

# PEKAPEKA

## New Zealand's secretive bats

*At one time there were four bat species in New Zealand. Today only two survive. Yet, despite their unique status as this country's only land-living native mammals, very little is known about what they do and even whether they are endangered. TIM HIGHAM reports on how some of the mysteries are being unravelled.*



*Lesser short-tailed male bat at his lek hole in a totara on Codfish Island. With a sound audible to some humans, bats sing and warble for up to eight hours a night, over several months, to try and attract females into their holes.*

ROD MORRIS

**D**USK in Fiordland's Eglinton Valley, even in late February, brings a chill to the air.

The wind dies away and with it our conversation.

We prefer momentarily the company of high, dark hills and paling sky. Then silhouetted against the last of the day's light is what we came to observe. Suddenly close by, it flutters like a magnificent butterfly above the stream.

Darting, changing direction and speed in strange, staggered flight, it forages on mayflies hatching from the water.

The object of our curiosity is a long-tailed bat which, along with its lesser short-tailed cousin, is New Zealand's only native terrestrial mammal.

Surprisingly little is known about bats by the general public. Their habits of being active only at night and of covering large territories using multiple roost sites, have not helped the very few people who

have attempted to study them.

Of the four species known to have existed, the long-tailed bat is the most common and is widely distributed through the North and South Islands, Stewart Island, Little Barrier and Great Barrier Islands and Kapiti Island. The lesser short-tailed bat is found only in a few scattered North Island forest sites, North-West Nelson Forest Park, and on Little Barrier Island and Codfish Island. The greater short-tailed bat became