

Bats Get Temporary Housing

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CORONA, Calif. - Imagine returning from your winter vacation and finding your old, dark, damp home was replaced with a modern, multi-story residence overlooking a river and a golf course.

That's what awaits a colony of bats when they return to their summer grounds along the Santa Ana River, about a mile downstream from Prado Dam. While the bats won't be able to see how nice their new homes look, they most certainly will appreciate how well they abide by the three rules of real estate: location, location, location.

"We're putting the bat boxes near water, because that's where the bats forage," said Chris Jones, a biologist in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Environmental Planning Section.

"They perform a valuable ecological service, they're like vector control. They eat three to four times their body weight in insects every day."



A rigger attaches a strap to the bat box pole in preparation to lifting it into place. The boxes will serve as a temporary home for migrating bats upon their return to the Santa Ana River in late February or early March. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)



Workers adjust temporary supports designed to hold the bat box in place after the cement footing is poured. This bat box could hold up to 500 bats until construction on the new “bat friendly” bridge is completed. (USACE photo by Greg Fuderer)

That may not seem like a lot when one considers the adult bats weigh less than two-tenths of an ounce, but mosquitoes weigh significantly less.

The Corps is installing the bat boxes as mitigation for a bank stabilization project that will help protect the 91 Freeway. As part of that project, the Corps is replacing an old bridge, the bats’ former home, with a new bridge in preparation for the day when Prado Dam begins releasing up to 30,000 cubic feet of water per second.

The new bridge will include “bat friendly features,” according to Jones. “The new bridge is designed to include nooks and crannies for the bats to nest,” he said.

Since the construction of the new bridge is not complete and the old bridge will soon be demolished, temporary housing had to be provided. The migratory bats’ return is heavily weather-dependent, but biologists expect them to return in late February or early March.

The three bat boxes are constructed from old ammunition boxes and plywood. Each box contains several separate nesting areas and is designed to house up to 500 bats each.