

# Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

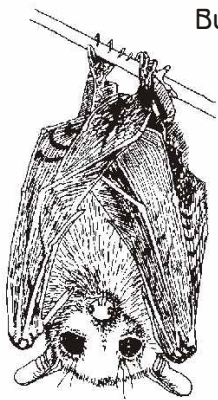
## WHAT BAT IS THAT ?

There are more than 35 species of bats in the Northern Territory. They are a special group of mammals that belong to a group that scientists call *Chiroptera*, which means 'hand-wing'. They are split into two groups: the Microbats (*Microchiroptera*) and the Megabats (*Megachiroptera*).

The microbats are usually small, eat insects and use echolocation to find their way in the dark. Most Australian bats belong to this group.

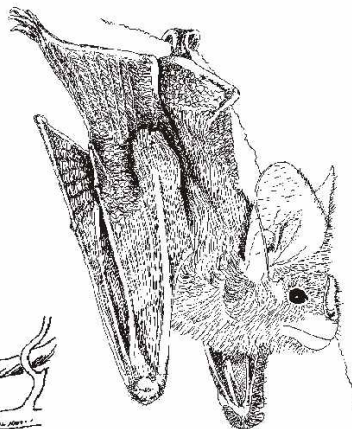
The megabats are often called fruit bats as they live on fruit, flowers and nectar. They have big eyes and noses to see and smell and find food. They do not use echolocation so rarely fly in complete darkness. In the Top End the best known of these are our flying foxes.

But remember not all megabats are large. Some like the blossom bats may be tiny, like miniature flying-foxes.



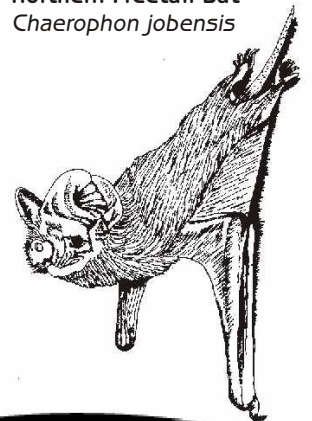
Northern Blossom Bat  
*Macroglossus minimus*

Ghost Bat  
*Macroderma gigas*



The **Ghost Bat** is Australia's only carnivorous bat. It is sometimes called a vampire bat. It lives in caves and feeds on frogs, birds, other bats and large insects. It is extinct in Central Australia but still found in the Top End.

Northern Freetail Bat  
*Chaerophon jobensis*



**Flying foxes** are the largest Territory bats. They are found in the Top End but not Central Australia. During the daytime they hang upside down in mangroves and paperbark trees. At dusk they fly off in great flocks to feed on flowers and fruit.



Black Flying-fox  
*Pteropus alecto*

Small, **insectivorous bats** are found in both the Centre and the Top End. At night you may see them around street lights or near swimming pools catching moths. Most of them live in trees rather than caves. During the day they hide under the bark or in hollows.



Northern Territory  
Government

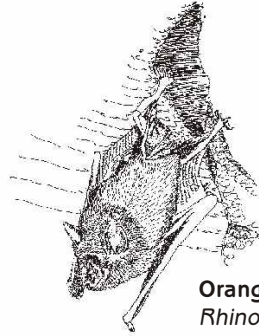


## SEEING IN THE DARK

When you hear the saying "as blind as a bat" this is far from true. Bats just do not rely on their eyesight as much as we do. Yet microbats have an amazing ability to move about in complete darkness. Their secret is that they use an elaborate system of echolocation to locate food and any obstacles in their way. They make very high pitched noises which we can't hear and these bounce off any objects in their path. These sounds are picked up again by the bat's big ears which act like TV antennae. It's like seeing sound. Modern ships use a similar system, called sonar, to tell them the depth of the water.

### DID YOU KNOW...

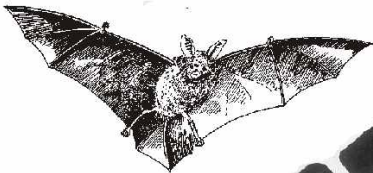
About one fifth of all mammals are bats. Their ability to fly and special way to find food means that they can be found on all continents except Antarctica.



The hot and humid caves found in Litchfield National Park are home to some of the largest colonies of the Orange Leaf-nosed Bat in Australia.

Orange Leaf-nosed Bat  
*Rhinonictes aurantius*

Help this little bat find its way through the dark to its tucker.



Want to learn more about bats?

Check out the reference book *Australian Bats* by Sue Churchill. It has great colour photographs to help you identify some bats.

