

# Get Wild: Bats in the High Country

Stasia Stockwell



**Using echolocation, bats can determine an object's texture, size, distance, speed, and the direction it is moving. Bats use these calls to navigate at night, find food, and communicate with each other.**

*Courtesy photo*

Moose and black bears, marmots and coyotes — there are many well-known mammals that we share our home in the mountains with. A gaggle of birds fills our blue skies, from blue jays to mountain chickadees. But what about the lone winged mammals that lurk in the darker corners of nature? Bats call the mountains of Colorado home just as much as we do, and while we may not see them as often as we see a moose crossing Breckenridge's Main Street, that doesn't mean they're not there.

In fact, bats are so cool and critical to our ecosystems that Oct. 24-31 has been declared [National Bat Week](#)

!

Bats carry bits of spooky lore with them. They may seem strange — these unique nocturnal, airborne creatures hang upside down and make sounds like an odd cross between an angry squirrel and a large locust. Despite their reputation though, bats really aren't all that scary once you get to know them.

---

According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife, there are 18 known species of bats that call Colorado home. A handful of these species are regular inhabitants of Summit County, with the big brown bat being one of the most common in the state and in our county. Rocky Mountain National Park is presumed to be home to at least nine different bat species. In the summertime after dark, the bats emerge to feed on a feast of insects and can be heard and sometimes seen in the shadows of the moonlight.

Some bats are known to migrate when winter brings its chill, while others hole up in hibernation for the season. In Colorado, our bats choose the

latter. This time of year, these furry flying creatures retreat into hibernation for the winter and won't resurface until spring begins to melt away winter, usually around March.

---

Despite their vampiric reputation — thanks to their nocturnal nature and sharp teeth — bats shouldn't be feared or viewed as pests to be rid of. Quite the opposite: Bats are a crucial part of our ecosystem and are fascinating creatures that should be protected. Bats consume loads of insects when they come out to feed each night, which helps manage insect populations and protects crops from pests in many areas. Many bats even play the crucial role of plant pollinators. While we humans are up in the High Country in the summer months, swatting away swaths of mosquitos as we pitch our tents and linger by Alpine lakes, bats help then, too. They feast on hordes of mosquitos each night, helping to control the population of those pesky, often disease-causing insects.

Even though bats are a crucial part of our ecosystem and need our protection, it's still smart to keep our distance. Bats occasionally carry rabies and other diseases like any rodent we might find in the mountains, though rabid bats are rarely found in Summit County despite regular testing. Also, human presence can result in transmission of pathogens to bats, such as white nose syndrome, which has killed over 1 million bats in the US since 2006. Keeping our distance is best for human safety, but it's also best for the bats. We don't want to disturb them, whether they're readying for hibernation or about to give birth to young.

Bats are up against the challenges of a changing climate just like every other species. These cave-dwelling creatures are as crucial to our mountain ecosystems as the pika and snowshoe hares that also call this place home. We'd be smart to help keep these insect-eaters and pollinators around, no matter how spooky they may seem.



Stasia Stockwell

Stasia Stockwell

**“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Stasia Stockwell is a Breckenridge local and avid backcountry skier. A true mountain dweller, she feels most at home in the alpine. Stasia writes primarily for the outdoor adventure realm, with the desire to connect readers from all backgrounds with nature in a meaningful way**