

Conservationist goes out to bat for tiny species

By JANE HAMMOND, *The West Australian* May 27, 2010

Perth has its very own Batman but, unlike the cartoon superhero, Joe Tonga's efforts are focused on saving the city's microbats and fighting the scourge of the mosquito.

The metropolitan area is home to a little-known population of native microbats, tiny insectivorous flying mammals that can eat up to 1000 mosquitoes each a night, the equivalent of half their body weight. The bats play a vital role in the ecology of the Swan Coastal Plain.

They also help control mosquito numbers but their habitat is disappearing, threatening their long-term survival.

Mr Tonga, a builder by trade, has turned his attention to constructing letterboxed-sized bat homes in an effort to encourage the tiny creatures to breed and thrive. His efforts have nurtured scores of bat colonies and helped provide havens for the mammals.

He has helped install about 500 boxes, each capable of holding up to 150 wild microbats.

The environmentalists work has attracted the interest of a number of Perth councils, who have employed him to host community bat-box building workshops. The next workshops will be at Perth Zoo in July and September.

The chances of having a bat in your backyard increase if you live within 10km of water and have native plants.

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