

Hi-tech Bats

by Ed Parker

No this is not about cricket but bats of the animal variety. Let's face it, bats have had some bad press over the years. Messy, dirty, smelly and noisy are some descriptions one might hear to describe these creatures.

Bats, however, are in fact quite sophisticated creatures: true placental mammals (as are humans) and the only mammals which undertake true flight, having forelimbs adapted as wings.

They also are equipped with 'high-tech' gear - some with night vision capability and others with ultrasound sonar navigation skills.

Most of us are aware of flying foxes and fruit bats, generally large specimens, with large eyes to give excellent night vision. These are in the 'mega-bat' category, and some 5 species are well-known in the Brisbane region.

The other, lesser known category of 'micro-bats' number some 18 species in SE Queensland. Their size can vary from a tiny 35mm (Little Cave Bat) to 100mm (White-striped Free-tail Bat).

All micro-bats use sonar navigation (or echo location) to travel and to detect small insects to feed upon. A few species emit sounds within human audible range (less than 18kHz) but most send their signals at ultrasonic frequencies from 20 to 100kHz.

By contrast the mega-bats are fruit, blossom or nectar feeders and rely upon their excellent night vision rather than sonar navigation.

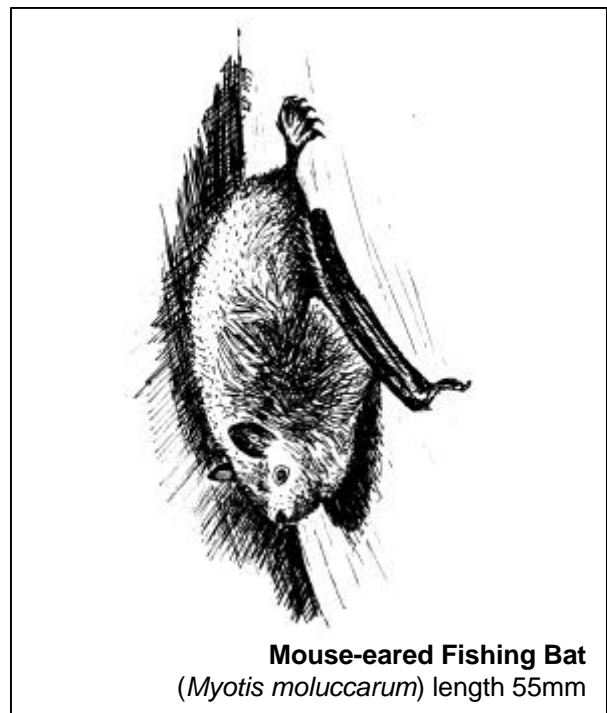
To dispel the notion that bats are dirty, smelly creatures, they are in fact meticulous in

grooming to keep their fur and flying membranes in top flight condition. Any pungent odours are not due to uncleanliness but emitted by scent glands, as with many animals, linked to reproductive purposes.

While flying foxes are important to pollination of eucalypts and other native trees, the micro-bats assist in control of insects.

Recently some residents were treated to an informative night inspection near the mouth of Mt Ommaney Creek led by visiting bat experts.

One species found was the Mouse-eared Fishing Bat (*Myotis moluccarum*), so named because it skims down to the water surface to capture prey such as fish. It had its roost in a road culvert and the species is the only SEQ micro-bat which is carnivorous as well as insectivorous. At a size of 55mm, it fitted comfortably within a clasped human hand.



This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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