



MAMMALS

VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BAT

ABOUT

The Virginia Big-eared Bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*) is a medium-sized bat 3½-4 inches long and weighing 9-12 grams. It has brown fur, a buff-colored underside, and there are two prominent lumps on the nose. The bats' large ears are over one inch (2.5 cm) long and connected by a low band across the forehead. This mammal roosts in caves in both winter and summer.

Female Virginia Big-eared Bats form maternity colonies in caves where they rear their young. The bats forage for food in old fields, hay fields, and forested areas. Studies have shown that they travel up to 6.5 miles (10.5 km) from the cave to feed, and individuals often return to the same feeding area night after night. Like all bats they eat insects – particularly small moths. Mating takes place in fall and winter, but the male's sperm is stored and does not fertilize the egg until the following spring. The populations of maternity colonies range from 120 to 1,350 bats. Most young are born in June after a gestation period of 56-100 days. Each female has a single pup, which is capable of flying at three weeks old. By December the bats enter hibernation after having stored enough body fat to get through the winter. They hibernate in caves with cold, but above freezing, temperatures.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Virginia Big-eared Bat is an endangered species. This bat is a subspecies of Townsend's Big-eared Bat with populations found in Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. The total population in West Virginia is probably less than 20,000. The number of Virginia Big-Eared bats declined sharply between the 1950s and early 1980s. This was mostly due to human disturbance of their cave roosts. During winter, these bats are more sensitive to disturbance than most. Bats only survive winter on a limited amount of stored fat, and any arousal from hibernation uses up precious fat reserves. If disturbed repeatedly throughout the winter, they starve to death before spring arrives. The protection of cave roosts led to an increase in numbers since the 1980s, however, a mysterious disease is devastating bat populations in the eastern US, and certain species are under threat of extinction. This disease is called white-nose syndrome, which has been associated with a previously unknown fungus that invades the bat's skin.

For more detailed information visit: www.wvdnr.gov or www.npwrc.usgs.gov or www.fws.gov.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

How do Virginia Big-eared Bats survive the winter?

- a) By hanging upside-down
- b) By storing fat
- c) By roosting in large groups
- d) By hunting for insects

Answer is B.

