

Bats in Austin

The Congress Avenue Bridge is located in downtown Austin and is home to the largest urban bat colony in North America. Once the Austin bats made the local residents run in fear, but today they bring people from near and far to Town Lake every evening.

Each night, between the months of March and November, an estimated 1.5 million Mexican free-tail bats fly out from under the bridge in search of food, covering the sky like a black cloud. It is one of the most impressive and peculiar attractions found in Texas with the most spectacular flights occurring in late summer. While the bridge was under reconstruction in 1980, the engineers assigned to the project apparently had no idea that the new crevices they were creating under the bridge would make a wonderful home for a bat colony. It became headline news when the bats started moving into the bridge by the thousands. After the newness of the nighttime flights had worn off and the occurrence was no longer exciting, local residents began to grow fearful of the bats. The enormous quantity of bat guano left an unpleasant smell and stain on the beautiful new bridge, which increased the residents' dislike of the bats. Austin residents even began petitioning to have the colony completely removed.

About that same time, a group called Bat Conservation International got involved, and began a program to educate people about these small flying mammals. Austin-ites soon learned that bats are actually gentle animals that eat anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 pounds of mosquitoes and other types of insects ...each night! This pleased local residents who enjoy their late afternoon jogs around Town Lake and playing Frisbee at nearby Zilker Park. The educational program turned out to be a huge success, and Austin residents began to appreciate the local bats.

Hundreds of people gather by the Congress Avenue Bridge or sit in boats on the lake every evening in hopes of seeing this phenomenon. Watching this flight for food is a favorite evening activity for locals and tourists alike. If you are interested in getting an up close view of the bats, check out one of the sunset paddleboat or kayak tours that are available on Town Lake. This spectacular sight will have you in awe over the bats that once had residents scared, but now draw spectators every evening to watch this fascinating nature phenomenon.

Source(s):

Austin City Guide. (2010). Austin Congress Bridge Bats. Retrieved on October 30, 2010 from <http://www.austincityguide.com/content/congress-bridge-bats-austin.asp>

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