

Bats at Craters of the Moon Transcript

[MUSIC PLAYING] Craters of the moon national monument and preserve. Encompassing over 1,100 square miles of a unique and stunning volcanic landscape. When established by President Calvin Coolidge in 1924, the area was described as a weird and scenic landscape peculiar to itself. The terrain is rugged and foreboding. Winters are bitterly cold and in summer ground temperatures can exceed 140 degrees. However, despite the harsh conditions many plants and animals have made a home here.

There's the charming American hiker living within the volcanic rocks of the lava flows. And every spring wildflowers show up in abundance in the centre fields but there is a more secretive creature that also makes its home here. Mostly hidden from view, bats find the many crevices and caves within the lava fields to be an ideal habitat. There are thousands of caves at craters of the moon. Some are obscure and hidden, others are well known such as dewdrop cave along the cave trail. .

Then there are caves such as this far from any trail and rarely visited. This cave provides a unique resource for wildlife in the area. Inside, perennial ice means that it is too cold for bats to live here during the summer. However, once night falls, this cave comes alive. Hundreds of bats begin their night with a visit to this cavern. Many different species from miles away converge here. While the activity is heaviest at nightfall, it continues all night long.

Using a specially built high speed camera, we can get an idea about what species are visiting the cave. The Western small footed bat. The long legged bat. The Western long eared bat. And a single image of a rare and beautiful townsend's big eared bat, a sensitive species that makes its home at craters of the moon year round. Why are bats drawn to this place? The reason is simple. Water.

Hidden away during the heat of the day, roosting bats wake up thirsty. A small cavern with a large subterranean pond provides an opportunity to start the night's hunting with a drink of cool, clean water. Bats utilize caves throughout craters of the moon. In winter for hibernation and in summer for shelter and a place to raise their young. Bats use caves such as this one to survive in a hot and arid environment. This underground pond is a valuable resource for wildlife in such a remote place.

Bats are such precision flyers that they do not need to stop to drink. They maneuver low over the pond's surface and are able to scoop up a mouthful of water in a fraction of a second. Using echolocation, bats are able to do this in complete and total darkness. The ecology of caves and the bats and other creatures who depend on them exists in a fragile balance. While hibernating or raising their young, bats are very vulnerable to any human disturbance and recently a whole new threat to bats has emerged.

In 2006, a new disease called white nose syndrome appeared in cave dwelling bat populations. While harmless to humans, this fungal disease is fatal in up to 90% of infected bats. The fungus thrives in the cold cave environments many bats use for hibernation and the hardy fungal spores can be transported between caves on boots, clothing, and equipment.

Although the epidemic began in New York it is rapidly moving West to protect caves and bats the National Park Service is restricting access to caves. Visits to caves are limited to guided tours or by

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permit. Contact the park for updated information. Besides providing critically important pest control services for the region's agricultural economy, bats are also an important part of the craters of the moon ecosystem. Please help protect our vulnerable bat populations by observing all of the rules and regulations for entering caves. In this way, all of us, both bats and humans, can continue to enjoy these subterranean passages for many years to come.

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