

Live Bats are Back in Georgia!

Imagine, you are reading your local newspaper and you happen to read that there will be an educational program about bats at a local zoo or nature center, so you join some friends and head out to see the presentation. You walk in and take your seat as the speaker is introduced and starts talking. The talk includes a set of slides showing bats flying, eating, and generally doing what bats do. After awhile, the slides end, the lights are turned back on, and the speaker takes questions from the audience. After that, it's time to go home. Not very exciting, right?



A “standard” bat presentation

Pictures of bats are nice, but wouldn't it be more interesting to actually see a live bat? During the presentation, you learn that various regulations in Georgia make it difficult to bring a live bat to a public event. The regulations require a special cage for the bat that is difficult to assemble.

Now there is a suitable cage thanks to collaboration between Basically Bats and The Center for Wildlife Education at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. Sue Barnard of BBI designed the new cage to meet the strict regulations of the Department of Natural Resources, but at the same time, allowing for an interesting program. In order to tell an interesting story, the cage is shaped like a barn, one of the common places where bats can be found. The inside of the cage is large, with many hiding places where the bat can move if it feels like being out of sight. It has a plastic mesh “ladder” that leads from the floor of the cage (where the bat would find its food and water) up to the highest point inside the “steeple” of the barn. This top portion of the barn is attached with Velcro, and it can be removed to reveal a mesh cage with a clear plastic front. Because bats like to roost at the highest point in a cage, the bat will go into this small structure and can be seen by the audience. Furthermore, because the cage is mesh, a bat's echolocation call can be picked up by a bat detector. The bat detector makes the calls audible for the audience.



Mesh cage at the top of the “steeple”

Suddenly the bat presentation has gone from a dry slide show to an exciting event, where people get a chance to actually see what a bat looks like and hear the sonar sounds that are normally inaudible to human ears. Obviously, it took a fair amount of work to make this happen; what are the benefits of having a live bat at a presentation?

1. A presentation that includes a live bat is inherently more interesting than a presentation that relies entirely on pictures.
2. People tend to be less fearful after seeing a live bat when they realize that bats aren't the huge monsters that are featured in horror films and nightmares.



3. As you can see by the photo below, children **love** getting a chance to see a live bat.



4. The ability to actually hear the bat's echolocation calls from a bat detector is more interesting than hearing them from a tape or a computer playback.



Zoe echolocating for an admiring fan.

The BBI bat barn is occupied by *Zoe*, a female big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) who was born in captivity in 1996. Since *Zoe* cannot be released into the wild, she can spend some of her time as an ambassador, helping people get a better understanding of bats. *Zoe* has already traveled extensively throughout Georgia. She has traveled to the Wildlife Education Center at Georgia Southern University, Oglethorpe Elementary School on St. Simons Island, and the Southern Conservation Trust in Peachtree City. In every case, *Zoe* has performed magnificently. She is a natural for these presentations.

Since we have access to this new cage, we hope that *Zoe* will be able to help many people learn about bats as she travels around Georgia in her new house. Generally, *Zoe* travels to presentations given by Stephen Burnett, a professor at Clayton College & State University in Morrow, Georgia. If you're interested in seeing where *Zoe* is going to be in the future, you can check Dr. Burnett's web page at:

http://a-s.clayton.edu/burnett/bat_talks/

[Back to Basically Bats Home](#)