

Keep Texas Wild

Hanging Around With Bats

Sleep all day. Stay out all night.



Mexican long-tongued bat

NIGHT RIDERS!

What pops into your mind when you think of bats? Count Dracula and haunted houses? Long, pointed fangs and cold, beady eyes? While you would never want to pick up a bat and play with it, bats are helpful, gentle creatures and not as frightening as they look. There are 32 kinds of bats in Texas. The bats you are most likely to see eat lots of insects. Other bats pollinate flowers and help spread the seeds of plants. The Chinese view bats as symbols of good luck!

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roosting under a bridge

PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC

Mexican free-tailed:
our state bat

PHOTO © RICK & NORA BOWERS/KAC

pallid bats
hanging together

PHOTO © GREG LASLEY/KAC PRODUCTIONS

emerging from
a cave

PHOTO © KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS

» WHERE DO BATS LIVE?

Bats spend their days sleeping in dark places like caves, holes in trees and rocks, the attics and ceilings of barns and buildings, under bridges and in manmade bat houses. They hang upside down because their feet are very strong for hanging, but not for standing. A bat has special toes that lock, so even when the bat is asleep upside-down, it will not fall.

» ANATOMY OF A BAT

Third finger

Second finger

Thumb

Fourth finger

Calcar

Tail membrane

Fifth finger

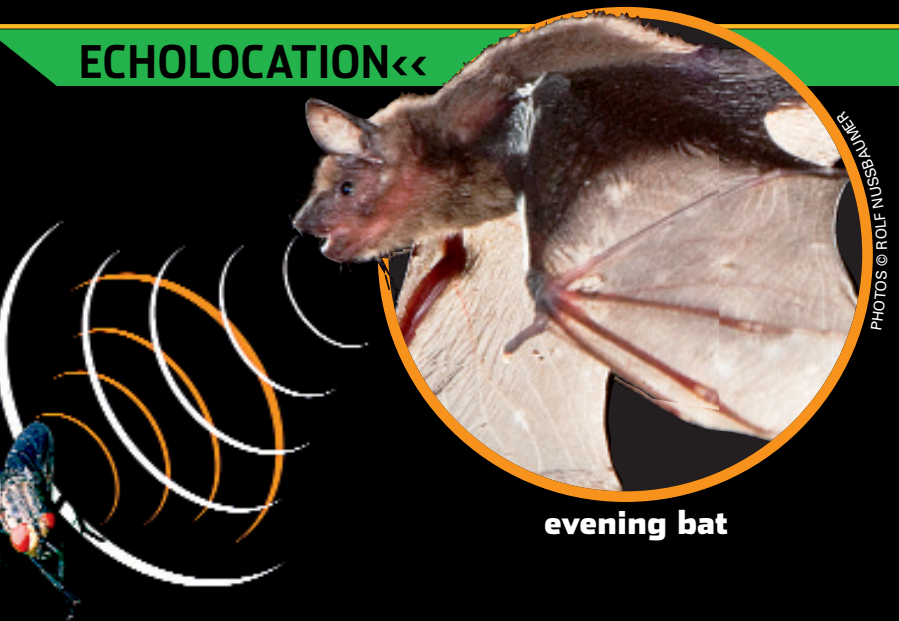
Forearm

Ear

Fingers and a thumb! Bat wings are like hands with long fingers. A thin skin connects them for flight.

Agave blossom

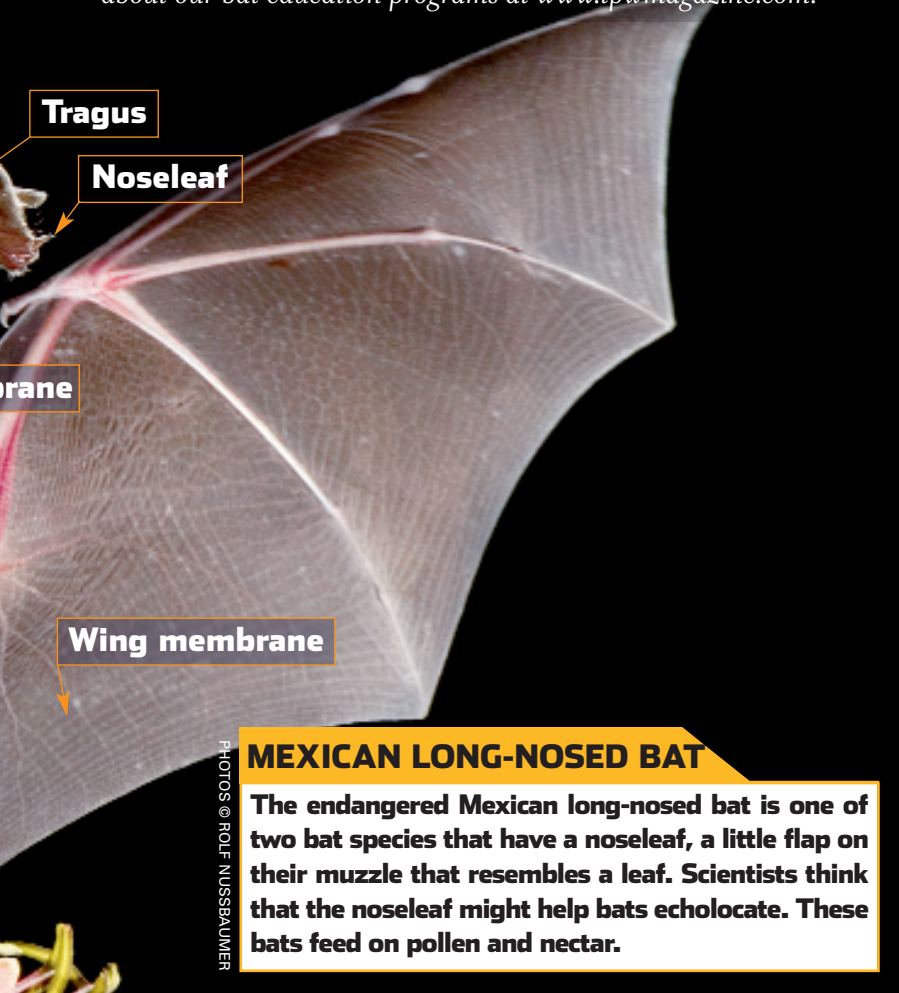
ECHOLOCATION<<



evening bat

Bats can make sounds (a human can't hear the sound) that strike targets and bounce back. The way the sound bounces back tells them what the target is and where it is. The collection of echoes makes a mental picture. This echolocation works so well that bats can fly and find food in total darkness and not hit anything.

Would you like a bat to visit your school? Teachers, find out more about our bat education programs at www.tpwmagazine.com.



MEXICAN LONG-NOSED BAT

The endangered Mexican long-nosed bat is one of two bat species that have a noseleaf, a little flap on their muzzle that resembles a leaf. Scientists think that the noseleaf might help bats echolocate. These bats feed on pollen and nectar.

PHOTOS © ROLF NUSBAUMER

Bat Myths

1. ALL BATS HAVE RABIES.

Any mammal can have rabies, including bats. But there is only one human death each year in the United States from rabid bats (on average). More people die from dog bites than bat bites.

2. BATS ARE DIRTY.

Bats groom themselves regularly (like a cat) and are actually very clean.

3. BATS ARE MICE WITH WINGS. Although bats and mice are both mammals, bats are more like you than like mice. For example, mice have many babies, but humans and bats usually have only one.



4. BATS ARE BLIND. A bat can see as well as you can.

5. BATS WILL SUCK YOUR BLOOD. Only three types of "vampire" bats exist, and they live in Central America. Only once has one been found in Texas, and that was 40 years ago.



ILLUSTRATIONS © FIAN ARROYO

6. BATS GET TANGLED IN YOUR HAIR.

Bat echolocation is precise enough to catch a tiny bug in the air. A bat can easily avoid your head.

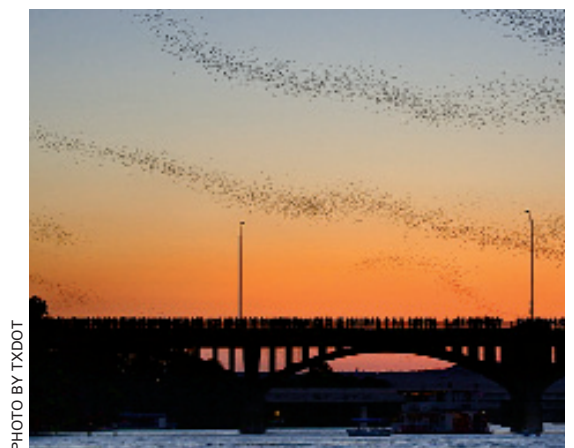


PHOTO BY TYDOD

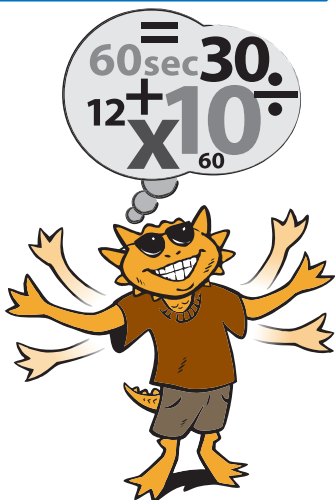
Some bats live alone or in small groups; others live in large groups called colonies. The largest colony in any city lives under a bridge in Austin. People gather at sunset during the summer to watch the 1.5 million bats fly out. To find other places to see bats, go to www.tpwmagazine.com.



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD MATH



1. Bats can't glide so they must constantly flap their wings to fly. Mexican free-tailed bats can flap their wings 10 times per second. How many times per minute is that? How many times can you flap your arms in a minute?

2. Some bats eat half their weight in insects every night! If you were a bat, how many pounds of food would you eat in a day?

3. If a bat can pollinate flowers on 12 different agave plants in one night, how many agaves will he pollinate in 30 nights?

>> WILD WORDS

BAT WORD SEARCH:

bat
bridge
cave
echolocate
freetail
hibernate
insect
mammal
nectar
noseleaf
pollen
roost
species
wing

E	P	O	T	G	W	M	G	Z	V
F	C	P	S	I	I	K	H	D	W
A	L	H	O	J	N	Q	I	K	F
E	A	N	O	L	G	S	B	R	N
L	M	E	R	L	L	P	E	O	U
E	M	C	C	R	O	E	R	C	H
S	A	T	T	A	T	C	N	J	T
O	M	A	Q	A	V	I	A	W	N
N	B	R	I	D	G	E	T	T	Y
E	T	L	Q	R	X	S	E	S	E

>> WILD SCIENCE

Can You Echolocate?

Go into an empty room (like a gym) or hallway. Holding two jingle bells (or balls), close your eyes and spin in a circle a few times. Keeping your eyes closed, stop and roll your bell in front of you. Listen to how long it takes to hit the wall. Turn to the right and roll the other one. Which wall is closer? How do you know? You just used echolocation!



>> KEEPING IT WILD



Go outside and find three places where bats might roost. You could even make an origami bat (directions at www.tpwmagazine.com) and try to find good places for it to hide outside. What is good about those habitats? What is bad about them? Some bats have become endangered because humans have moved closer to their natural homes, like caves. What can we do to provide them with new places to live?

NEXT MONTH: Native Americans: Living Off the Land



TEACHER RESOURCE

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