

Where's Mom?

Free-tailed bats roost together in groups called colonies. Some colonies contain millions of bats. Bracken Cave in Texas is home to 20 million free-tailed bats. This is the largest bat colony in the world.

Mothers and their babies, called pups, live in special areas of the cave. While their mothers hunt for food, millions of squirming babies hang on the wall with their feet and thumbs. When the mothers return, do they feed the first hungry pup they come to? Scientists say no, each mother finds her own pup. She recognizes her pup by a unique sound it makes. When she gets close, mother and pup can recognize each other by smell.

On their long narrow wings the free-tailed bats can fly high and fast. With a good tailwind a free-tailed bat can reach a speed of 60 miles an hour. These bats are insect eaters, and they are a big help to farmers. Bats keep insect numbers down— insects that would eat valuable crops. In Central Texas bats can eat up to 1000 tons of insects in one night!

Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico is known for its large number of free-tailed bats. Visitors watch the bats leave their cave for a night of hunting. About dusk these bats come pouring out of the cave like a great plume of black smoke. They spread out in different directions and are soon out of sight.

For information on how bat mothers find their pups, go to:

<http://www.batcon.org/batsmag/v12n3-3.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/cave/batprog.htm>

Pauly the Adventurous Pallid Bat

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