

MAMMALS

INDIANA BAT

ABOUT

The Indiana Bat (*Myotis Sodalis*) has grayish-chestnut fur with pink lips and nose, and pinkish to cinnamon colored under parts. It grows to approximately three inches long. The bats mate in the autumn but the female becomes pregnant after winter hibernation when the sperm stored from the autumn mating fertilizes an egg. The pregnant females then migrate to trees that serve as maternity colonies over the summer season, where there can be hundreds of mothers and their young living in the maternity roost trees. One pup is born, which the mother looks after for about a month. She then takes it on its first flight in tandem with her. The length of time it takes a pup to mature depends on the weather, and sometimes the mother will move her baby to warmer areas on the tree. Indiana Bats eat flying insects and forage along river and lake shorelines, at the tops of trees in floodplains, and in upland forests. They sometimes eat as many as 17 times a minute.

DID YOU KNOW?

Although they once numbered in the millions, the endangered Indiana Bat population has declined 56% in the past 40 years. It was listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act in 1967. This bat hibernates in limestone caves, called hibernacula, from mid-autumn to early spring. The bats cluster together in the same area of a cave, which may protect them from temperature changes and other disturbances. The roosts are usually in the coldest part of the cave, which ensures the lowering of the bat's metabolic rate, thereby making fat reserves last the whole six-month hibernation. Indiana Bats are creatures of habit and tend to return to the same hibernacula each year, and their species is found in Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia amongst other states in the US. Their decline is due to many reasons. Vandalism and human disturbance of their hibernacula have taken a terrible toll on their numbers, but add to that the degradation of their summer habitat – from forest clearing, stream channeling, housing developments, and the clearing of land for agriculture – and the future survival of this small flying mammal hangs by a thread.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What is a hibernacula?

- a) Limestone caves where bats hibernate
- b) A cluster of bats
- c) The coldest part of a cave
- d) The hibernation season

Answer is A.

