bat bug. There is usually no need to treat bedrooms, beds or other sleeping areas with insecticides if the bats are eliminated.

## If You Have a Bat Inside Your House

If you are in Lincoln and find a bat in the living space of your home, do not shoo it out. If a bat is inside your house and you know where it is located, call Lincoln Animal Control to safely remove the bat and take it to the Nebraska Veterinary Diagnostic Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln for rabies testing. If you are outside the city and can safely trap and contain the bat, take it to a veterinarian. If you have been exposed to a bat and may have been bitten, contact your primary care physician.

### Saying to remember: **June through July — Let them fly!**

The best time to exclude bats is after Aug. 1 because bats have their young in spring and by the end of July, they are mature enough to leave the roost. Exclusion is the best method for control and includes installing a one-way door so the bats can fly out, but no longer return.

### Hire a Professional If You Have Bats Roosting in the House

Over the last three years, the number of bat bug inquiries and identi-

fications have increased, which indicates a greater abundance of urban bats in the city of Lincoln and surrounding areas.

Professional pest management companies should have a hand lens with them or microscope at their office. It is important to positively identify the pest so the correct course of action can be taken.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Nebraska Extension NebGuide, *Bats in and Around Structures (G1667)*, is available at the Extension office and online at <https://wildlife.unl.edu/pdfs/bats-in-around-structures.pdf>