

Westphoria

[Carlsbad Confidential: The Bats](#)

October 31, 2014 | By [Megan McCrea](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)



Mexican free-tailed bat (Tadarida brasiliensis)
(via USFWS/Ann Froschauer)

Every fall, thousands of visitors pour into [Carlsbad Caverns](#) in New Mexico. And, every autumn night, thousands of bats pour *out*. I sat down with Dr. Ken Geluso, biologist and author of [Bats of Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#), to get the low-down on these high-flyers.

“Mexican free-tailed bats are highly colonial and cave dwelling, so they need caves [like those in [Carlsbad Caverns](#)] that have large, spacious ceilings.

From spring, when the bats arrive, until late autumn, when they leave, the park holds [bat flight programs](#). Each night, hundreds and hundreds of visitors sit in a large amphitheater, right in front of the entry to Carlsbad Cavern. When the [bats](#) decide to come out, they come out in a column, a steady stream of little black specks. A lot of people describe it, from a distance, as smoke rising from the ground. That's supposedly how Carlsbad Cavern was originally discovered.

A park ranger comes out and tells the visitors facts about bats; they dispel common misconceptions and emphasize the ecological importance of bats in terms of eating and controlling the populations of night-flying insects. Then [the visitors] watch the bat flight, and I don't think there's one person in the world—I don't care if they like bats or not—that is not just amazed, watching that stream of bats coming right over their heads."



Carlsbad cavern entrance (photo by Flickr user Luke Jones)

Want to see the bats of Carlsbad for yourself? Find more information [here](#).