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# MAMMALS

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## ADAPTATION ENABLES BATS TO FLOURISH

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Bats are the most diverse group of mammals inhabiting the world today. They represent nearly 25 per cent of all mammal species known. Their success is due to sophisticated adaptations such as ultrasonic echolocation, and flight. Flying at night when most of the world's birds are sleeping allows bats to take advantage of an almost unlimited food supply of beetles, moths and other insects, while avoiding many predators. All of Saskatchewan's eight

species of regularly occurring bats are insectivorous.

The Big Brown Bat, with a wing span of 30 cm, and the Little Brown Bat, with a wing span of 25 cm, are the two species most likely encountered by people in Saskatchewan.

Areas with older buildings and larger trees near water are preferred by bats. For some reason, brick buildings seem especially attractive. Their daytime sleeping quarters, called roosts, protect bats from the elements while they rest, digest their insect meals and raise their young. Female Little Brown Bats select warm dry sites, characteristics often met by building attics, while the males choose damper sites such as caves.

Incidentally, if you have unwanted bats as guests at your home or cottage, the best way to eliminate the problem is to plug the entrance to the roost in the evening after the bats fly out to feed.

Big and Little Brown Bats roost in small colonies. Several species of solitary forest dwelling bats have a patterned coloration of the fur resembling dead leaves and lichens, which is thought to provide camouflage for bats roosting in trees. The Silver-haired and Hoary bats prefer to roost



*Big Brown Bat*

*R.J. Long*

in spruce trees and the Red Bat roosts in deciduous trees.

Each autumn most of Saskatchewan's bats make an invisible migration south to warmer climates. At least one species, the Big Brown Bat, regularly hibernates in Sas-

katchewan. While it tolerates the cold better than other species, little is known of the details of its winter roosting habits. Rarely, during a mild spell or when disturbed, these bats are seen flying when there is snow on the ground.

## **“YOUNG BIRDER OF THE YEAR” COMPETITION HELPS KIDS TAKE NOTE OF NATURE**

A new, year-long competition is being launched today that encourages young birders to develop their birding skills by keeping a field notebook for one year. The competition is being launched by the American Birding Association and Leica Sport Optics.

Entrants will be asked to keep a field notebook and write several essays over the course of a year. Notebooks will be judged by a panel of birding experts next spring who will look for the greatest improvements in birding techniques, including observation skills, field sketching, and creativity. Entrants will be judged in three age categories: 10-12 years, 13-15 years, and 16-18 years.

ABA's Executive Director Greg Butcher said of the competition, "ABA is committed to supporting the interests of young birders through education programs that develop the skills of detailed and accurate observation and record keeping. These skills will serve birders well for the rest of their lives."

First prize in each category includes a pair of Leica 8X32 BA Ultra Binoculars and a scholarship to attend a field ornithology summer camp in the Rockies. Entry fees for the competition are \$15.00 for ABA members, or \$20.00 for non-members, and include a Registration Packet containing an ABA Field Notebook, the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, and the ABA youth newsletter *A Bird's-Eye View*.

In the United States in 1991, an estimated 65 million people fed birds, and 54 million reported watching wildlife around their homes. Of these, about 51 million were "backyard" birdwatchers. (USDI Survey, 1993) In a 1990 survey, twice as many vacationers preferred to watch birds than play golf! (Fortune, 1990)

The American Birding Association is an international non-profit birding and bird conservation organization headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado. ABA provides leadership to field birders by increasing their knowledge, skills, and enjoyment of birding, and by contributing to bird conservation. To learn more about membership in the ABA, or to request a 'Young Birder of the Year' registration packet, contact Paul Green at (719) 578-9703, email paulgrn@aba.org, or visit the ABA web site and [www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org).

Leica Sport Optics is the premier supplier of optics equipment to the birding market and is based in Northvale, NJ. For further information contact Terry Moore @ (201) 767-7500.

*(Editor's note: To help support the ABA's initiative to encourage young people to develop as naturalists Nature Saskatchewan will pay the entry fees for up to three people, one from each age group. Please contact the executive for details.)*