

If you own, use or manage a swimming pool, Indiana State's bat research center needs your help

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Indiana State student Zachary Nickerson holds a bat while doing research in the field.

As spring turns to summer, many of us enjoy the longer days by lingering on our back porches or sitting by the pool.

It's the latter on which researchers at the Center for Bat Research, Outreach, and Conservation at Indiana State University are focusing. They would like the public's help in understanding how [bats](#) use swimming [pools](#).

A nationwide survey is now available online, so if you own, use or manage a [swimming pool](#), you can provide valuable information. Even if you have never seen a bat near your pool, that's important, researchers say.

Anecdotal reports suggest bats use swimming pools for drinking, perhaps especially in areas where natural water sources are scarce, said student researcher Zachary Nickerson, a junior from Columbus, Ind.

"Bats drink water in-flight, so they come down, take a drink and fly out all in one motion. They can't land and drink and take off again. So if there's an obstruction in the way or the pool is too small or something goes wrong, they can get trapped in the pool and die," Nickerson said.

To participate in the voluntary survey, go to batsandpools.wordpress.com

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This is the second year for the research project, which started after Joy O'Keefe, assistant professor of biology at Indiana State and director of the Bat Center, started hearing reports about dead bats being found in swimming pools. O'Keefe confirmed these anecdotes with a colleague in Texas and decided research was needed to determine if the phenomena was widespread.

Last year, 78 percent of the nearly 400 respondents reported seeing bats near their pools; 13 percent reported drowned bats.

"We're definitely finding what we were expecting to find," said

Nickerson, who is double majoring in biology and chemistry. "With 300-plus (respondents), we got good data and good spatial distribution, but we need more to make the conclusions concrete."

This year, Nickerson is hoping to get at least 1,000 respondents to have a more comprehensive sample. With the additional data, researchers hope to answer questions about bat mortality, whether there are certain areas of the country or types of landscapes that are more affected. The features of the pools are also of interest - size, whether there's a slide or building near it, etc.

Geographically, Nickerson would also like to get data from residents in the Northern Great Plains or Rocky Mountains. The West and East coasts and Texas were better represented in last year's survey, but more data are needed from all across the country.

"If bats are drowning in pools, it would be nice to see if there is something we can do about it, if there is something about a pool or an area of the country that stands out," Nickerson said.

The survey is open through December.

Provided by Indiana State University

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