

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
North Florida National Wildlife Refuges
P. O. Box 68, St. Marks, FL 32355
Phone: 850-925-6121
Fax: 850-925-6930

News Release



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Contact: Refuge Staff

Partnerships Create Home for Refuge Bats

For years, colony-forming bats of St Vincent National Wildlife Refuge have dwelled in the attic of the old hunting cabin, a wooden lodging structure located on the barrier island near Apalachicola, Florida. Their twilight departure patterns the air and guano droppings on the porch provide a distinctive fragrance. In 2006, Ryan Barberides of Lynn Haven built four pole bat houses as part of his Eagle Scout project. He was assisted by the Bonita Bay Environmental Youth Club and Boy Scout Troop #321 in placing the poles on the island. Currently the four houses are located just south west of the cabin and all four show evidence of use.

A historical renovation of the cabin has now begun, which will displace the wintering occupants, a colony of Brazilian free tail bats. To resolve this problem, refuge volunteers Carl Wolfe and Rae Ellen Syverson, contacted Joe Reinman, Wildlife Biologist at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. He encouraged them to investigate building a community bat house on St. Vincent Island. The St. Marks Refuge Association, Inc. agreed to purchase the materials needed to build the bat house. A very generous donation of materials and labor for the roof was donated by Bobby James, Bobby James Quality Roofing Inc. of Eastpoint, FL. The four very strong utility poles supporting the bat house were donated by Progress Energy of Florida.

The bat house was constructed under the direction of Bob Casey, a refuge volunteer from Connecticut, along with the following individuals and companies who made this project a success: inmates from the Franklin County Work Camp; refuge volunteers Ken Fox, David Standeart, and Bob's dedicated wife Anita; Refuge Forestry Technician Dale Shiver who provided labor, expertise, and valuable knowledge during the entire project; and St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge employee Dallas Beckett, who transported a fork lift to the island and assisted with the task of erecting the bat house on the poles.

The bat house follows a plan from Florida Bat Conservancy and consists of 74 sheets of 4' x 8' plywood housed within a 8' x 8' wooden building, located 15'-16' off the ground. Now that the bat house is complete, it may take some time to achieve a good occupancy rate. According to the Florida Bat Conservancy, "the keys to a successful community bat house are design and location. A well-designed and properly located bat house has a reasonable chance of acquiring bats within a few years. However, since there are no guarantees, the best we can do is design and locate a bat house in a way that increases the likelihood that the bats will find it, try it out and choose to stay." With a local population of Brazilian free-tail bats that will be displaced with the cabin renovation, a good bat house design, and careful placement of the new home in the vicinity of the cabin, there is a very good likelihood that the house will soon be occupied.

Community bat houses are designed to provide roosting habitat for colony forming bats. The colony-

forming bats of the Florida panhandle likely to share the community bat house at St. Vincent Island NWR are Brazilian free-tail bats, big brown bats, evening bats and southeastern myotis bats.

Community bat houses are usually 4 to 8 feet square and may host more than 50,000 bats. Large community bat houses have been built at several locations in Florida including Hickory Mound Wildlife Management Area in Taylor County, Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Knapp-Phipps Park in Tallahassee, and Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park in Suwannee County. The largest of the Florida bat houses is an 18' x 18' house on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville. More than 100,000 bats were reported to roost in this structure by 2008. Descriptions of these bat houses and those at other locations can be found at the Florida Bat Conservancy web site: <http://www.floridabats.org/CBH.htm>

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