



Your response to the competition in our recent journals has been tremendous, with 70 entries to the "Save-Us" quiz and crossword and all of them correct! Although we could only draw one name out of the hat for first prize you are clearly all winners in the field of nature interpretation. Keep up the good work!

Congratulations to Howard Smith of Marton for winning the *Readers Digest Book of Birds*. Special tribute must to the Mangawhai Beach School for their great efforts

and to Olivia King for sending in the photo (top right) of the models made by her class during their tuatara project.

This month we take a look at our only native land mammals — bats, whose Maori name is Pekapeka. We have also included a game similar to snakes and ladders.

I hope you continue to respond to and enjoy these pages.

Terary Harrison



Batty about bats

Bats are curious animals. You can tell how humans feel about them by the way they call crazy people "batty" or say that they have "bats in their belfry".

People's opinions about New Zealand bats have, unfortunately, been influenced by overseas experience, where bats are not always popular and seem to be often associated with haunted places. That's probably because they like dark and dank homes.

Your chances of seeing the two species of New Zealand native bat are slim — you will have to visit mature forests where there are old hollow trees or caves in which the bats roost by day. Only the size of a mouse, the two kinds of bats in New Zealand are the short-tailed and long-tailed bat. They are also the only native New Zealand mammals.

At dusk the bats can be seen flying in the darkening sky catching insects such as moths which are often scooped up in their wings or tail webbing. Flying insects form their staple diet.

The long-tailed bat hunts only in the air. However, its short-tailed cousin can also be seen feeding on fruit and flowers while crawling "on all fours" over tree trunks and branches. It can do this because it has developed a way of folding its wings to allow it to move about. This unique feature, and a small tail, help tell the two species apart.

The bats are covered with short, reddish brown fur. Poor eyesight means they mostly rely on their large ears — operating like radar beacons — to "see". Their ears collect the echoes from their high pitched squeaks which bounce off objects like trees. This enables them to navigate in the dark.

The wingspan of both bats is between 25 to 30cm. When coming in to rest, bats fly in slowly, land and hang on with toes and thumbs, then turn and hang upside down by their hind toes. They are very sociable and huddle together for warmth. Long-tailed bats hibernate for short periods in win-



Photo by courtesy of Wildlife Service

ter and breed in the summer. A milk-fed young bat can sometimes be seen clinging to its mother's back for several weeks — even when she's flying.

Our short-tailed bat is very rare. It plays host to the remarkable wingless bat fly which feeds solely on deposits of bat guano within the bat's tree roost. Relatively new to science, this bat fly is endangered, like the short-tailed bat itself. They are rare because their lowland forest homes have been destroyed and chemical controls have reduced their insect food supply.

Today people feel better about bats than they used to. In 1874 a large colony of long-tailed bats was driven out of Geraldine's limestone caves by the blasting of a mining company. They then settled in to the belfry tower of the All Angels Church in Geraldine where they stayed for two weeks, much to the horror of the local community, before disappearing forever.

Department of Conservation staff who look after our historic places are now breeding bats so that they can be released from the Geraldine church every year. John Daniels, who is in charge of the operation, believes they will not only attract visitors to the recently restored church, but also help in establishing bat colonies. Surely not a batty idea? 🦇