

Ghost Bat

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Scientific Name: Macroderma gigas

The ghost bat, with its ghostly coloured fur, pale wings, strange-looking nose and needle-sharp teeth, may look like a spooky vampire but it doesn't suck blood. It does, however, hunt other animals for their meat, and is Australia's largest carnivorous bat. The ghost bat has excellent hearing and eyesight and, like other microbats, it uses echolocation to find its food.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE? The body is covered in soft, light to dark grey fur, but the belly is a paler, sometimes white, colour. Ghost bats don't have tails and the wing skin stretches back between the legs. The long ears are joined together in the centre. They have large eyes and a long noseleaf.

SIZE: Adults grow 10–13 centimetres long and only weigh around 165 grams. The wingspan is about a metre wide.

WHAT DO THEY EAT? Ghost bats eat lizards, frogs, sleeping birds, large insects and small mammals including hopping mice, dunnarts and even other bats. When hunting, they often perch about 2 metres above the ground and listen for rustling in the grass below. They swoop out and use their excellent eyesight and echolocation to pinpoint the animal before dropping down and biting it behind its head or neck. The animal is then carried back to the bat's perch and devoured.

WHERE DO THEY LIVE? Ghost bats only live in Australia. They can be found in a very broad range of habitats, from lush north Queensland rainforests, up through the forests and woodlands of Cape York Peninsula and around the dry, arid regions of Western Australia. Ghost bats roost in cracks between rocks, caves and old mine shafts in colonies of just a few to more than 400 bats!

BREEDING & CARING FOR YOUNG: About six months after mating, a female ghost bat gives birth to one young, usually around October. As summer heats up, the females move their young to the warmest caves. Young ghost bats can fly at about seven weeks of age. The young bats go out with their mothers to learn hunting skills until they are able to look after themselves.

PREDATORS & THREATS: Snakes, including pythons (such as the spotted python), hunt warmblooded animals like the ghost bat. Owls may also hunt and catch them. Ghost bats are very sensitive to human disturbances to their roosting sites. Many of these sites have been cleared to make way for mines or farms. Feral cats and foxes also compete with the ghost bat for food.

WHAT IS THEIR STATUS? Vulnerable.

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