

BATS

Bats are the only true flying mammal. They have wings made of thin skin membranes, which are stretched between the fingers and hind limbs.

Bats are found on all continents of the world except Antarctica. There are about 950 species. They are divided into two suborders; Megachiroptera and Microchiroptera.

MEGABATS (MEGACHIROPTERA)

Megabats are a small group comprised of fruit-bats, flying-foxes and other nectar and pollen-eating bats. They are found in various countries throughout the world. There are about 150 species in this group with only eight found in Australia.

Megabats have simple flight styles, uncomplicated ears, long snouts, two claws on the forelimbs and short or absent tails. They are strong fliers, capable of flying over 50 km a night in search of food or shelter.

They can weigh up to one kg with a wingspan of up to 1.6m. Their eyes are large and sight, as well as smell, appears to be the major means of flight navigation.

They are largely restricted to tropical forests where succulent fruit and nectar are found all year round. Fruit bats crush the soft fruit between their teeth swallowing the juice and spitting out the pulp. Blossom bats feed on pollen and nectar by means of a brush-tipped tongue.

They spend their days in camps that can hold hundreds of thousands of individuals. These camps usually consist of different species. When roosting, megabats hang by a hind-foot, wrap their wings firmly around their body and hold their head perpendicular to the chest.



Grey-headed flying fox



Black flying fox

MICROBATS (MICROCHIROPTERA)

Six families are represented in Australia including *Hipposideridae* (leaf-nosed-bats), *Megadermatidae* (ghost bats); *Emballonuridae* (sheath-tail bats); *Rhinolophidae* (horseshoe bats); *Molossidae* (freetail bats) and *Vespertilionidae* (ordinary bats).

All Australian microbats use ultrasonic echolocation for navigation and locating prey, which consists mostly of insects. Echolocation involves pulses of ultrasound being broadcast through the mouth and nostrils. These pulses are reflected from all solid objects around the bat and are returned to the ears and brain. This in turn creates a mental picture of the bat's surroundings.

Microbats have eyes, but they are small. They also have large, complex shaped ears; a short snout; forearms which have only one claw and noses that are often elaborately shaped. They are usually small, weighing up to 170 grams and have a wingspan of up to 30 cm (the only exception is the ghost bat, who can have a wingspan of 1m).

They can be solitary or live in groups and may roost in caves, crevices, tree holes, under bark or occasionally out in the open.

REPRODUCTION

Bats are placental mammals, with most species giving birth to a single young. The gestation period is between 50 and 240 days depending on the species.

The milk teeth, which are present at birth, along with their sharp claws, enable the young to cling to their mother. Females carry their young with them when searching for food, until they are old enough to be left behind in nurseries. Maternal dependence varies between species eg. three to ten weeks.

The most commonly seen bats in south-east Queensland are from the megabat sub-order- little red flying foxes, black flying foxes and the grey headed flying fox, now on the threatened species list as vulnerable.



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