



Bats of British Columbia

A Lynn Canyon Ecology Centre Information Sheet

Why are bats important?

Bats have lived on Earth for more than 50 million years. They are the only flying mammal species. Mammals have fur, give birth to live young, drink milk from their mother, and are warm-blooded. Bats live all across the world and provide pest control, plant pollination, and seed dispersal, which makes bats essential to the health of our ecosystems.

Two groups of bats

Bats are in the order Chiroptera and are separated into two groups: megabats (megachiroptera) and microbats (microchiroptera). Microbats, which are generally smaller, use echolocation to navigate and hunt for insects. They make up 80% of the bats worldwide. Megabats, also known as fruit bats or flying foxes, usually have larger bodies with big eyes.

Bats in BC

BC has the greatest diversity of bats in Canada. There are 15 species of microbats in BC, though not all of them occur in the same parts of the Province. Almost half of our BC bats are listed as vulnerable or threatened. The Little Brown Bat is the most common. You have probably seen them dipping and diving for insects. The smallest bat in BC is the Western Small-footed Myotis with an 8 cm long body and 22 cm long wings. They weigh about the same as a loonie. The biggest bat is the Hoary Bat with a 14 cm long body and 40 cm long wings. They weigh as much as a dinner fork.

Bats of the Lower Mainland

- Townsend's Big-eared Bat*
- Hoary Bat
- Silver-haired Bat
- Big Brown Bat
- Yuma Myotis
- California Myotis
- Long-legged Myotis
- Little Brown Myotis^
- Long-eared Myotis

*species of concern, ^endangered

Habitat

BC bats like dry grasslands, forests, and urban areas and stay away from high elevation, snow, and cold alpine areas. They roost in cliffs, wildlife trees, caves, mines, bridges, rock piles, roofs, attics, and in bat boxes. Some even roost at the ends of tree branches. Bats live near their foraging and drinking sites, like ponds, wetlands, and rivers. They hibernate in caves, deeper rock crevices, and abandoned mines.

Bat Lifecycle

Winter:

Bats either migrate or hibernate during the winter months. Hibernating bats find a safe place to roost and lower their body temperature and heartbeat. It is very important to leave bats alone in the winter, as waking up from hibernation requires a lot of energy.

Spring:

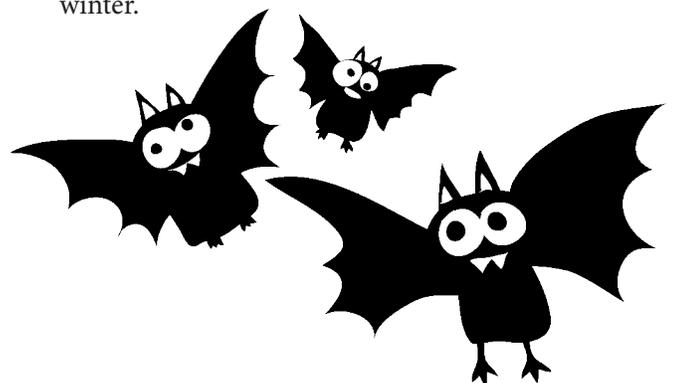
Bats wake up from hibernation or return from migration and first need to find enough food to give them energy. Then they look for a roost. Female bats give birth to their young in late spring.

Summer:

Each night, bats leave their roosts and hunt for insects. Female bats leave their pups in the maternity roosts with one adult bat who is the babysitter. Bat pups learn how to fly at 3 weeks.

Fall:

Bat pups are now good fliers and leave their mothers to fend for themselves. Fall is a time to fatten up before winter. Mating takes place in the fall and winter.



Chiroptera is from the Greek

CHEIR -

"hand"

and

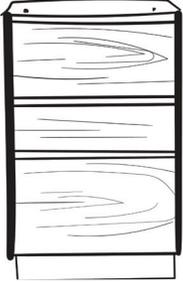
PTERON -

"wing."

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Diet

Microbats are great to have around because one bat can eat more than 1000 mosquitoes in one hour! They also save forests and crops from pests. In the US, bats are worth \$3.7 billion each year for their pest control. Bats can eat more than their own weight in insects per night. That's the equivalent of a 150 lb person eating 600 "quarter-pounder" burgers in one day!

Bats in trouble

Bats give birth to one pup per year on average, and only half of those survive their first winter. This means that bats are especially vulnerable to entrapment, extermination, habitat loss, predation to cats, and collisions with wind turbines and cars. Additionally, white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease introduced to eastern North America, has been wiping out bat populations across the continent.

Bat Conservation

The BC Bat Action Team (BC BAT) is formed of professional biologists, researchers, educators, students, naturalists and others who are interested in bat conservation in BC. Their 3 goals are to:

1. Address primary threats to bats
2. Understand BC bats
3. Support bat conservation

How can you help?

Be a bat ambassador: correct misconceptions and promote awareness.

Create habitat for bats: keep dead trees and snags, plant a tree or build a pond. Make sure your yard is safe for bats and never use harmful chemicals.

Build a bat box: use a design adapted for BC bats.

Report your bat sightings.

Volunteer with the BC annual bat count. Collect valuable data on local bat populations by volunteering four evenings a year.

For more information visit www.bcbats.ca

Bat Myths

- "Blind as a bat" - bats aren't blind, they have to see in the dark!
- "Bats are rodents" - nope, they are mammals.
- "Bats drink blood" - only 3 species, out of the 1,400+ species of bats drink blood. Vampire bats are found in Central and South America.

