



Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*)

The Indiana bat is an endangered species. Endangered species are animals and plants that are in danger of becoming extinct. Threatened species are those that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Identifying, protecting, and restoring endangered and threatened species are primary objectives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species program.

What is the Indiana Bat?

Description

The scientific name of the Indiana bat is *Myotis sodalis* and it is an accurate description of the species. *Myotis* means “mouse ear” and refers to the relatively small, mouse-like ears of the bats in this group. *Sodalis* is the Latin word for “companion.” The Indiana bat is a very social species; large numbers cluster together during hibernation. The species is called the Indiana bat because the first specimen described to science in 1928 was based on a specimen found in southern Indiana's Wyandotte Cave in 1904.

The Indiana bat is quite small, weighing only one-quarter of an ounce (about the weight of three pennies). In flight, it has a wingspan of 9 to 11 inches. The fur is dark-brown to black. The Indiana bat is similar in appearance to many other related species. Biologists can distinguish it from similar species by comparing characteristics such as the structure of the foot and color variations in the fur.

Habitat

Indiana bats hibernate during winter in caves or, occasionally, in abandoned mines. For hibernation, they require cool, humid caves with stable temperatures, under 50° F but above freezing. Very few caves within the range of the species have these conditions.



Photo by Rich Fields

Indiana bats eat up to half their body weight in insects each night.

Hibernation is an adaptation for survival during the cold winter months when no insects are available for bats to eat. Bats must store energy in the form of fat before hibernating. During the six months of hibernation the stored fat is their only source of energy. If bats are disturbed or cave temperatures increase, more energy is needed and hibernating bats may starve.

After hibernation, Indiana bats migrate to their summer habitat in wooded areas where they usually roost under loose tree bark on dead or dying trees. During summer, males roost alone or in small groups, while females roost in larger groups of up to 100 bats or more. Indiana bats also forage in or along the edges of forested areas.

Reproduction

Indiana bats mate during fall before they enter caves to hibernate. Females store the sperm through winter and become pregnant in spring soon after they emerge from the caves.

After migrating to their summer areas, females roost under the peeling bark of dead and dying trees in groups of up to 100 or more. Such groups are called maternity colonies. Each female in the colony gives birth to only one pup per year. Young bats are nursed by the mother, who leaves the roost tree only to forage for food. The young stay with the maternity colony throughout their first summer.

Feeding Habits

Indiana bats eat a variety of flying insects found along rivers or lakes and in uplands. Like all insect-eating bats, they benefit people by consuming insects that are considered pests or otherwise harmful to humans. Their role in insect control is not insignificant – Indiana bats eat up to half their body weight in insects each night.

Range

Indiana bats are found over most of the eastern half of the United States. Almost half of all Indiana bats (207,000

in 2005) hibernate in caves in southern Indiana. In 2005, other states which supported populations of over 40,000 included Missouri (65,000), Kentucky (62,000), Illinois (43,000) and New York (42,000). Other states within the current range of the Indiana bat include Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia. The 2005 population estimate is about 457,000 Indiana bats, half as many as when the species was listed as endangered in 1967.

Why is the Indiana Bat Endangered?

Human Disturbance

Indiana bats, because they hibernate in large numbers in only a few caves, are extremely vulnerable to disturbance. During hibernation, they cluster in groups of up to 500 per square foot. Since the largest hibernation caves support from 20,000 to 50,000 bats, it is easy to see how a large part of the total population can be affected by a single event. Episodes of large numbers of Indiana bat deaths have occurred due to human disturbance during hibernation.

Cave Commercialization and Improper Gating

The commercialization of caves – allowing visitors to tour caves during hibernation – drives bats away. Changes in the structure of caves, such as blocking an entrance, can change the temperature in a cave. A change of even a few degrees can make a cave unsuitable for hibernating bats. Some caves are fitted with gates to keep people out, but improper gating that prevents access by bats or alters air flow, temperature, or humidity can also be harmful. Properly constructed gates are beneficial because they keep people from disturbing hibernating bats while maintaining temperature and other requirements and allowing access for bats.

Summer Habitat Loss or Degradation

Indiana bats use trees as roosting and foraging sites during summer months.

Loss and fragmentation of forested habitats can affect bat populations.

Pesticides and Environmental Contaminants

Insect-eating bats may seem to have an unlimited food supply, but in local areas, insects may not be plentiful because of pesticide use. This can also affect the quality of the bats' food supply. Many scientists believe that population declines occurring today might be due, in part, to pesticides and environmental contaminants. Bats may be affected by eating contaminated insects, drinking contaminated water, or absorbing the chemicals while feeding in areas that have been recently treated.

What is Being Done to Prevent Extinction of the Indiana Bat?

Listing

Prompted by declining populations caused by disturbance of bats during hibernation and modification of hibernacula, the Indiana bat was listed in 1967 as “in danger of extinction” under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966. It is listed as “endangered” under the current Endangered Species Act of 1973. Listing under the Endangered Species Act protects the Indiana bat from take (harming, harassing, killing) and requires Federal agencies to work to conserve it.

Recovery Plan

The Endangered Species Act requires that recovery plans be prepared for all listed species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a recovery plan for the Indiana bat in 1983 and is now revising that Plan. The recovery plan describes actions needed to help the bat recover.

Habitat Protection

Public lands like National Wildlife Refuges, military areas, and U.S. Forest Service lands are managed for Indiana bats by protecting forests. This means ensuring that there are the size and species of trees needed by Indiana bats for roosting; and providing a supply of dead and dying trees that can be used as roost sites. In addition, caves used for hibernation are managed to

maintain suitable conditions for hibernation and eliminate disturbance.

Education and Outreach

Understanding the important role played by Indiana bats is a key to conserving the species. Helping people learn more about the Indiana bat and other endangered species can lead to more effective recovery efforts.

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