



ALASKA BAT MONITORING PROGRAM

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Alaska Bat Monitoring Program is a volunteer-based effort designed to assess the current status of bats in Alaska. The goal is to learn where bats are found in the state and to assess their baseline populations. We are also interested in habitat variables associated with their presence. Because our knowledge of bats is very limited in Alaska, we are looking for observations to be reported from any area where bats are observed in our state.

In an effort to increase public awareness of our bats, we are continuing a coordinated education effort to teach Alaskans about these amazing flying mammals. We hope that with increased awareness, more Alaskans will report their bat observations, which will help scientists working to document the distribution and abundance of bats in Alaska. It also encourages individuals, groups and schools to get outside and learn more about our wild Alaska. Please contact us if you are interested in learning more about scheduling a presentation for your school, class, or civic organization,

Reasons for the Program

Bat species are on the decline globally due to human-related factors which include habitat destruction, maternal roost and hibernacula disturbances, direct killing by humans and alteration of their prey base (insects) by pesticide use in some areas, wind generators, and possibly the spread of White Nose Syndrome. Bats are often misunderstood by humans, who fear them or view them as pests. Scientists also face difficulties in conserving bats and protecting their critical needs, as they are one of the least studied mammals in the world. Bats also have a slow reproduction rate, making them more vulnerable to rapid declines.

There are five bat species known to roost in Alaska. Of these five species, the Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*) is by far the most common, and is the only bat known to be found north of Prince William Sound. The other species (Silver-haired Bat, Long-legged Myotis, Keen's Myotis, and California Myotis) have only been documented in Southeast Alaska.

There is very little known of their summer distribution, and even less known about where they go in the winter. The dispersed summer populations throughout Alaska may hibernate in Southeast Alaska during winter months, but this has not yet been confirmed. Bats fill a valuable ecological niche, consuming large numbers of insects daily. Their predation helps to keep insect populations under control. Through increased awareness of the value of bats in the wild and your reported bat sighting observations, we can slowly begin to understand and conserve bats in Alaska.

What we have learned

Since the start of the Alaska Bat Monitoring Program, Citizen Scientist observations have led to the expansion of the little brown bat's documented range. Until now, the range of the Little Brown Bat was estimated from only a few dozen museum specimens. The Alaska Bat Monitoring Program has resulted in hundreds of new bat locations, and has expanded their known range to include St. Michael, White Mountain, and the Simidi Islands. We have also been able to identify and confirm the first maternity roosts in Southcentral and interior Alaska, as well as the first observations of apparent migratory flocks.

What we have yet to learn

Our understanding of the actual distribution of bats in Alaska and the habitats they use remains limited. We also still don't know where bats in Southcentral and interior Alaska reside in the winter. Do they stay in place or migrate elsewhere? Thanks to our Citizen Scientists, we are now in the position of beginning to answer this question. Citizen Scientists have documented several summer roosts with at least 100 bats, and some of these volunteers believe that "their" bats overwinter in their cabins or houses. These observations (and possibly yours, too!) will form the basis for an upcoming research effort to establish whether any of these bats actually overwinter in place or if they migrate to points unknown. In the near future, we will be following several of these large roosts through the late summer, fall, and winter, checking for the continued presence of bats.

We need your help!

What can you do? Please submit your bat observations (we have a handy electronic data form!), and if you have a large roost of bats and are interested in participating in our wintering research question, please let us know. For more information about bats in Alaska and the Alaska Bat Monitoring Program, or for survey instructions and data forms, please see our website: www.akbats.net.

Please direct questions and comments to:

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Thank you for your participation in our project!!

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