

Bats of the Virgin Islands



Who's native to the Virgin Islands you ask - Bats are! Bats are the only mammals native to the Virgin Islands before the introduction of people, deer, mongoose, and rats. Bats have occupied these islands hundreds of thousands, if not millions of years. Almost 1,000 bat species can be found worldwide, however, there are five types of bats found in the Virgin Islands.

The **Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat** (*Artibeus jamaicensis*) is the most prevalent bat found in a variety of habitats. These bats are important pollinators of our local fruiting and flowering tree and plants. Fruit bats play a major role in dispersing the seeds of tropical fruit such as papaya, guavaberry, mangos, soursop, bananas and coconuts.

The insectivorous bat, **Pallas' Mastiff Bat** (*Molossus molossus*), has a wing span less than 30cm. If you are looking for a natural pest control, the Mastiff is your bat. These tiny critters can consume thousands of flying insects each night!

The **Antillean Cave Bat** (*Brachyphylla cavernarum*) can be found roosting in caves, dense tree tops, and cliffs throughout Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles. They also have a varied diet of fruits, nectar, pollen and insects.

The **Red Fig-eating Bat** (*Stenoderma rufum*) is a very rare bat native only to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. This bat depends on tropical and subtropical dry forests for its survival.

The **Greater Bulldog Bat** (*Noctilio leporinus*) is a fishing bat with long toes and sharp claws used to scoop fish up! This bat frequents estuaries and guts where it catches and feeds on freshwater crabs, shrimp and bugs.

Island Native is a monthly blog devoted to educating the public about local wildlife that inhabit the Virgin Islands. *Prepared by Pawsitive Living*

Help the Natives!

- Plant a bat-friendly garden. Simple additions like planting night-scented flowers, creating a pond, and putting up a bat box for bats to roost in can attract bats.
- Go on bat walks to see and hear bats, or learn from the experts about how to identify and help the different bat species. Contact Renata Platenberg @ 340-693-1238 or renata.platenberg@live.uvi.edu
- Educate your friends and families about these wonderful creatures.
- Join conservation organizations that are working to protect bats.



References:

- Do One Thing For Wildlife. Newsletter by Renata Platenberg. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife. October 2011.
- Do One Thing For Wildlife. Newsletter by Renata Platenberg. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife. October 2012.
- A Bat Conservation and Management Plan for St. Thomas and St. John, US Virgin Islands. Kevel Lindsay, Jean-Pierre Bacle, and Gary Kwiecinski. For the USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife. December 2009.
- <http://www.defenders.org/bats/bats>