

Evening Bat

(*Nycticeius humeralis*)

Evening Bats are small brown flying mammals. They are 1.9 - 2.6 inches long with about 10-inch wing spans. Adults weigh 0.2 - 0.4 ounces, about as much as one or two U.S. quarters. Females are slightly larger than males. Evening Bats have bicolored brown fur which is dark brown at the base and lighter shades to dull grayish brown at the tips. Their ears, muzzle, and wings are leathery brown/black and their tail is similarly colored with fur at the base of the upper side. They have 2 rather than 4 upper incisors.

The Evening Bat can be found throughout much of eastern North America. Its range covers more than a million square miles, extending from central Pennsylvania and the Great Lakes south to Florida and northern Mexico and west as far as parts of Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Its range has been expanding; the Evening Bat has been recently found in Wisconsin and Minnesota. It is much more prevalent in the southern parts of its range. Bats cannot survive freezing temperatures and need temperatures above 45 degrees to be active. Evening Bats migrate south from the northern parts of their range in autumn. Although the Evening Bat population is considered "stable," all bats in Florida are protected year-round. Furthermore, during the maternity season, from April 15 to August 15, a special permit is required to relocate bats, even if their roost is located in your house!



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Evening Bats roost individually or in fairly small groups of 100 or less. They do not hibernate and very rarely roost in a cave. Thus they are not at risk for White Nose Syndrome which has killed millions of cave hibernating bats since 2006. Evening Bats are considered forest-dwelling bats because they prefer to roost in tree cavities, beneath tree bark, under palm fronds, in Spanish Moss, in concrete bridges, beneath caps on top of utility poles, in folded patio umbrellas, and in buildings, houses, and bat houses. In Florida they're the second most common bat to inhabit bat houses. To help protect the bats from owls, hawks, and snakes, their main predators, bat houses should be placed on a pole ten or more feet off the ground rather than in a tree and should not have a horizontal landing post. The house should face the southeast or southwest with four or more hours of direct sunlight. It should have an unobstructed entrance and be away from outdoor lighting, overhead wires, close vegetation, and busy highways. For a better chance of attracting bats, it should be in place by late winter.



Evening Bat by James Kiser Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife



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Evening Bats play an important role in regulating the insect population. They emerge from their roost at dusk to forage along forest edges, clearings, and over waterways for beetles, mosquitoes, moths, flies, plant hoppers, flying termites, flying ants, and other agricultural pests. They forage high in the evening and lower as the night progresses, using echolocation to find their prey. Bat Conservation International states that insect-consuming bats save farmers twenty-three billion dollars annually in pesticide use. Although some bats feed on fruit and nectar, all 13 resident Florida species are insectivores. Evening Bats return to the same roost every morning and even remember that roost and return to it after being gone for many months.

Many bats live 10 to 20 years and some species can live as long as 30 years. I have found several estimates of the Florida Evening Bat's life span; some say 2 to 5 years, some 4 to 6 years and others estimate that they live about 10 years. The female Evening Bat is ready to reproduce when she is about 10 months old. Females form maternity roosts. Males and females stay segregated except for mating which takes place in the fall.

Pregnancy, however, doesn't begin until early spring and lasts 6 to 9 weeks. In Florida mothers usually give birth to two pups from late April to early June.

The pups are born pink and hairless with their eyes closed but grow quickly and are capable of flight by about 20 days. Mothers, however, nurse their pups for 6 to 9 weeks, returning several times from foraging during the night to nurse. Male pups leave the maternity roost as soon as they are weaned but female pups forage with their mother and return to the same maternity roost when they are ready to reproduce. Evening Bats are polygamous. Bats can transmit rabies and their guano (droppings) can be contaminated with the fungus that causes histoplasmosis.

Consequently, if you become directly exposed to a bat or have slept in a room with a bat in it you should be evaluated for the rabies vaccine. The rabies vaccination is a six-shot series, given over 4-6 weeks. You should also wear a mask and gloves if you are around bat droppings.

Mary Jo Davis is the Chair of the Birds, Butterflies, Bats and Bees Committee.