

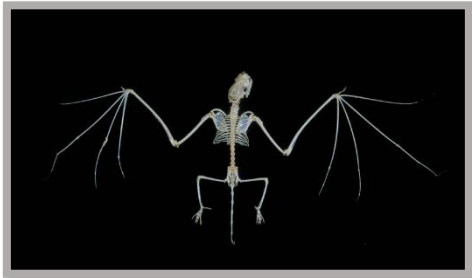
# Oakland Owlet's Bat Hike @ Stony Creek Metropark

The Oakland Owlet's families and friends spent an evening looking for bats and birds on Saturday September 23 at Stony Creek Metropark. A special thank you to Erin Parker, Interpretive Services Supervisor for sharing her time and leading this hike. This field trip was planned in 2022, but circumstances prevented it from taking place. Erin Parker offered to assist the Oakland Owlets with a Bat Hike this year.



Owlet's families and friends met Erin outside of Stony Creek Nature Center just before sunset. Erin had a treasure trove of biological artifacts to share with us

about bats. The first order of the night was to discuss what a bat is. Although bats fly like birds, bats are mammals. They are the only mammals capable of truly flying. Through



pictures, posters and a bat skeleton, Erin explained how stretched skin between the bat's specialized fingers, legs and tails forms membranous wings. The bat's long tail provides the framework which is used like a catcher's mitt to snag insects in flight. Bats provide many ecological services including pollination and insect control which are important to agriculture throughout the world.

Erin discussed bats found in Michigan. All Michigan bats eat insects. Michigan bats can consume between 600 to 1,000 mosquito sized insects per hour under normal seasonal conditions. Everyone appreciated knowing this because it was a warm evening and mosquitoes were active. Erin had photos of each species of bat. There are nine different bats known in Michigan. However, biologists at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have discovered a southern bat during their Metroparks' surveys. This bat was detected during our hike.

While Erin was speaking, a bat darted overhead. Erin identified this bat as a "**Hoary Bat.**" Erin used an Echometer to identify this bat. This device couples a microphone with computer software that detects the echoes bats emit while flying. Bats locate flying insects at night through a process known as "echolocation." Using high-pitched sound waves to pinpoint insects, bats zoom towards them. Erin shared the software identifies bat species by their distinct vocal signatures. Metroparks also works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to verify bat species detected in the parks.



Several species of Michigan bats are endangered or threatened. Bats have a low reproductive rate and are not quickly replaced if populations are reduced. Bats are impacted by pesticide use, the general decline of insects, the lack of places to hibernate, loss of habitat, climate change and the introduction of white nose syndrome. White nose syndrome is a fungal disease that is killing bats across the country. This deadly fungal disease has spread rapidly in the past decade in North America and originated in Europe.



As the sunlight faded, we walked toward Stony Creek in search of bats. Within a few steps Erin found a new bat species. In low light it became harder to see bats flying overhead, but Erin was detecting new echolocations on the Echometer frequently. A few birds called as the sun set including Red-winged Blackbird, American Robin, American Crow, and Blue Jay. Our attention turned to the enveloping darkness.

Erin was excited to find the Seminole Bat, a southern species that was new to the park surveys. With each new bat, Erin would share some details about these bats. Before long we discovered four distinct species. By the time we reached Stony Creek, we encountered the **Hoary, Silver Haired, Tri-colored** and **Seminole Bats**. Everyone quietly followed Erin. Then, Erin suggested moving back to the nature center in hope of seeing the Big Brown Bat that usually flies over the building.

We found an American Toad dining on the insects attracted to night light next to the building. The toad's eyes glowed from the light reflective membrane that helps them see in the dark. Erin was successful in finding both the **Big Brown Bat and the Northern Long-eared Bat**. This was a record setting evening in that we discovered six species of bats on our hike.



We made our way back to the parking lot and everyone thanked Erin for her time and our successful bat search. Michigan Department of Natural Resources Bat Posters were given to everyone. The moon was bright, but it was dark. Everyone gained a new appreciation of the importance of bats and their place in nature.

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