

Western Red Bat

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SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Lasiurus blossevillii*. Derived from the Greek *lasios* meaning shaggy and *oura* meaning having a tail. Derivation of the Latin specific epithet is unclear.

DESCRIPTION: A beautiful bat. The fur ranges from yellow-brown to bright orange, with white-tipped hairs. Distinct white bib under neck, in spectacular contrast to jet-black wing membrane. Dorsal surface of tail membrane completely furred. Medium sized, with short, round ears and dense, shaggy fur. Forearm 1.5 inches long, weight 0.25 to 0.5 ounce. Wingspan about 12 inches.

HABITAT: Broad-leafed woodlands, usually in riparian areas. Primarily found at mid-elevations; in Arizona known from 2,400 to 7,200 feet.

DISTRIBUTION: North, Central, and South America. Arizona: statewide, from spring until fall (April-September). In winter, the bat migrates to lower latitudes, where most hibernate.

BIOLOGY: While roosting, with their head tucked under their tail and enveloped by their wings, red bats resemble dead leaves. In fact, they are so well camouflaged that one person inadvertently plucked a female and her offspring while reaching for a peach. They typically roost singly in the foliage of broad-leafed trees such as sycamores, cottonwoods, walnuts, and fruit orchards, sometimes in leafy shrubs or herbs (perhaps also in saguaro boots and canyon grape vines). Roosts are shaded from above and on the sides, generally 3 to many feet off the ground, and open below, thus allowing these bats to drop into flight.

Emerging one to two hours after dark, red bats forage on moths, beetles, flying ants, and occasionally on ground-dwelling crickets. Although they can reach speeds of 40 mph in flight, they usually remain within 1,000 yards or so of their roosts. Sometimes they hunt around street lamps

near their roosts. Although usually solitary, these bats occasionally forage in family groups comprised of an adult female and her offspring.

Red bats mate between August and October. As with most North American bats, the female stores sperm until spring, when fertilization occurs. Gestation is about 65 days; most young are born between mid-May and June. Females have two pairs of mammae. Litters range from one to five (averaging 2). Pups weigh a mere 0.02 ounce at birth and begin flying when three to four weeks old.

In late fall, western red bats are thought to migrate to and hibernate in the southern part of their range. Dense body fur and various metabolic adaptations allow them to withstand subfreezing temperatures. Hibernating, or torpid, individuals respond very slowly to temperature changes. Laboratory tests indicate they will not arouse until ambient temperatures reach 66 degrees Fahrenheit.

STATUS: The western red bat was included on the Department's draft list of *Arizona Wildlife of Special Concern* (AGFD in prep.). It has not been listed or proposed for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered or threatened. In Arizona, all bats are protected through Commission Order 14. They cannot be taken alive or dead, under auspices of a hunting license. Bats cannot be imported, exported, or otherwise possessed, without a special permit issued pursuant to Article 4 (Live Wildlife Rules).

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Detailed information is lacking, but loss of riparian and other broad-leafed deciduous forests is suspected to have had a negative effect on western red bats. Protecting riparian areas may be the best means to ensure their continued existence. Studies to determine life history information, roost requirements, and population status and trends are sorely needed. ♣



Art by C. Tanner