



# BAT

## Phobias Create PCO Opportunity

Bat control can be a profitable service offering, but it requires knowledge and preparation.

by Lisa Lupo

**B**ats have gotten a bad rap. Ask someone to describe a bat, and you're most likely to get a horrified shudder, followed by the portrayal of a fierce, nightmarish creature with long, pointed teeth that seeks out humans for blood. But bat management expert Jim Dreisacker knows bats, and says such perceptions are complete myths.

Photo: ©Joe McDonald / Animals Animals Enterprises.  
Little brown bat, *Myotis lucifugus*, in flight.



Dreisacker often uses a sealant foam to close openings in structures.

“They are fascinating creatures,” he says of bats. “To me they are a joy, a pleasure to work with.” But the fact that most homeowners have absolutely no tolerance for the mammal (as 3:00 a.m. phone calls from frenzied homeowners requesting immediate removal are nothing out-of-the-ordinary for Dreisacker), is what keeps him in business and also, he notes, creates a sales opportunity for pest control operators throughout the country.

Dreisacker is owner of Westchester Wildlife Control, Brewster, N.Y., and is the inventor of the BatCone bat removal device. He got into the business due, primarily, to his life-long love of wildlife. “I’ve always had an interest in animals; I was always fascinated by wildlife,” he says. As a young boy Dreisacker would trap squirrels and other animals just to observe them, and he was an avid nature-television fan. “I could watch nature programs all day and night!”

## ONE WAY OUT

He’d been in the business for 23 years, excluding, trapping and sealing out wildlife of all sorts, but it was Westchester Wildlife Control owner Jim Dreisacker’s interest in and observations of bats that led to the invention of the first BatCone, the adaptable ProCone, and now an upgrade on the original (tentatively named BatCone II), expected to be released this fall.

BatCone is designed for use against flat surfaces, while ProCone has a flexible vinyl flange allowing for installation on irregular surfaces and also enables exclusion services for sparrows and starlings.

The cones all work on the principle of a diminishing-diameter tunnel, or “cone,” placed at entry points of the building in which the bat has taken up residence. With the larger end of the funnel set flush against the access hole, and the smaller end facing out, bats can go into the larger end from inside the building and crawl out through the smaller end — but are unable to do the opposite, thus creating a one-way access point: out. With the cones set at the bat’s active access points, and all other access points caulked or

**STARTING A BAT BUSINESS.** As an adult, this love of wildlife grew naturally into a career, and his avid observations paid off in expertise in wildlife behavior and management, with a key focus on bats. There is a definite need for bat removal services, he says, and it is a service that pest management professionals should consider providing, if they don’t already. “It’s really an easy business to get into. The beautiful thing about bats is they’re not hard to keep out.” The primary prerequisites for starting a bat-removal business are knowledge about bat behavior and management techniques and devices; an understanding of local regulations; and a good pair of thick leather gloves along with a tall ladder.

Although they are generally gentle creatures, Dreisacker says, bats may bite in self-defense. But because their teeth are actually very small, leather gloves are all the bat-management provider needs for safe handling. However, Dreisacker’s first response to the question about what a pest control operator needs to get into the business: “You can’t be afraid to climb a ladder.” Because the bats’ most common habitat in homes is in the attic, exterior device placement can require some lofty work.

One reason that bats are easy to manage is because once they are excluded and the entry points have been sealed, they don’t chew their way back in as a rodent would, Dreisacker says.

In addition, study of their biology and behavior has enabled Dreisacker to assess their limitations, and then develop a device through which the bats could only proceed one way, that is, out of the structure.

Dreisacker’s BatCone is, as its name

implies, “coned” — larger at the entry hole, tapering to a smaller exit point — making it so the bat can crawl out the cone, but cannot get back in. Though it sounds fairly simple, its invention was the result of “many, many hours, nights and countless observations.” (For more information, see related story on page 76.)

## PASS UP SUMMER EXCLUSION.

Dreisacker’s keen understanding of bats also causes him to decline certain business, while enabling him to take on accounts that others may decline. During the summer months, female bats set up nursing colonies in which they have and care for new offspring. Because the young do not leave the roost for their first few months, exclusion work will trap out the mothers and trap in the young — causing the offspring to die in the walls of the house “which isn’t good for anyone.”

On the other hand, Dreisacker says, males tend to roost by themselves. So when he gets summer calls, he will inspect the home, find the habitat and determine whether it is a male or female roost. If it is male, he then performs that exclusion and bat-proofing service, and keeps his business going year round, “when competitors aren’t doing any bat work.”

Such discretionary work, however, requires delicate customer communication. If Dreisacker finds that a homeowner’s problem is due to a nursing colony, he will say, “I can’t help you because I don’t want to have dead bats in the wall.” Sometimes he can educate them enough so that they will wait until fall; other times, they simply call other providers until someone agrees to do the work.

otherwise sealed, the devices provide for complete exclusion without harming the bats.

Dreisacker had tried and tested a number of bat-removal devices before, but none provided a complete solution, until he hit upon the cone-principle — first using a caulking tube, then working with a manufacturer to create a more professional unit. The easy-to-install cones, now made of weatherproof, disposable, recyclable plastic are not harmful to the bat or the PCO.

The device is available from a variety of sources including Wildlife Control Supplies ([www.wildlifecontrolsupplies.com](http://www.wildlifecontrolsupplies.com)), Critter Control ([www.crittercontrol.com](http://www.crittercontrol.com)), Bird Barrier ([www.birdbarrier.com](http://www.birdbarrier.com)), and PVE (800/724-9468). For more information on the BatCone, ProCone and bat management, visit [www.batcone.com](http://www.batcone.com).





Dreisacker applies caulk to seal possible bat entry points.

Bat management providers also need to be cognizant of federal and state regulations related to bats. Only six of the 45 bat species found in the United States are federally protected under the Endangered Species Act — with the most commonly encountered little brown and big brown bats not among the six. But some states do have stricter regulations. In Georgia, for example, it is illegal to capture, kill or harm any species, but devices such as the BatCone can be used, as it fits into the state's allowance for "temporary excluder devices that allow bats to fly out in the evening to feed, but prevent their return to the attic," according to a release by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia Ecological Services, which adds that even for federally protected species, "There's flexibility under the Endangered Species Act that gives choices when conflicts occur between human health and listed species," Dreisacker says.

In New York, where Dreisacker provides service, the common little and big brown bats are not protected. However, he says, "there is a health issue involved, even though it is very small."

Less than one percent of bats are infected with rabies, and years ago, bats which got into habited rooms could just be let out. But after a young girl died as a result of being bitten by a rabid bat a few years ago, these bats now need to be trapped and taken to the health department for testing, and a series of questions asked of the homeowner by the service provider.

In addition, though in all his years of work with bats, Dreisacker has never been bitten, he is vaccinated for rabies, and as mandated by the state, gets a blood test and booster shot regularly.

**BAT MANAGEMENT TRAINING.** Despite the many behavioral facts and regulatory requirements that a PCO must be aware of, it is not difficult to get started in bat work, Dreisacker says. A review of his [www.batcone.com](http://www.batcone.com) Web site provides pest control

professionals with a free introduction to bats, as well as information on exclusion methods, cone installation, trivia and even "bat rehabilitation." And, for more in-depth instruction, Dreisacker conducts training seminars.

Because, as he says, "it is much easier to show than to teach," he prefers training at job sites with bat problems.

But Dreisacker also conducts classroom training sessions, particularly when a company has a larger group it wishes to train. "I just think bat removal is a great opportunity for PCOs," he says. "They already have the client base. I generate quite a few leads from PCOs in the area who don't do bat work."

Dreisacker, whose expertise is often sought by local police responding to 911 bat calls and has been written about in publications as prestigious as *The New York Times*, offers his day-long sessions for \$1,500. "I enjoy teaching people to do this type of work," he says, adding that several of those he has trained have gone on to establish businesses at which they make six-figure incomes.

**PROFITABLE...BUT BE PREPARED.**

Depending on the extent of the problem and the size of the home, bat jobs can bring in a few hundred to several thousand dollars each, Dreisacker says. One of his highest-paying jobs was for an apartment complex which ran \$30,000. On another occasion, a single residence ("a mansion") once brought in \$18,000. "I factor my price



Jim Dreisacker

according to what I had to do," Dreisacker says, explaining that prices are based on such factors as the height of the structure, the number of openings to be sealed and devices to be placed, the total time needed to do the job, and the length of the guarantee. Dreisacker's price range begins at \$250 per man-hour, plus material and extra equipment (such as scaffold/bucket truck rental) costs.

The key to successful service is first eliminating, or sealing, any other possible ways for the bats to gain access to a structure, then performing exclusion service with the exit-only devices, and finally, returning to remove the devices and seal these entryways once the bats are gone. All these steps are moot, however, when receiving a middle-of-the-night call to remove a bat from a bedroom. "Fifty percent of bat calls come for emergency service at night," Dreisacker says. And most of these occur

on hot summer nights when attic-dwelling bats venture into the main part of air-conditioned homes seeking the cooler air. "On 90-degree nights, we get three, four, five calls for bats," he says.

The plus-side of these middle-of-the-night rousings are the "emergency fees" PCOs can earn, higher charges which compensate for the urgent service as well as the mandated need to transport the bat to the health department for testing.

**BENEFICIAL "PEST."** Unlike much pest management work — but like most wildlife management — bat service generally does not involve elimination, or killing, of the bat "pest."

Rather it is the implementation of techniques to move the bats from the human habitats into more congenial environments.

On his Web site, [www.batcone.com](http://www.batcone.com), Dreisacker explains their beneficial nature: "Bats are gentle creatures but occasionally they become a nuisance and get 'too close for comfort'. If this occurs, don't panic. All the negative stories and tales you've heard about bats are greatly exaggerated."

As insectivores, bats are indeed beneficial to the environment — and humans. A single little brown bat can consume up to 1,200 insects in one hour; and, as further noted by the Georgia Ecological Services, "Bats are undoubtedly one of the most under-appreciated animals that contribute to our diverse natural heritage ... Though they somewhat resemble mice, they are not closely related to rodents and do not gnaw. The bats in Georgia aid humans by eating as much as half their weight each day in mosquitoes, beetles, moths and other insects."

In many states in which the common bats are not protected, "you could kill the little brown and big brown bats," Dreisacker says, "but I would discourage it at any time. They're a beautiful animal and beneficial." 🦇

*The author is a Champlin, Minn.-based writer and frequent contributor to PCT. She be contacted at [llupo@gje.net](mailto:llupo@gje.net).*

For more information on the Bat Cone, visit [www.batcone.com](http://www.batcone.com). Learn more about the biology, behavior and management of bats at [www.pctonline.com/training](http://www.pctonline.com/training). In addition to hands-on, practical management tips, PCT Online Training features an interactive quiz that pest management professionals can use to test their knowledge of these pests.