



Saul Young

Sara Gardner, left, of Auburn University, and Lindsey Shiflet, of the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, set up mist nets at the Dennis Cove campground to capture bats for study and tagging during the annual bat blitz.



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Jeff Corcoran, left, of Southern Illinois University, and Joy O'Keefe, a doctoral student at Clemson University's department of forestry and natural resources and team leader of the Southeastern Bat Diversity Network's annual bat blitz, take a closer look at one of the bats captured last week.

BAT FACTS

- All the bat species found in Tennessee are insect eaters. A single bat can catch hundreds of insects in an hour, and large colonies catch tons of

Lindsey Shiflet, a graduate student at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, said streams serve as natural feeding corridors for many bat species.

"There's an art to setting the nets," Shiflet said. "You have to think like a bat."

At 8:50 p.m., the survey team unrolled the mist nets, which were light as silk and looked suitable for badminton. Their base of operation was a picnic area approximately 50 yards from the nets. Every eight minutes, three people from the team would head off through the rhododendron thickets to check the nets. Everyone wore waders and headlamps.

Joy O'Keefe, doctoral student at Clemson University's department of forestry and natural resources, was the team leader. On her left hand she wore a glove to protect her from the bats' needle-sharp teeth. She said it was a batting glove, the kind used by baseball players.

"We can expect to catch nine or 10 species of bats here tonight," O'Keefe said. "Most of them roost in trees in the summer."

At 9 p.m., they caught the first bat of the night — a northern long-eared bat that weighed 6.4 grams. Like all the bats captured during the bat blitz, this one was released after it was weighed, measured and examined.

The Cherokee National Forest is home to two federally listed bats, the gray bat and the Indiana bat. A third federally listed species, the Virginia big-eared bat, is likely also in the Cherokee National Forest since it is known to live in neighboring forests in North Carolina and Virginia.

The second bat captured that night was an eastern pipestrelle, and the third was another northern long-eared bat.

At 10:40 p.m., they captured an eastern red bat, one of the night's most cantankerous specimens. The bat's fur was thick and pale red. It had long wings and weighed a whopping 12 grams.

A screech owl called from the distance, and a full moon hung overhead. The bat team said they didn't expect to be in bed until 3 a.m.

Melissa Miller, a biologist with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, said the Bat Diversity Network's annual bat blitzes are the highlight of her year.

"It's a reunion among people who share a passion for bats," Miller said. "For me, it's a rare opportunity to learn new field

insects every night.

techniques and hang out with people as weird as I am.”

- Bats are mammals, and like humans they give birth to live young. In the United States and Canada, most bats mate in the fall. In the spring, pregnant females form nursery colonies, giving birth in litters of one or two. Baby bats learn to fly within three weeks. Some bats survive for as long as 34 years.

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- Most bats communicate and navigate with high frequency sounds, or echolocation. In total darkness, bats can detect obstacles as fine as a human hair.
- Bats can be found in almost any conceivable shelter but are best known for living in caves. Many species adapt to living in only one or a few types of shelter and cannot survive anywhere else. Some species that now roost in buildings do so because they have no natural alternatives.
- Bats are beneficial. In addition to keeping insects in check, they play a role in pollinating plants. Bat studies have helped scientists develop navigational techniques for the blind, birth control and artificial insemination techniques, vaccines and a better understanding of low temperature surgical procedures.

Source: U.S. Forest Service

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