



The Famous Bats of Carlsbad Cavern

General Information

Sixteen living species of bats have been found in Carlsbad Caverns National Park. The park's primary wildlife attraction is the large maternity colony of Mexican free-tailed bats that roost in the Bat Cave.

Research indicates that Mexican free-tailed bats have roosted in Carlsbad Cavern for over 5,000 years. During the past century their numbers have declined to less than 500,000.

Many visitors confuse the swallows at the cave entrance with bats. Cave swallows were found nesting in several caves in the park in the 1950s. In 1966 two pairs of cave swallows made their

nest in Carlsbad Cavern. Since then, the population has gradually increased to more than 2,000 birds. They are responsible for the strong odor you will notice on the Natural Entrance Route during spring and summer.

Viewing the bats

Thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats, whirling counter-clockwise, spilling forth from the cave entrance, silhouetted against a colorful desert sky...this is the bat flight experience at Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

From early May through late October, Mexican free-tailed bats leave the cave almost every evening to feed on night-flying insects in the nearby Pecos and Black River valleys.

Prior to the flight, an interpretive talk is given at the cave entrance by a park ranger. The program time varies; call (505)785-2232 extension 0 or check at the visitor center information desk for the exact program time. Please be

aware that bats are wild animals, they come out if and when they are ready. There are no guarantees.

The bat flight talks are normally scheduled from mid-May through the end of September. The program is free.

The thickest bat flights usually occur in August and September. At this time the baby bats, which were born in early summer, join the flight along with migrating bats from points farther north. By late October or early November most of the bats have migrated to Mexico for the winter.

Safety

The Bat Flight Amphitheater is wheelchair accessible. Ask a ranger for help with the accessible restroom.

Pets are not permitted at the Bat Flight program.

For the safety of the bats, **flash photography and flash cameras are prohibited** at the cave entrance while the bats are flying. Purchase postcards and posters in THE CAVERN BOOKSTORE instead.

According to Bat Conservation International (BCI): *Since 1980, in the United*

States there have been 16 human cases of rabies attributed to bats. While all human mortality is significant, these figures should be viewed in context of other national mortality statistics. For example, in 1988 alone, 16 people were killed by their pet dogs, 34 people died from bee stings, and 82 people were killed by lightning. All these factors are much more threatening than exposure to rabies from bats...

However, we recommend that you never touch bats in any way. Notify a ranger if you see a bat on the ground.

How many bats are there?

Sixteen living species of bats have been found in Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and one extinct species.

Big Free-tailed Bat
(*Nyctinomops macrotis*)
Constantine's Free-tailed Bat
(*Tadarida constantinei*)—**extinct**
Mexican Free-tailed Bat
(*Tadarida brasiliensis mexicana*)
Pocketed Free-tailed Bat
(*Nyctinomops femorosacca*)
Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*)
California Myotis
(*Myotis californicus*)
Cave Myotis (*Myotis velifer*)
Fringed Myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*)
Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*)
Long-legged Myotis (*Myotis volans*)
Pallid Bat (*Antrozous pallidus*)
Red Bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*)
Silver-haired Bat
(*Lasionycteris noctivagans*)
Townsend's Big-eared Bat
(*Corynorhinus townsendii*)
Western Pipistrelle
(*Pipistrellus hesperus*)
Western Small-footed Myotis
(*Myotis ciliolabrum*)
Yuma Myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*)

The colony of Mexican free-tailed bats at Carlsbad Cavern declined from an estimated 8.7 million in 1936 to approximately 200,000 in 1973. Similar

declines have been noted throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico. The pesticide DDT is thought to be the primary cause.

Photo monitoring

In 1996 infrared photographs were taken of the ceiling in Bat Cave. The spring prebirth population of Mexican free-tails was estimated to be about 193,000 bats. The population nearly doubled to an estimated 352,000 bats by fall when the young were flying.

The population of the bat colony fluctuates greatly from season to season. It also changes daily, perhaps in response to conditions of drought or rain, food availability, or the life cycle of the bats. Research on the diet and activity level of the bats will help biologists to understand the causes of population change.

Sound recordings

Experiments with recording the sounds made by bats are ongoing. Eventually we hope to correlate this sound "signature" with the population estimate from the photo monitoring method. Sound recordings taken throughout the night have the additional benefit of helping us to understand bat behavior during various seasons, weather patterns, or disturbances.

Fringed myotis bats

Nearly 1,000 feet below the surface, and over a mile from any known opening, lives a colony of about 100 fringed myotis bats. This maternal colony roosts just above Lake of the Clouds, the lowest and warmest point in Carlsbad Cavern.

Researchers found that most fringed myotis bats exit the main cave entrance with the Mexican free-tailed bats; a few depart through the smaller second natural entrance. This opening, located 200 yards east of the main cave entrance, is surrounded by a fence. It was also found that lights left on in the cave delayed the emergence of the fringed myotis bats. Rangers now turn

out all lights in the cave at the end of each day.

This research was funded with a grant from the Adopt-A-Bat program, a non-profit fund that supports bat conservation, education, and research.

You can help bats

You can help protect bats by adopting a bat at the visitor center in THE CAVERN BOOKSTORE. All funds from the Adopt-A-Bat program are used to educate people about bats and to support bat research programs. (Sorry, you can't take your bat home with you.)

Loss of habitat is a serious problem for bats. You can help by putting a bat house in your yard. Pick up plans to build your own bat house at the visitor center information desk.

Learn the truth about bats and help spread the word to others that bats are

beneficial. You can learn more about bats by contacting BCI:

Bat Conservation International
P.O. Box 162603
Austin, Texas 78716
(512) 327-9721
www.batcon.org

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