



PHOTOS BY TOM LEMKE



COMMONWEALTH of the  
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

• Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)  
• Maug  
• Asuncion

• Agrihan

• Pagan

• Alamagan

• Guguan

• Sarigan

• Anatahan

• Farallon de Medinilla

• Saipan

• Tinian  
• Aguiluan

• Rota

★ Distribution in the CNMI

ENDANGERED

## SHEATH-TAILED BAT

Fanihin Liyang Payesyey/Pai'Scheei  
*Chamorro* *Carolinian*

### IDENTIFICATION

The Sheath-tailed bat, *Emballonura semicaudata*, is a small brown bat weighing less than a quarter of an ounce (5.5g). It has a wingspan of eight to nine inches. A pronounced thumb with a claw is located on the leading edge of each wing. This bat has rounded black ears and a relatively long tail surrounded by a well-developed skin-like membrane forming a sheath, thus the name Sheath-tailed. Full-grown adult Sheath-tailed bats are smaller in size than baby Mariana fruit bats, the only other bat native to the CNMI.

### HABITAT and FEEDING

A native species, the Sheath-tailed bat is found on Aguiluan. It was once believed to be quite rare, but recently bats have been found nesting and foraging over much of the island. The bats roost in small colonies of several to sixty-five animals and are known from several caves. They emerge from the caves at dusk to feed on a variety of small flying insects such as gnats, mosquitoes, moths and beetles. Most feeding occurs in native forests, while open fields appear to be avoided. They use echolocation, or sonar, to navigate through caves and forests and to detect and capture their prey.

Ecologically, Sheath-tailed bats are similar to Mariana swiftlets, small birds that also roost in caves and feed on aerial insects. Swiftlets are active during the day, whereas the bats are active at night.

### REPRODUCTION

Sheath-tailed bats typically give birth to only one young per year. Records indicate that bats may be born in various months throughout the year. Like other insectivorous bats, the young are dependent on their mothers for several months. Females give birth and raise their young in small maternity groups, while males roost in other locations. The young are left to roost in caves while the mother feeds.

### THREATS and CONSERVATION

Sheath-tailed bats are native to the Mariana Islands, Palau, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu. Populations have declined on many of these islands in recent years. The only remaining population in the Mariana Islands is on Aguiluan, because populations on Saipan, Rota and Guam were lost between the 1940s and 1970s. The causes of localized extinctions are unknown, but may have involved pesticide contamination, deforestation, degradation of caves, or introduced predators.

In 1991, the Sheath-tailed bat was placed on the CNMI threatened and endangered species list. The CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife is monitoring the status of the remaining population. Protecting caves and native forests on Aguiluan is an important step in the conservation of this species. Other species that benefit from protection of caves and native forests include the Mariana swiftlet and unique cave invertebrates.

## LITTLE FAT BAT

Sheath-tailed bats eat hundreds of insects each night, consuming more than their entire body weight in just a few nights.

**FACTOID!**



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