ENVS 3600 - Service Learning though Bat Boxes | Community Engaged Learning

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ENVS Students work on their Bat Boxes

Dr. Robert Schmidt is no stranger to service-learning. Throughout his tenure at USU he has consistently provided meaningful hands on projects for his students in a range of course from Environmental Advocacy and Action to Professional Orientation ENVS. One class that is especially fun to blend course materials with community projects is his Living with Wildlife, ENVS 3600 course. While learning about how human interaction can alter wildlife behavior and the issues surrounding environmental habitats, students also had a chance to put those conservation practices in use building bat boxes! Nationwide, bat populations are being devastated by White Nose Syndrome, a fungal disease accidentally imported to the US in 2012 (https://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/). WNS is slowly marching across the US, and will probably reach Utah in a few years. According to Bat Conservation International, building bat houses is a great way to get involved in bat conservation. ‘With this project, the construction of 18 four-chamber bat nursery boxes, students learned about bat conservation, ecological services provided to us by bats, and what communities can do to promote bats,’ Professor Robert Schmidt said, ‘At the same time, these students learned to work together on a complex group project, following specific guidelines, and with a variety of new tools.’

Students learned why bat boxes might be needed, how much they cost and what supplies are needed to build these small habitats, then worked with the USU Tech Club to cut the wood and assemble the bat boxes. ‘This project and the class as a whole has really opened my eyes to how many opportunities there really are to participate in conservation efforts,’ one student reflected on the experience. ‘It doesn’t just have to be huge activities or projects, it can be something as simple as planting local flora in your yard. Small things can make a big difference and I like being able to say I helped. I don’t want to be a bystander when it comes to conservation.’

The bat boxes will be installed in the spring in partnership with the USU Wildlife Society. The boxes will ensure that bats in Cache County will have somewhere safe to sleep and their presence can continue to help the community and ecosystem. While the bats might be happy to have a place to stay, students taking the class also were able to see the long-term impact of their work. ‘While most assignments are done by the student, graded, and then forgotten about, the bat box service project assignment is much more. It not only made me appreciate woodworking, strengthen my ability to work in a group, and learn about bat behavior, it will also be benefiting the bats I learned about,’ another student stated. ‘It should be mandatory for more classes to have service learning projects so that the University can increase its positive presence in the community. I believe this would create a good relationship between the academics at the University and the community as a whole.’