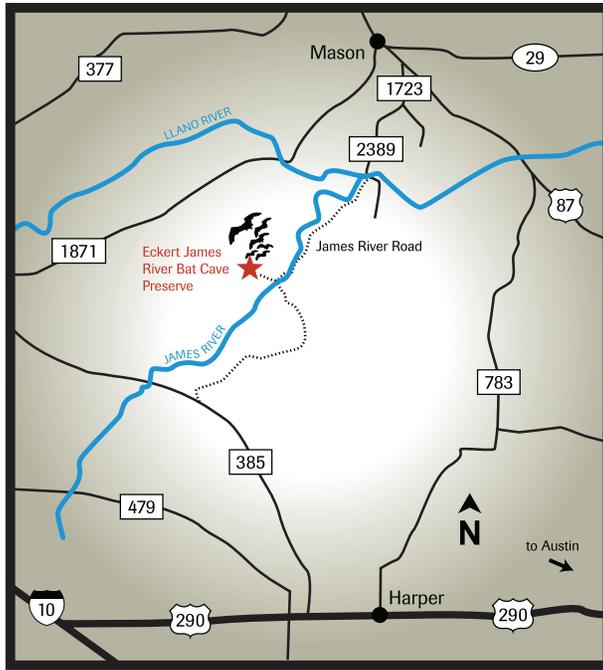


**VISIT**

The Nature Conservancy's Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve is open to visitors at scheduled times during the bat season. Be sure to call (325) 347-5970 for up to date schedule information before heading to the cave.

Please remember that the preserve is a true wilderness area. Electricity, restrooms, water and food are not available, and pets are not allowed on preserve grounds. There is no smoking on preserve grounds. The cave is approximately 500 yards from the parking area and can only be reached by a trail leading over a slight incline that is not wheelchair accessible. Benches are provided for seating near the cave entrance.



**DIRECTIONS & CONTACT INFORMATION**

From the town of Mason, follow FM 2389 for 8.3 miles along a partially unpaved road until you reach the James River. Drive slowly; the road may be slick but is safe to cross under normal conditions.

The preserve is located approximately 0.5 miles past the river crossing. As the road curves sharply to the left, look for a gated entrance on the right.

**FEES**

Adults ..... \$5/person  
Children (AGES 5 AND UNDER) ..... Free



Learn more at [nature.org/texas](http://nature.org/texas)

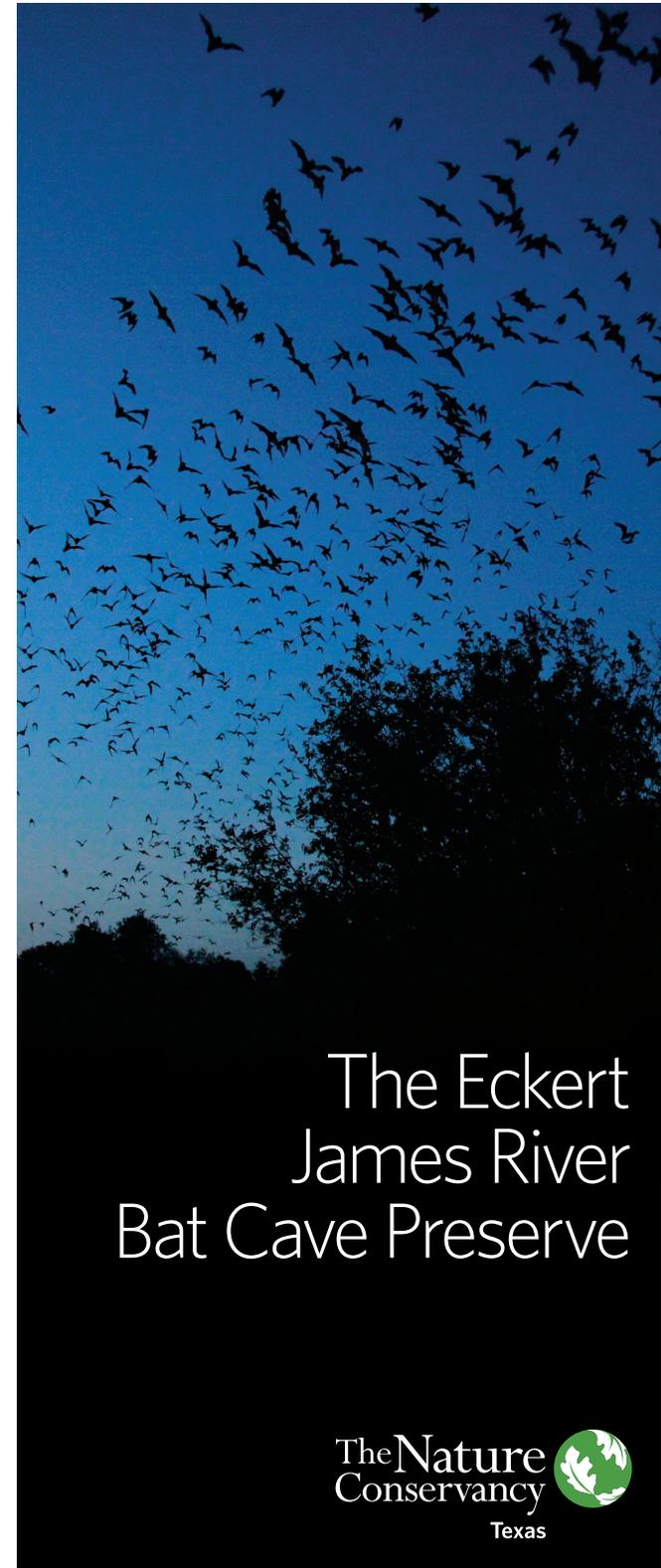
(325) 347-5970 MAY-SEPTEMBER (512) 263-8878 OCTOBER-APRIL

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*Disturbance and destruction of roost sites has led to a dramatic decline in free-tailed bat populations.*

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# The Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve



*A Mexican free-tailed bat consumes nearly its body weight in insects, every night.*



© HEATHER DIEHL

*The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.*

Nestled in the Texas Hill Country southwest of the town of Mason is the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve, one of the largest bat nurseries in the country. About four million female Mexican free-tailed bats inhabit the site from May through September each year, making the cave their home to birth and raise pups before returning to Mexico.

While tranquil during the day, in the hours just before sunset, hundreds of bats flutter and chirp restlessly around the mouth of the cave. Slowly, a stream of bats emerges and flies in a low, large circle, just outside the cave's entrance. They gradually spiral upwards, creating a funnel of flying mammals that reaches several hundred feet into the evening sky. The bats at the top of the spiral then break off into columns that stream out over the countryside. This densely-packed "bat tornado" is visible to spectators for about an hour, forming a sight completely unlike any other.

The Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve is home to one of the largest aggregations of warm-blooded animals in the world. Historically, bats were considered menacing creatures to be avoided or destroyed. Now, thanks to the work of biologists and groups like Bat Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy, they are recognized as an integral component of the region's ecology. Bats play a critical role in maintaining the balance of nature, with some species acting as agents of seed dispersal and cross-pollination. Mexican free-tailed bats help control insect populations; each night, they consume nearly their own body weight in mosquitoes and crop pests like cut worm and corn borer moths.

The free-tailed bat population has declined dramatically in some areas of the country, largely due to the disturbance and destruction of roost sites by humans. Because free-tailed bats give birth to only a single pup each year, the population's recovery rate is slow. The Conservancy's goal is to protect these bats and their critical habitat and to provide access for the public to visit and witness the dramatic evening emergence. The preserve also serves as an important research site, helping to inform bat conservation strategies across the state.

### **HISTORY**

The Eckert family acquired the property on which the preserve sits in 1907. In the early 1900s, W. Phillip Eckert mined the cave's bat guano and sold it to local farmers for crop fertilizer. His son, Lee Eckert, continued his father's legacy of bat conservation and guano mining and left the site to his wife and children when he passed away in 1967. In 1990, Richard Phillip Eckert and Virginia Eckert Garrett donated the cave to The Nature Conservancy to honor their father, Lee, and grandfather, W. Phillip.



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Visit [nature.org/texas](https://www.nature.org/texas) to learn more about Mexican free-tailed bats.