

Canyon Bat

SCIENTIFIC NAME: The bat formerly known as the Western pipistrelle was recently reclassified under the newly described genus *Parastrellus*, from *para*, a Greek word meaning “beside” or “aside from,” and *stellus*, a Latinized form of *pipistrello*, the Italian word meaning “bat.” The species designation *hesperus* is from the Greek *hesperos*, meaning “evening star.” This bat’s common name is “canyon bat,” but until the new scientific name becomes more commonly used, it also may be referred to as a “pipistrelle.”

DESCRIPTION: The canyon bat has pale, straw-colored fur and a black face mask, ears, forearms, legs, feet and wings. It weighs 3–6 grams or the equivalent of a single Hershey’s Kiss, making it the smallest North American bat. The canyon bat has a 7- to 9-inch wingspan, about the width of a human hand.

Only the Western small-footed myotis (*Myotis ciliolabrum*) and the California myotis (*Myotis californicus*) are similar enough in appearance to be confused with the canyon bat. All three are small and have a keeled calcar (a spur of cartilage arising from the ankle). The canyon bat has a blunt, forward-curved tragus (the cartilaginous projection in front of the ear opening), while both *Myotis* species have a pointed tragus.

DISTRIBUTION: Canyon bats are known throughout most of the Western states, from southeastern Colorado to the Pacific Ocean, and from extreme southern Washington to western Mexico. In Arizona they can be found scattered throughout the state in all types of habitats.

HABITAT: Canyon bats are most abundant in desert and lowland habitats and rocky canyons. This species typically lives in rock crevices along cliff faces, and also will roost in mine or cave crevices and buildings. Some researchers have speculated that canyon bats probably also live in rodent burrows, because they can be found in desert flatlands many miles from any typical roost structure shortly

after sunset. Plant associations include creosote bush, paloverde, saguaro, mesquite, pinyon, juniper, cottonwood and sycamore at an elevational range up to 6,800 feet.

BIOLOGY: This species emerges earlier than most North American bats and is usually the first bat seen in the evening. Canyon bats typically are active only for a couple hours after sunset and may become active again at sunrise. Their slow, fluttery wing beats resemble those of a butterfly, making them one of the easiest bats to recognize in flight. Because they are not strong fliers, they likely do not travel far from roosts or water. Canyon bats flutter down from rocky crevice roosts to hunt along canyons, streambeds and water holes and feed on flying ants, leafhoppers, mosquitoes and other swarming insects.

These bats don’t form large colonies like many other species do. Canyon bats roost singly or in very small groups. Small maternity colonies of up to 12 females have been found in rock crevices. Females give birth to twins, usually in June. The canyon bat has been known to live 7 years.

STATUS: This common bat’s population appears to be stable, or at least no local declines have been detected. Although it is one of the most common bats, very little is known about this species’ normal roosting habits, maternity roosts or winter habits.

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MANAGEMENT NEEDS: The canyon bat’s preference for solitary life in rock crevices makes it a difficult bat to study. These bats are too small to track with radio transmitter equipment; therefore, we lack very basic information that would help us to make management recommendations. 🦇

■ Wildlife biologist Angie McIntire developed a passion for bats as an intern with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. She works as a bat specialist in the Non-game Branch.



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