

Tyrrell goes batty against mosquitoes

Kyle Smylie | inSide Drumheller

The Tyrrell museum will be recruiting bats to combat the annual spring plague of freshly hatched mosquitoes after bat houses were donated to the museum for their Green Team initiative.

Donating houses to the Atlas Coal Mine, Dinosaur Trail Golf and Country Club, Dinosaur Provincial Park, and one to keep for themselves, the Tyrrell hopes bats will take up residence in the skinny wooden structures to provide a chemical free solution for dealing with the pesky problem.

"Spraying for adult mosquitoes or poisoning the larvae seems like an unattractive idea," said Mike Dooley, public relations coordinator at the Royal Tyrrell Museum.

"The trick is to put these houses out in places that are appropriate for them to live, and they will eventually move into them."

The valley is home to two species, the little brown bat and big brown bat, with plans to attract the little kind to the houses. These bats can eat up to 500-3,000 insects a night.

The opportunity to control mosquitoes through use of natural predators will reduce the risk to the public of West Nile Virus, which is one major benefit to this project.

"We thought it would be an interesting way to reduce the pesticides we use," said Dooley, adding they hope it will provide a more enjoyable experience for those using the trail systems around the museum.

The Atlas Coal Mine is accustomed to having swarms of mosquitoes coming from the wet ground around the historic site, and with a lot of wildlife around the site, executive director Linda Digby said it was a relief to have this option.

Dooley said he will be donating the fifth bat house to the Town of Drumheller as the town prepares to use its last stockpile of pesticide which has now been discontinued. The chemical in use now is far more effective than the greener options they will have to choose from next year.

"We would rather not use chemical if at all possible," said Director of Infrastructure Allan Kendrick, saying the town has looked into using bat houses



The Tyrrell Museum's Green Team initiative donated bat houses to the Atlas Coal Mine, Dinosaur Trail Golf and Country Club, Dinosaur Provincial Park, and the town as a means of controlling the expected high amount of mosquitoes this spring.

before. "There are other chemicals out there, but they could be a much more onerous thing to do."

The town's operations man-

ager Keith Russell said there is more standing water this year than average years, saying the valley can expect more mosquitoes as a result.

"We've detected some larvae already in the valley, so we're in the midst of applying our aerial application," said Russell. "We still have an adequate supply which will carry us through this year, depending on how bad they are, and hopefully carry us

Pictured from left are Linda Digby of the Atlas, Mike Dooley of the Tyrrell, golf course manager Scott Westman and superintendent Rob Holm.

inSide photo by Kyle Smylie

into next year."

Russell said the other alternatives are not as effective, and in some cases are more expensive.

"(Bats) are part of the control, but a very small part of it," said Russell. "It's another option, and as long as there are some options we'd be more than willing to pursue it."

The houses were donated by Canadian Bathouses Inc., based in Ontario.