

BATS IN THE CADDO LAKE AREA



RAFINESQUE'S BIG-EARED BAT

Bats are a vital part of the ecosystems in which they live and a common site in the Caddo Lake area, where eleven species have been documented. All of these are insectivorous (eat insects). Insect-eating bats eat literally tons of insects every night, many considered detrimental to people or agricultural crops. They provide natural pest control for insects such as moths, beetles, flies and mosquitoes. In fact, a small bat can eat up to 2,000 mosquito-sized insects in one night. Bats merit our protection for this and many other reasons, yet they rank among the least studied forms of wildlife. Almost half of the bat species in the U.S. are in serious decline.

BAT HABITS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Bats, like other mammals, are live-born, have fur, and feed young on milk. They are unique among mammals in that they're born feet-first and can fly. Bats' wings consist of a double membrane thinly stretched across enlarged bones and greatly elongated fingers. Unlike birds, which flap their wings up and down, bats "swim" through the air.

Bats have small eyes and were once thought to have poor vision (thus the expression "blind as a bat"). They are nocturnal creatures that use an array of vocal communication signals, including echolocation (the use of sound or sonar), to help them perceive in detail their prey and environment in the dark.

In the Caddo Lake area, you may see bats in forest openings, along open water in the dwindling light of sunset, and around streetlights foraging for insects. They can be noticed particularly at streetlights by their highly focused erratic and acrobatic flight as they locate and capture insects attracted to those lights.



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These medium-sized bats are easily distinguished by their immense ears, which are more than an inch in length. They are dark brown above and grayish white below. Favored roosting sites include partially lighted, unoccupied buildings and other structures such as wells and cisterns, but they can also form nursery colonies in large hollow trees. Big-eared bats emerge from their roosts after dark to feed on small, nocturnal insects, such as moths and then return before dawn. East Texas is the westernmost portion of their migratory range which extends east to southern Virginia. These bats can be seen around Caddo Lake year-round though their visits are rare and they hibernate in the winter months. They are on both state and federal endangered species lists.

SEMINOLE BATS

The favorite roost of this deep mahogany-colored bat is in clumps of Spanish moss, however they also roost beneath loose bark of dead trees and in clumps of foliage. Emerging early in the evening from daytime roosts, these bats usually feed at treetop level, about 7-15 meters above the ground. They are active in all seasons, including warm evenings in winter, and feed on bugs, flies, and beetles, which are captured on the wing. Seminole bats appear to be nonmigratory, entering a state of suspended physical activity during extreme winter weather, but emerging to feed on the warmest evenings.



SEMINOLE BAT



EVENING BAT

EVENING BATS

Evening bats generally begin foraging for food around sunset, first flying above the trees and gradually descending lower. They feed heavily on beetles, but also eat moths and other insects. With a plain nose and short, narrow, leathery wings, Evening bats are small to medium in size, and both dark and yellowish brown in color. They are true forest bats, occurring more commonly around streams in bottomlands and man-made ponds, and preferring trees for roost sites, though they will roost in buildings and attics. The Evening bat is likely around Caddo Lake all year and can be seen foraging around streetlights except during very cold periods.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP BATS

- Learn more about bats and their importance in our environment.
- Avoid disturbing or harming bats.
- Bat-proof your home to prevent entry.
- Offer them a bat house as an alternative home.
- Find information about bat houses and bats in general on the Bat Conservation International website at www.batcon.org