

Bats of B.C.

They hang upside down to rest, they're awake when we're asleep in bed, they see with sound that we can't hear, and they fly with silky skin between their fingers. Bats really are the most incredible animals and British Columbia is lucky enough to have at least fifteen species.

Bats are the only true flying mammals. Scientists classify bats in the order *Chiroptera*, meaning "hand-wing". Bats are found around the world, in every habitat type (including cities) except the Arctic and Antarctic.

Ace fliers

Quick and agile, bats are all-round better fliers than birds.

Their bodies are small, but their wings are large and very mobile.

The wing is made of soft, thin skin which starts at the bat's neck, links the tips of all the fingers (except the thumb), then goes down to the bat's ankle, on to the tip of its tail then up the other side.

① Juvenile bat wing



We don't have fruit bats in B.C., but they do exist in Australia, Africa and Asia where they pollinate flowers and help spread plant seeds.

The importance of bats

B.C. bats are the most important predators of night-flying insects in the province. They eat about half their weight in insects every night! Just one **Little Brown Myotis** can catch and eat 600 insects in an hour! Most B.C. bats especially like the insects of marshes and lakes, such as mayflies, midges, caddisflies and mosquitoes. The **Pallid Bat** is adapted to desert living and eats crickets and scorpions off the ground.

Spring

As breeding female bats come out of hibernation, they gather together in nursery colonies to have their babies. They choose sun-warmed cracks in rocks, dead trees or - attics! Most bats have only one pup a year. Pups are nursed until they can fly. Meantime, they stay at the roost while their mothers hunt for food at night. If the mother flies to another roost she'll take the pup with her, clinging to her chest.

Summer - and the livin' is easy

During the summer, most bat species spend daylight hours hanging upside down in tree cavities, buildings, rock cracks, under the leaves at the tops of trees or inside peeling tree bark. At night, of course, they are out catching insects.

⑤ Long-eared Bat drinking



⑥ Yuma Myotis pup

⑦ Female with pup



⑧ Townsend's Big-eared Bat

Winter: one long sleep

In B.C., two species of bats migrate south, but the other 13 species hibernate throughout the cold season. Damp caves and rock crevices make the best places to hibernate. The bats go into a torpor (like a coma) and their heart rate drops to 5 beats per minute. Bats do not store food for the winter, so they must fatten up during the summer to avoid starving through their long winter sleep.

Sources:
 Bird Life, RSPB Wildlife Explorers
 Bats in British Columbia, B.C. Ministry of the Environment
 BC Nature magazine
 B.C. Community Bat Program

⑨ Roosting bat



② Bats flying at night



③ Spotted bat



④ Pallid bat

