

SA's "bat man" comes to town

South East residents have a great opportunity to learn about the bats of the Limestone Coast at a special community presentation to be held in Mount Gambier on Wednesday 7 May.

The presentation, which is a joint initiative between the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) and the Southern and Central Natural Resources Management Groups, will take place in City Hall, Old Town Hall, Commercial Street East, from 7.00 pm.

DEH Regional Ecologist Randall Johnson said the Bats of the Limestone Coast presentation is the third of a series of four presentations held during autumn and winter 2008 to give the South East community an opportunity to learn about local wildlife.

"The aim of the presentation is to increase awareness among the local community about the bats of the Limestone Coast and to dispel some of the common myths associated with one of Australia's most widespread and diverse mammal groups," Mr Johnson said.

"Terry Reardon from the South Australian Museum will be presenting on the ecology, conservation and management of the bat species of the Limestone Coast.

"Terry has over 20 years of experience in bat ecology and conservation and has worked in many parts of Australia and New Guinea.

"The audience will learn all about the bat species of the South East Region – where they live, what they eat, how they navigate in the dark, how we study them and what the local community can do to help conserve and protect these species," he said.

A total of 17 bat species, from four families, are known to occur in the South East. Of these species, fifteen are small, insect-eating bats that use echolocation or sonar to navigate and detect insect prey. The remaining two species are fruit or nectar-feeding bats, which are typically large in size and rely on sight and smell to navigate and find food.

The critically endangered Southern Bentwing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*) is endemic to the South East and adjacent areas of western Victoria. The Naracoorte Caves is renowned for being one of only two known maternity colonies for the species in the region. Urgent conservation measures are required to sustain a long-term viable population of the species into the future.

Over the past several years, the occurrence of the Grey-headed Flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) has increased markedly across the South East.

The region forms the most western limit of the species' range with core

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populations or camps typically occupying more tropical regions along eastern Australia. An increased incidence of this species in the region is thought to be a result of limited food availability elsewhere across the species' core range.

Bat Facts

- Over 75 bat species, from seven families, are known to occur in Australia.
- Despite the misconceptions, there are no species of 'blood-sucking' or 'vampire' bats in Australia.
- The saying 'blind as a bat' is untrue; both the mega- and micro-bats can surprisingly see quite well.
- Bats are unique in that they are the only mammals capable of sustained flight.
- Bats fall under the group or order 'Chiroptera', which means 'hand-wing'.
- Almost one quarter of all native mammal species that occur in the South East region are bats.
- Young bats are referred to as 'pups'.
- Microbats use 'echolocation' or 'sonar' to navigate and search for insect prey in the dark.
- Bats do not need to 'hold on' while hanging upside-down. The muscles in their feet are actually used to let go of objects.

Editors' note: *Photos and film footage of the Southern Bentwing Bat maternity colony are available on request. Call Randall Johnson on 08 8735 1122.*

