

Bats: habitat basics

Head and shoulders
Photo of DC or
Soil Conservationist
here

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Bats can't seem to catch a break. Just as soon as more people find out how helpful they are, another vampire movie comes out and terrifies a whole new audience. The truth is, only three of more than 900 species of bats feed on the blood of other animals. Many others feed on crop pests. Bats are important worldwide for their role in plant pollination, insect control, and dispersal of seeds. They are especially helpful in controlling crop pests; some bats eat 600 mosquito-sized insects in an hour.

But 40 percent of American bat species are in severe decline because of habitat loss. Reasons include loss of roosting habitat because of cave and mine closings, intentional habitat destruction, development and deforestation, and loss of trees, snags and hedgerows from farmlands. Here are the basic bat habitat needs.

Food preferences. Insect-eating bats feed primarily on night-flying insects such as moths, beetles, fruit flies, mosquitoes, and mayflies. They can consume half their body weight each night in insects-- some species eat grasshoppers and cicadas.

Fruit-eating bats eat fruit, pollen or nectar from plants and flowers as they pollinate such plants as bananas, mangoes, dates, figs, peaches, cashews and avocados.

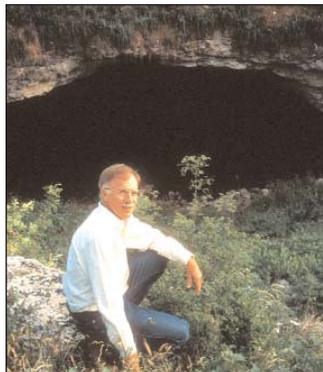
Roosting cover. Being nocturnal, bats roost during the day in tree branches and leaves, under tree bark, in caves and mines, under bridges, in cliff crevices and natural tree cavities, and in attics and roofs of barns. Roosts may be for nursery colonies of females and their young; lower temperature bachelor roosts; and migratory stopover roosts.

Foraging needs. Most common foraging habitat is woodlot canopies and understory, over streams and other open water, open fields and croplands, over deserts, and in lighted residential areas with large insect populations. Bats skim water from the surface to drink while in flight.

Hibernation. Caves and abandoned mines are the largest hibernating habitat. That's why totally sealed mine closings can hurt bat populations. Some bats hibernate in tree cavities, tree bark crevices, and buildings.

Habitat interspersion. All the habitat components-- roosting, food, water, foraging and hibernation habitat, are needed in relative proximity to each other.

For more information, stop at our office at (Number) (Street) in (city) , or visit the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov Or, visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov



It takes hours each night for millions of bats to fly out of Bracken Cave near San Antonio in their quest for night-flying insect food.

Wildlife Ways Did you know....



More than 900 species of bats exist worldwide, accounting for about one quarter of all mammal species.