

# Chapter 8: Facts about bats and species profiles

## Important facts about bats

- There are nearly 1000 different kinds of bats on Earth. After rodents, bats are the most diverse group of mammals in the world.
- The smallest mammal in the world is the bumblebee bat from Thailand that weighs 1.5 g and easily fits into a matchbox. The largest bats are flying-foxes found in northern Australia and South-East Asia which weigh over 1 kg and have wingspans over 1.5 m.
- A small bat can catch and eat more than 600 mosquitoes in one hour. Many important insect pests, such as the cotton pest moth *Heliothis* and lawn grub moths, are eaten by bats.
- In their natural state, important agricultural plants such as bananas, mangoes and figs rely on bats for pollination and seed dispersal.
- Many of Australia's commercial hardwood timbers rely on flying-foxes to transfer their pollen and thus avoid self-fertilisation and genetic inbreeding.
- Grey-headed Flying-foxes move around in an area from Melbourne to Bundaberg searching for flowering and fruiting trees. Individuals may move up to 600 km in several days searching for food.
- Flying-fox camps are the largest concentrations of native mammals in Australia.
- Bat droppings (guano) in caves support whole ecosystems of unique organisms including bacteria useful in detoxifying wastes, improving detergents and the production of antibiotics.
- Bat guano is a powerful plant fertiliser and has also been used in the manufacture of gunpowder.
- Bats are extremely vulnerable to extinction, partly because they are the slowest reproducing mammals for their size.
- Most bat species produce only one young per year and don't breed until they are several years old.
- Loss of bats increases the demand for chemical insecticides, can jeopardise whole ecosystems of other animal and plant species, and can harm human economies.

