

## Bats

By M. Brock Fenton. 1992. Facts On File, New York. xvi + 207 pp., illus. \$55.00.

This book combines a diverse array of information on bats in an attractively illustrated publication. As is his usual style, Dr. Fenton presents an engaging narrative on these unique and intriguing animals, the only mammals to possess true flight. One of the foremost bat researchers in the world, he will stimulate both the specialist and general reader alike.

The book is divided into 13 chapters with a range of interesting subjects such as the scientific process of studying bats, facts and fiction of vampire bats, and differing cultural perceptions of bats. Other more traditional topics include echolocation, feeding strategies, roosts, social behaviour, public health, conservation, natural history, and general biology. Interspersed throughout the book are 20 accounts of more specialized subject matter with detailed explanations. Some of these interesting discussions cover bat photography, technical aspects of echolocation, and the building of bat houses. There will surely be a fascinating topic to satisfy most curiosities such as a summary on bat detectors, devices used to listen to bats at night.

Drawing extensively on his own research programmes, supplemented with references to general books and specialized articles, Dr. Fenton is able to comment authoritatively on many aspects of bats, from the scientific to the artistic. Not only does he discuss echolocation, one of his primary areas of study, but also differing human social views of bats as evidenced in textiles, ceramics, and other art media. For example, although some bats may consume the equivalent of their own body weight in insects, many insects have specialized strategies to lessen their chance of predation. Some insects have ears sensitive to bat echolocation allowing them to detect and avoid bats whereas others utilize secretions in combination with audible noises to alert bats to their unpalatable taste. For most North Americans, bats usually conjure images of blood-sucking vampires or pests in their cottages. However, the reader will discover that bats roosting in cottages are very beneficial because they consume large quantities of insects. For the record,

vampire bats are found only in Central and South America (one stray record from Texas) usually in close association with domesticated livestock. In contrast, Chinese culture portrays bats as symbols of joy and happiness with their images appearing in artwork and on everyday items such as rice bowls and clothing.

Liberally sprinkled throughout the book are numerous photographs of bats. They are of exceptional quality with most in colour and with many bats in natural setting. All but a few photographs are taken by the author and they represent over one hundred different species of bats. This attests not only to the wide species diversity found in this order of mammals, but also to Dr. Fenton's vast field experience with bats throughout the world. An appendix lists the common name, scientific name, and taxonomic family for all bats mentioned in the text. This represents almost one-fifth of the currently recognized species and all families of bats, testament to the breadth of the book and the author's knowledge of bats.

Without trying to look for typographical errors, one did catch my eye; the misspelling of the scientific name for moustached or leaf-chinned bats (family Mormoopidae) in the appendix on page 192. Some added features include the italicizing of page number in the index for illustrations and the listing of references by chapter in the bibliography with extra information on general works, books for younger readers, and two bat newsletters from the scientific community but also suitable for the amateur naturalist.

This book has successfully combined coffee-table presentation with scientific-based facts in a publication that will likely appeal to a wide readership. Very few scientists are able to consistently communicate their ideas to both the public and scientific communities. Considering the quality of publication and the information contained within, this is a very reasonably priced book that will be stimulating to both the amateur and the specialist interested in bats.

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