DIVERSITY

Bats are mammals with such unique characteristics that they have been placed in a group of their own: the order Chiroptera.

This pallid bat has just caught a katydid. It also catches grasshoppers, crickets, and even scorpions right off the ground. Bats are very helpful to us because many, like this bat, help to control countless insects. Pallid bats are very inquisitive and are commonly found in buildings throughout the western United States and Canada.

The spotted bat is certainly one of the world's most unusual mammals. It can roll up its long pink ears during sleep.

Hoary bats, with their long, silky fur, are among the most beautifully colored bats in North America.

Long-tongued bats have narrow heads, specially adapted for eating nectar from flowers.

Ghost-faced bats, with eyes that seem to be in their ears, have very unusual faces indeed!

The Greater Bonneted Bat is the largest North American bat with a wingspan of nearly two feet. It also has unusual facial features.

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Bats live in diverse habitats, including inside caves and mines, in the foliage of trees, under tree bark, in the eaves and attics of buildings and in rock cracks and crevices.

America’s largest bat colonies live in caves. Bracken Cave in central Texas is the summer home of 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats. The bats that live here catch a 500,000 pounds of insects each night over surrounding towns and farmland. They are the most important natural controllers of insect pests that fly at night.

Thousands of square feet of cave walls are covered by literally 240 tons of roosting bats, up to 500 per square foot. Bats gather here to rear their young in what is known as a nursery colony.

A mother bat gives birth to just one pup a year and quickly learns to recognize its voice and scent. The baby’s survival depends on her finding it in the midst of hundreds of other pups and nursing it several times a day.

Some bats never use caves. Hoary bats live in trees and are found from southern South America to northern Canada. In the fall they migrate south to milder climates where some hibernate in tree cavities such as woodpecker holes.

Some bats live in old wooden barns and houses, like these pallid bats. Many such structures are now being rebuilt with metal or other bat-proof materials that is limiting their homes.

Amazingly, a mother bat remembers her own pup’s exact location and voice even though it is packed tightly among hundreds of others. Babies grow rapidly, learning to fly and navigate in about four to five weeks.
Bats are not blind. Some bats use sound to help them navigate, communicate and find prey.

While some bats eat fruit and/or nectar, most bats use echolocation to navigate and catch insects. Most bats hunt flying prey, navigating with pulses of sound emitted through their noses or mouths.

Bats are so effective in the use of echolocation that they can catch up to 600 insects in one hour. Sensitive ears hear the echoes reflected from even tiny insects. They also can see and certainly avoid blundering into each other in traffic jams where several potential collisions must be avoided every second.

This Southwestern desert community is dependent upon bats to pollinate plants. The agave is so dependent on long-nosed bats that if its flowers aren't visited by bats, its seed production is greatly decreased. Without large numbers of long-nosed bats, cacti could decline, endangering numerous other plants and animals that depend on them for their survival.

This cactus flower has a shape and odor that attracts bats. It also opens at night when the bat is active.

This cactus flower will be pollinated from the pollen that the bat got on its fur when it ate nectar from another flower.

Both the bat and plant benefit: In exchange for pollination service to the cactus, bats are rewarded with a meal of nectar.

Here you can see how the bat enters the flower and gets pollen on its fur. It will carry this pollen on to the next flower when it leaves this one.

Bats are vital to many ecosystems.
It is our responsibility to protect our bats.

Bats account one fourth of all mammal species, but their numbers are declining at alarming rates. In the United States, seven species are now endangered. We need to do our part in protecting bats.