



Mexican Free-tailed Bat Facts

- Mexican free-tailed bats have been clocked at 60 mph at over 10,000 feet in the air.
- Each female gives birth to only one young.
- Pups (baby bats) hang in a separate area away from the mothers.
- Mexican free-tailed bat colonies are larger than any other bat colonies.
- Adults winter in Mexico and possibly further south.
- Males and females migrate north separately and roost separately in the summer.
- Bracken Cave in Central Texas is home to 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats, the largest known colony in the world.
- Mother Mexican free-tailed bats nurse their own pups, not just any pup.
- Pups are born in June and begin flying in August/September.
- Southern migration occurs primarily in October.

Bat Etiquette

Bats are wild animals and are sensitive to human disturbance. Please remember that this is the bats' home and you are a visitor here.

- Be quiet! This is the bats' bedroom and they are sleeping right now.
- NEVER handle grounded bats.
- Walk your horse or bike through the tunnel instead of riding.
- Avoid stirring up dust.
- Do not use flash photography or bright lights during the bats' flight.
- Do not throw objects at the bats.



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Caprock Canyons

Trailway

STATE PARK

THE Bats OF
Clarity
Tunnel



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Quitaque, Texas

Denizens of the Dark!

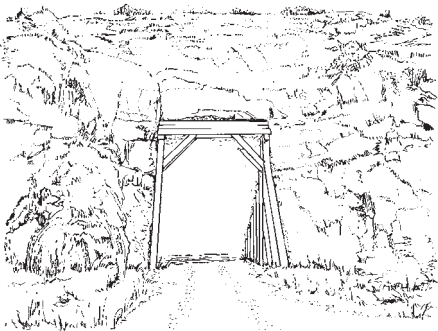
Tread softly when you travel through Clarity Tunnel. You are passing beneath the summer residence of a large colony of Mexican free-tailed bats. These bats migrate from Mexico every year to spend the summer at Clarity Tunnel giving birth and raising their young.

The tunnel is also home to a fascinating diversity of life. Thousands of invertebrates live their lives in this tunnel in near darkness, scavenging on bats that fall to the tunnel floor. Even though bats have few natural predators, the presence of a large colony attracts many other animals, including birds, mammals and reptiles that come to the tunnel looking for an easy meal.

Mexican free-tailed bats have remarkably acute hearing and can pinpoint the location of flying insects in the dark. They do this by echolocation, emitting high frequency calls that are inaudible to humans and then using their large ears and wrinkled skin flaps as sonar receivers.

Clarity Tunnel

Burlington Northern built this railroad as part of the Fort Worth and Denver South Plains Railway in the early 1920s. Clarity Tunnel was named for a railroad official at the time, Frank E. Clarity. The railroad was completed and began regular freight and passenger service between Lubbock and Estelline in 1928. Clarity Tunnel was included in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

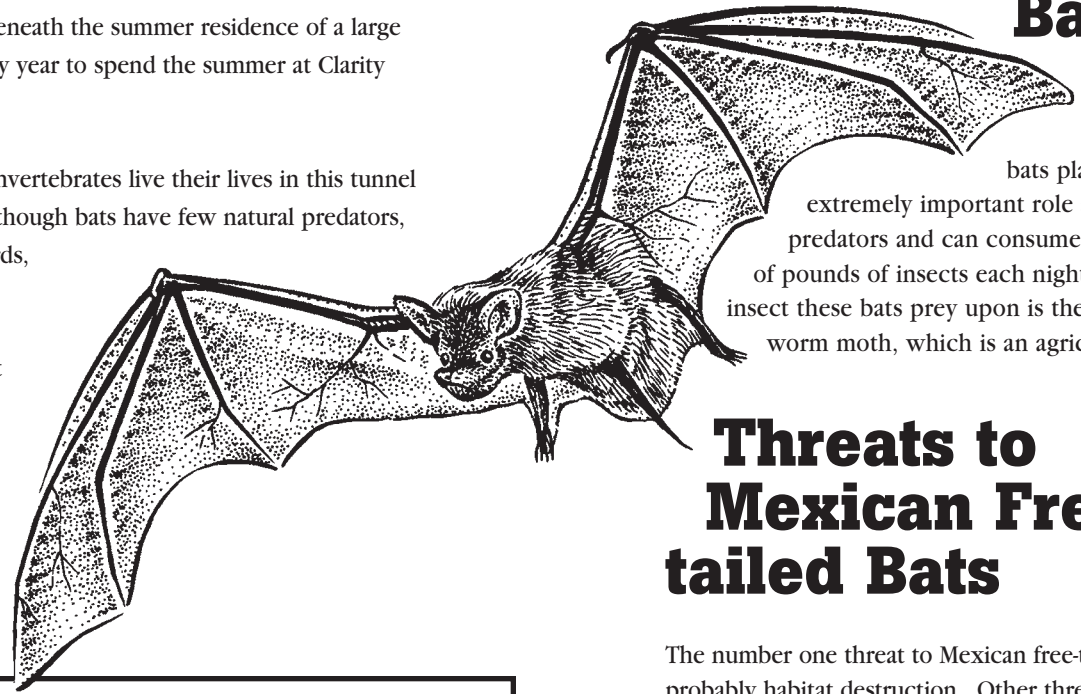


This rail line was in continual use until 1989 when Burlington Northern closed it.

With the help of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Texas Parks and Wildlife acquired the 64 miles of line in 1992. Funding for development of visitor information and interpretation was provided by the Department of Transportation by a federal transportation enhancement grant.

Biologists believe that bats began occupying the Tunnel after the last trains traveled through the Tunnel. However, a long-time resident of the immediate area suggests that bats occupied the Tunnel before the railroad stopped running. No matter when the bats began occupying the Tunnel, we know that the bats' numbers have increased since 1992. Clarity Tunnel's bat population is estimated from a few hundred thousand to up to a half a million!

Beneficial Bats



Mexican free-tailed bats play an

extremely important role as insect predators and can consume thousands of pounds of insects each night. One insect these bats prey upon is the cotton boll-worm moth, which is an agricultural pest.

Threats to Mexican Free-tailed Bats

The number one threat to Mexican free-tailed bats is probably habitat destruction. Other threats include disturbance at roost sites, vandalism and pesticide poisoning.

Diseases

Bats are known to transmit only two diseases to humans: rabies and histoplasmosis.

Like most mammals, few bats contract rabies. Those that do contract it rarely become aggressive. Transmission of rabies usually occurs through a bite. Therefore, bats should never be picked up. Bats that are easily captured are more likely sick and will bite in self-defense.

Histoplasmosis is caused by a common ground fungus that lives in soil enriched by bird or bat droppings. Very few individuals may become ill when inhaling large quantities of spore-laden dust.