

# DIAGNOSTIC & TREATMENT UPDATE FOR THE REHABILITATION OF INSECTIVOROUS BATS

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## DENTAL DISORDERS

Dental disorders have been observed in both wild and captive bats. **It is extremely important for caretakers to check the teeth and gums of bats on a regular basis.** In captivity, many dental problems can be avoided by using the tarter control diet for insectivorous bats developed by Bat World Sanctuary (see Tarter Control Diet page in Section II ).



The bat in this photo was maintained in a science display at an educational facility. By the time it arrived at Bat World Sanctuary, it required a full extraction of both upper and lower teeth.



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B



C

Forceps should be at least 6 inches in length to provide the leverage necessary to extract small bat teeth.

Plaque can accumulate on the teeth and hardened to tarter. Tarter turns black as it becomes stained by mealworms. Plaque and tarter build up can result in severe dental problems including gingivitis, loose teeth, and abscessed teeth (see photo A). Gum infections are first visible as a thin red line along the gum line. Excessive salivation, lethargy, anorexia, a watering or protruding eye, a swollen area on the head, behind the ear, on the jaw, or near the eye, and/or a cabbage-like odor, are signs of an abscess. An abscess can rupture through the skin and the puss harden. Puss that hardens may resemble grains of rice within the fur (see photo B).

Debris on the toes can also indicate dental problems. Bats comb their toe claws through their fur, then remove the debris from their toes with their teeth. A bat with a sore mouth may not keep its toes clean. Left untreated, infections associated with dental disorders can be deadly. Antibiotic treatment is critical.

For dental infections, administer an initial injection of Baytril®. (Old bats should not be given the initial Baytril® injection.) Administer the Baytril®/Clavamox® mixture orally thereafter. Administer Buprenex or Metacam® for pain. Never discontinue antibiotics prematurely.

Rinse the mouth of bats with signs of gum infection with a drop of Nolvadent® (0.1% Chlorhexadine acetate) after each feeding. As an alternative, apply a thin layer of Manuka honey to affected areas with a cotton swab.

Begin antibiotic treatment at least 24 hours prior to tooth extraction. Loose or abscessed teeth should be extracted by a veterinarian. (See *Captive Care and Medical Reference for the Rehabilitation of Insectivorous Bats.*) In an emergency, Cetacaine® Gel can be used to deaden the gums prior to extraction. Open the mouth and grasp the affected tooth **close to the gum line** with curved forceps (see photo C). Extract the tooth by gently rocking it back and forth while pulling. It is very important to note that canine teeth can be easily broken if extraction is attempted before they become loose in the socket.

Manuka Honey applied to inflamed gums and extraction sites can ease pain and promote healing. Captive bats with chronic tartar build-up should receive weekly applications of OraVet Plaque Prevention Gel. Wild bats with dental abscesses that have extended into the chest or head should be humanely euthanized.