

# Mexican Long-tongued Bat

By Shawn V. Castner  
Nongame Biologist

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Choeronycteris mexicana*. From the Greek *choiros* meaning pig (refers to the pig-shaped snout; former name: hog-nosed bat) and *nykteris* meaning bat. The specific epithet, *mexicana*, refers to its major distribution, and where the species was first described.

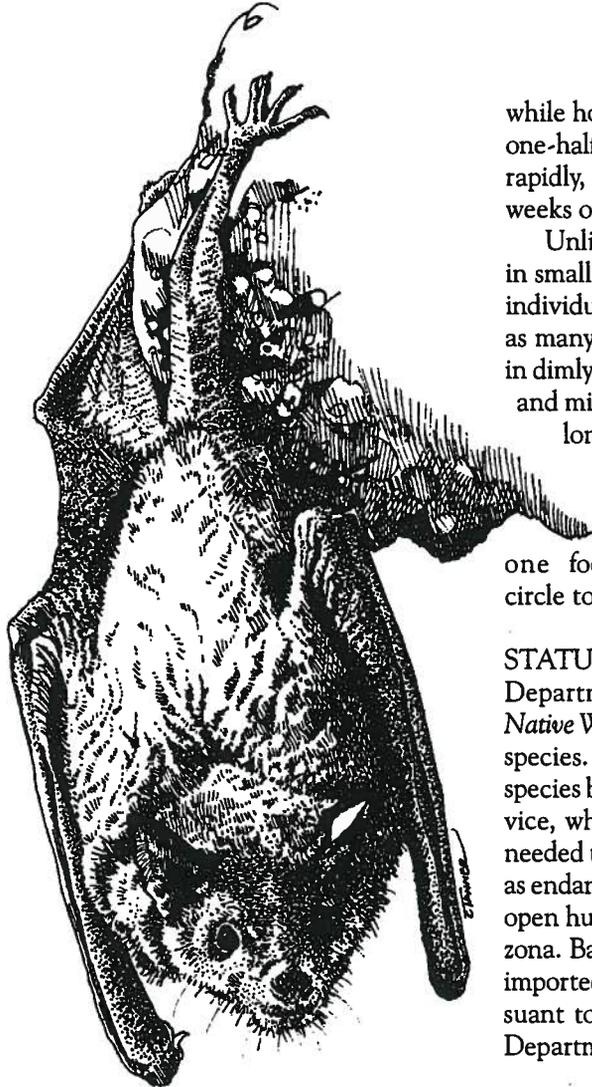
**DESCRIPTION:** Medium sized (length 3.5 inches; weight .75 ounce). Body brown to sooty gray. Distinguished from other Arizona bats by combination of leaf-like projection of skin from end of elongated nose, short ears, and short tail (length one-half inch) enclosed within the tail membrane.

**HABITAT:** Roosts in caves and mines; also uses buildings and other structures. In Arizona, occurs in montane mixed oak-conifer woodlands, mainly at elevations of 4,000 to 6,000 feet. In Mexico, occupies a variety of habitats from arid thornscrub to tropical deciduous forests.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Southwestern United States through Mexico and Central America. In the United States, occurs regularly during summer in extreme southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona. Also collected in San Diego.

**BIOLOGY:** The long-tongued bat is one of only two Arizona bats that forage primarily on nectar and pollen of night blooming flowers such as agaves and columnar cacti. It also eats the fruit of columnar cacti, along with incidental insects found on the fruit or flowers. Hummingbird feeders may help sustain individuals that arrive in Arizona early in the year, or remain into winter, when traditional food sources are not available. However, sugar water lacks essential nutrients required for long-term survival.

The Mexican long-tongued bat occurs in Arizona from spring to fall and



migrates south for the winter, where it remains active. Two factors contribute to its migratory lifestyle. Since it does not hibernate, and probably cannot lower its body temperature significantly, it must seek out warm roost sites year round. Also, when its food plants in one area end their blooming and fruiting cycle, it must find new areas in which other suitable plants are available.

Apparently only females come north to Arizona. The young are born in June-July, but there are two reports of late fall births (unusual for any bat). The single baby is well developed at birth, completely furred, and may weigh one-third as much as its mother. Mothers can fly

while holding young that are more than one-half their weight. The young develop rapidly, and can fly within two to three weeks of birth.

Unlike many bats, this species roosts in small numbers, usually fewer than 15 individuals, or singly. It does not cluster as many species do, and prefers to roost in dimly lit areas near entrances of caves and mines. Wary of intruders, Mexican long-tongued bats tend to fly out of the roost when disturbed, rather than deeper into it. They hang head down, usually from one foot, so they can rotate nearly full-circle to watch for intruders.

**STATUS:** This species is included on the Department's 1988 list of *Threatened Native Wildlife in Arizona* as a threatened species. It is classified as a Category 2 species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which means more information is needed to determine if it should be listed as endangered or threatened. There is no open hunting season on any bats in Arizona. Bats may only be captured, killed, imported, exported, possessed, etc. pursuant to a special license issued by the Department.

**MANAGEMENT NEEDS:** Information is needed to identify specific management needs. Little is known about population trends, seasonal movements, and food habits. Data on basic life history, migration patterns, and habitat requirements are needed. The fact that fewer than 400 individuals have been observed in the United States since 1906 indicates this species is rare.

As with most bats, the two most important limiting factors are probably adequate roost sites and food sources. Roosts need to be located, monitored, and protected. Food sources should also be protected. Public education is needed on the importance of bats and the sensitivity of roosts. ♣