

Hello and welcome to another installment of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument's Ranger Minutes. In today's episode we are going to talk about one of the smaller, rarely seen desert mammals, the lesser long nosed bat. An endangered species, the lesser long nosed bat is one of 13 bat species known to occur within Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Surprisingly, this little bat plays a very important role in the health and lives of the famous southwest cacti.

The arrival of the hot and dry Sonoran summer also signals the arrival of over one hundred thousand lesser longed nosed bats from central Mexico. Traveling distances upwards of 3700 miles, they are attracted by the promise of feeding on the flowering saguaro and organ pipe cactus, and take up roost in the abundant caves and abandoned mineshafts. The bat population is entirely female and pregnant, with the promise of feeding and raising their young in the surprisingly lush Sonoran Desert.

Once here, the bats begin their nightly feast of cactus nectar. When the night-blooming saguaro and organ pipe flowers first open, they emit a sweet perfume. The bats are attracted by the sweet odor, and poke their long noses into the cactus flower, reaching for the sugary nectar and lap it up with their long tongues. When the bats finish eating, they emerge from the flowers with their heads covered in pollen. As these feeding bats fly from flower to flower, they also pollinate the flowers, allowing the organ pipe and saguaro cactus to produce fruit.

As the flowers begin to wither during the later summer months, the bats will change their diet and become fruit eaters. The bats diet can now consist almost entirely of saguaro and organ pipe fruits, using the succulent fruits as a source of water during the dry summer. The fruit is easy to digest, but the fruit's seeds, are not. As the bats fly and travel, they spread the seeds over vast distances, allowing the cactus species to spread and grow. So their presence is key for the rebirth of the Organ Pipe and Saguaro Cactus.

During the height of the summer months when the temperature rises and water becomes scarce, the mother and child bats begin their epic journey south, only to return once again in time for the cactus bloom. This story tells us how interconnected the desert life has become, dependent on each other for their very survival. Thank you very much; and that is today's Ranger Minute.