

NEW ZEALAND'S *Elusive* Native Bats

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Bats are among the least known and most rarely seen of the native vertebrate animals in New Zealand. They hide by day in forest trees or caves, and only emerge to feed at dusk or after dark. Despite diligent study for over 10 years, we still know very little about the natural history and distribution of these secretive mammals. Ecology Division DSIR would like to enlist the help of Forest and Bird members to increase our limited knowledge of the distribution of bats throughout the country in order to assist with efforts to ensure their continued survival.

MANY NEW ZEALANDERS are surprised to hear that we have bats in this country. While Australia has over 60 species of bats and Britain has 15 species, New Zealand has only three species of bats, but one of these has probably become extinct as recently as 1965. However, New Zealand's modest bat fauna makes up in scientific interest what it lacks in numbers, with the two species of short-tailed bats belonging to a family of bats unique to this country. These small furry flying mammals, called 'pekapeka' by the Maori, have the distinction of being our only native land mammals.

Long-tailed Bats

The only relatively common species of bat, and the one most likely to be seen flying at dusk, is the long-tailed bat (*Chalinolobus tuberculatus*). This little bat, weighing only 8-10g, has small rounded ears, and long silky black or dark brown fur. Its long tail is almost as long as its body, and is joined to the hind legs on each side by a large 'v'-shaped tail membrane. This tail membrane is used like a butterfly net to catch and hold insects in flight. It can sometimes be seen if the bat is flying reasonably close to the observer and the light is still good.

Long-tailed bats are like nocturnal fantails



The lesser short-tailed bat.



The long tailed bat is the most common of our two native bats. Photo: DoC.