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Ijams Nature Center Celebrates New Bat House at FREE Program Oct. 22

Structure expected to attract 100,000+ Mexican free-tailed bats

(KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE, 10/9/25)—Ijams Nature Center will host a free “housewarming” program on Oct. 22 from 6-8 p.m. to celebrate the completion of the nonprofit nature center’s new bat house.

The bat house is expected to host more than 100,000 Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) when the colony is fully established.

The 10’ x 12’ structure is specifically designed to meet the needs of this bat species. It has multiple roosting chambers with close spacing and rough interior surfaces for the bats to grip.

Attendees will have the opportunity to see the bat house, learn more about the species, and see firsthand how the Knoxville community is working together to protect and sustain wildlife.

Ijams naturalists will lead short, guided walks to the bat house. Once at the site, Dr. Gary McCracken, UT professor emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and bat researcher, will talk about the benefits of bats and why this project is important to the community.

McCracken worked with Ijams Conservation Director Ben Nanny, other Ijams staff and volunteers, and a crew from Knox County Parks & Recreation to erect the bat house above the lime kilns at Mead’s Quarry.

Nanny said Knox County’s support was crucial in making this project possible.

“We’re extremely grateful to the County team for their skill, time, and commitment,” Nanny said. “This bat house is a shared investment in Knoxville’s ecological future, and we look forward to watching it come alive at dusk.”

Bats are often misunderstood, but they play vital roles in ecosystems. Each night, a Mexican free-tailed bat can eat insects that otherwise would damage crops or become pests. Over a large colony, this impact is enormous.

This site is ideal due to its close proximity to water, abundant insect life, and relative seclusion from disturbance. Ijams staff anticipate that this new habitat will become a nightly spectacle for visitors, and a living classroom for learning about bats.

Paige Crane, Ijams Education Director, said she is excited about the new opportunity to connect people to nature.

“Ijams already offers programs that focus on bats, moths, owls, and other wildlife that are most active at night,” Crane said. “The bat house will expand our educational programs as well as provide a place where the public can come to witness the colony and learn from interpretive signage.

“This project aligns with Ijams’ mission to foster the stewardship of nature through direct experience,” she continued. “By providing an appealing roost and inviting the public to observe and learn, our goal for the bat house is to help people feel more connected to nature and understand why we should appreciate and protect it.”

This program is part of Ijams Nature Center’s third annual Hallo-Week, a celebration of autumn that features night hikes and paddles, haunted histories, a poetry slam, trivia, and more Oct. 21-30.

Tickets for the bat house celebration are free, but registration is required at ijams.org/hallo-week-at-ijams.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025, Ijams Nature Center is a 320-acre nonprofit educational center in the heart of Knoxville that serves visitors of all ages, stages, and abilities. Its mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Ijams features 14 miles of hiking and mixed-use trails, a public access river dock, swimming, boating, biking, and so much more. Hundreds of world-class educational programs and events are coordinated and offered annually. Ijams’ grounds and trails are open every day from 8:00 AM until dusk. For more information, visit ijams.org or call 865-577-4717.

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All photos courtesy of Ijams Nature Center.



The Ijams bat house during the early phase of construction in spring 2025.



The newly completed bat house is expected to attract a large colony of Mexican free-tailed bats.



Once the colony has been established, the Ijams bat house will offer dazzling displays of more than 100,000 bats emerging from the house at dusk.