



Going Batty in Oconee County:

Engaging families, busting myths, and promoting bat education through a community festival



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Introduction

Bats act as an integral part of pest management for both natural and agricultural ecosystems in Georgia. However, due to habitat loss and disease, Georgia's bat populations are declining. Also, bats are often seen as a danger by humans, resulting in conflict when unwanted roosting occurs in dwellings. It is important to educate the public about the benefits of Georgia's flying mammals while providing them options to navigate potential conflict.

Oconee County Extension has created the Oconee County Bat Festival to address the need for bat education and to provide a real-world example of bat-human conflict mitigation through providing housing for a local park's large bat population.

Program Goals

- Increase awareness of the crucial role bats play in Georgia's local ecosystems
- Expand knowledge of the benefits bats have in ecosystems globally
- Expand knowledge on how homeowners can promote bats in their backyards
- Provide extra housing for Heritage Park's resident bat colony

Program Content

The festival offered educational opportunities for a wide range of audiences, from youth-centered games to more advanced lectures. It also showcased new bat-themed art exhibits dispelling bat myths and six new bat houses for the resident bats of the park.

Lecture Topics:

- Bat life history
- Benefits of bats
- Threats facing bats
- How to help bats

Hands-on Activities:

- Exploring echolocation
- Understanding bat senses
- Flying paper bats
- Viewing bat specimens



Attendees participating in festival activities:
(Top) Bat life history lecture
(Right) Exploring echolocation game
(Bottom) Taxidermized bat specimens



Batty additions to Heritage Park:
(Top) New bat houses
(Left) Little Free Library with bat resources
(Bottom) Bat murals busting bat myths

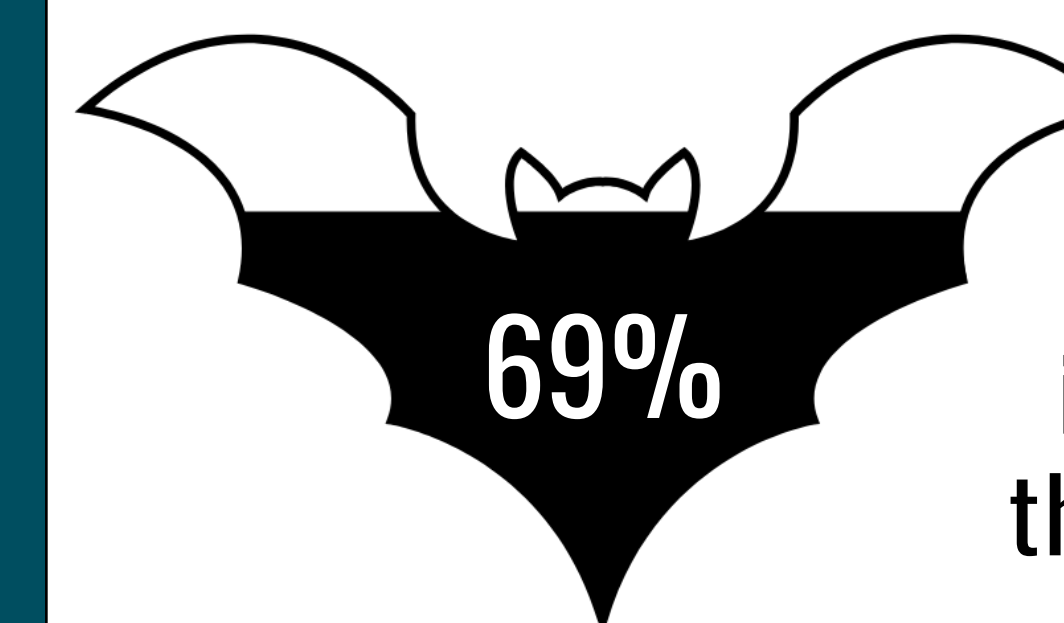


Results & Impact

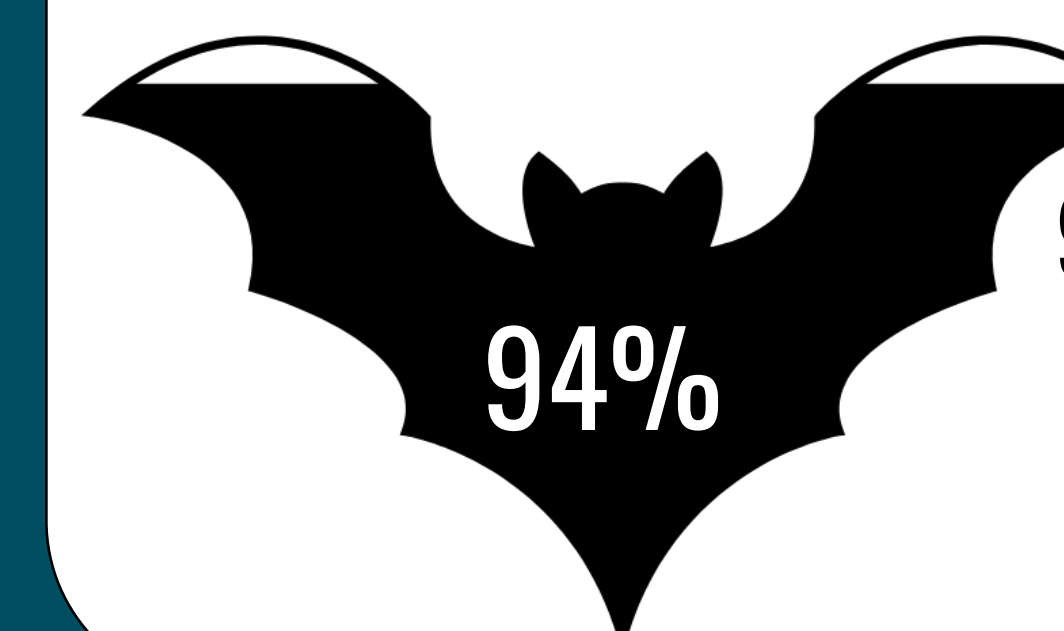
- 94 total participants attended the 4-hour festival
- Participants ranged from families with young children to senior citizens
- Six new 4-chamber bat houses were installed in the park



100% of participants reported a sustained or increased awareness and appreciation of bats' ecological role



69% of participants reported an increase in knowledge about bats, their benefits, and how to help them



94% of participants reported they were likely or very likely to adopt new practices to support bats

Conclusions

- The festival increased participants' knowledge, appreciation, and awareness of bats, including how they benefit the ecosystems in Georgia
- Implementing practices learned at the festival can support local bat populations by providing suitable housing, reducing pesticide use, and encouraging insect diversity

Acknowledgments

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