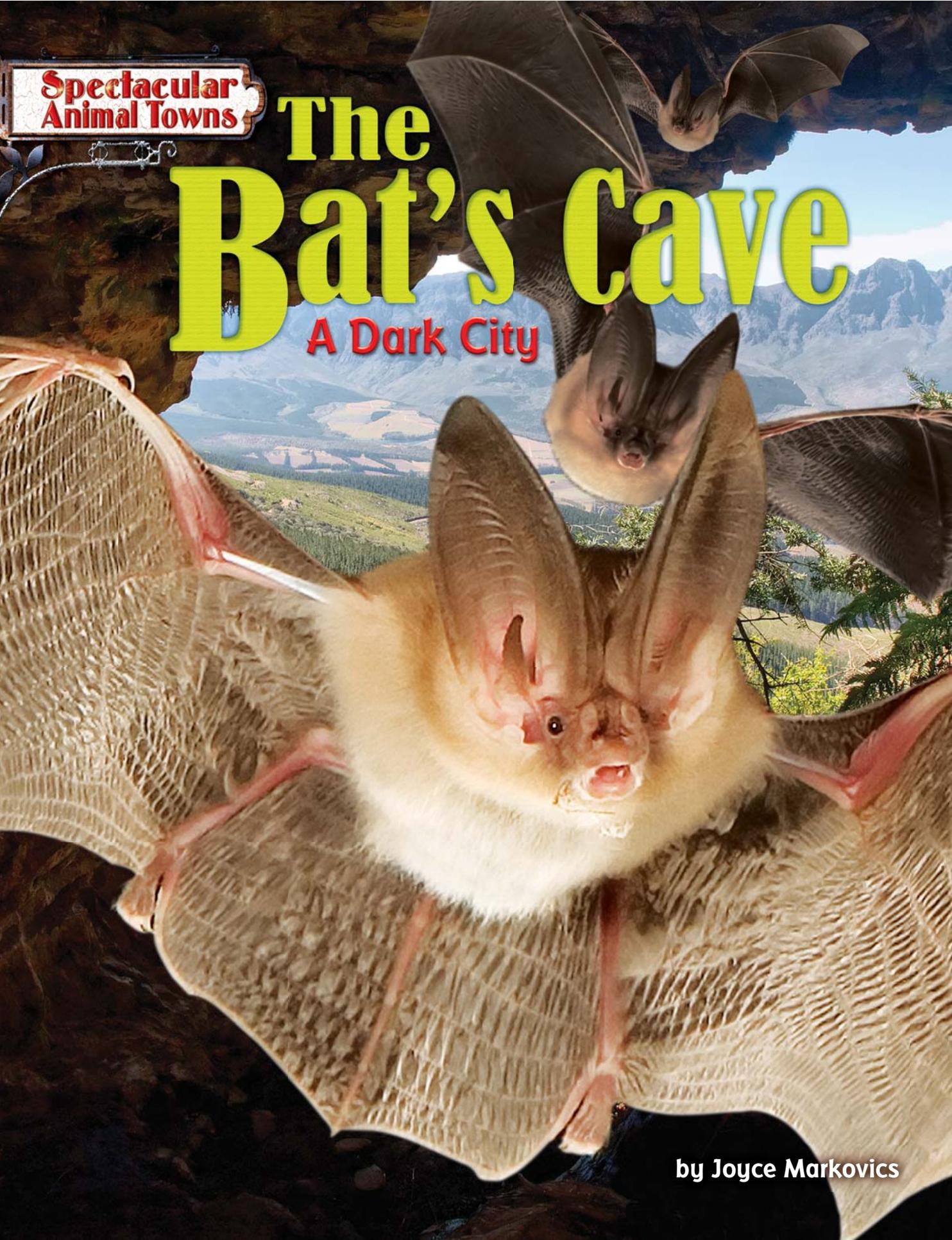


**Spectacular
Animal Towns**

The Bat's Cave

A Dark City



by Joyce Markovics

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The Bat's Cave

A Dark City



by Joyce Markovics

Consultants:

Susi von Oettingen, Endangered Species Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Jim Kennedy, Conservation Biologist
Cave and Mine Resources Specialist, Bat Conservation International

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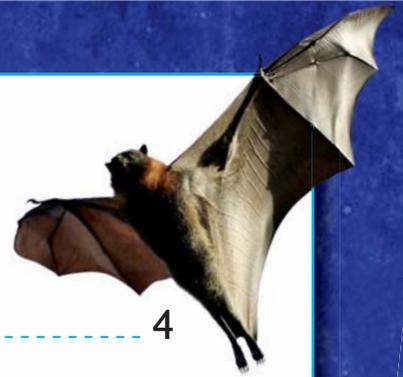
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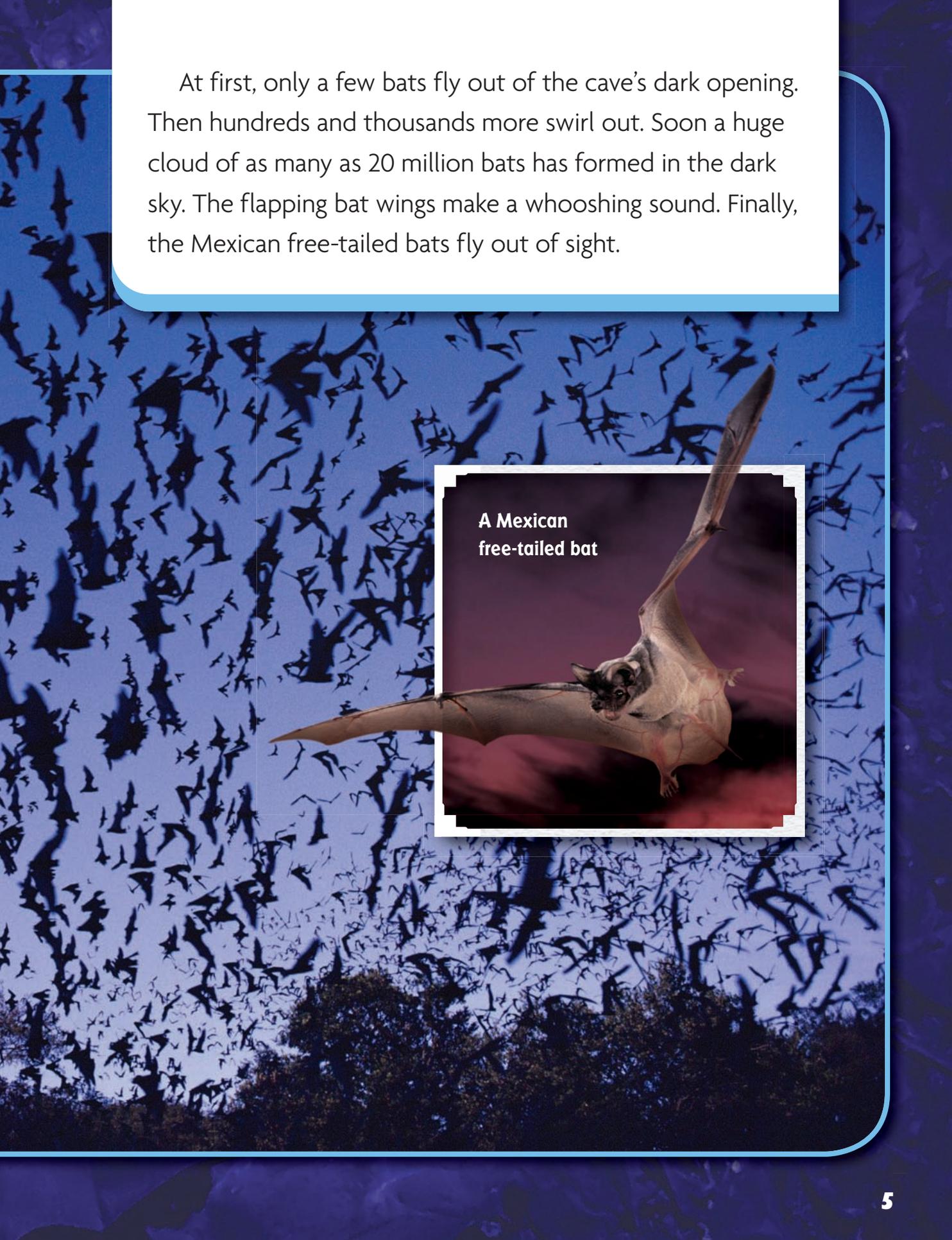
Bat Rush Hour

Just before the sun sets in South Central Texas, the summer sky comes alive. It's the time when Mexican free-tailed bats exit their home in Bracken Bat **Cave**. "For more than two hours they leave the cave and spiral higher and higher into the air," says **biologist** Gary F. McCracken.

A stream of Mexican free-tailed bats leaving Bracken Bat Cave

Bracken Bat Cave, located outside of San Antonio, Texas, houses the largest known bat **colony** in the world. There are more bats living in the cave than there are people living in Mumbai, India—one of the world's largest human cities.

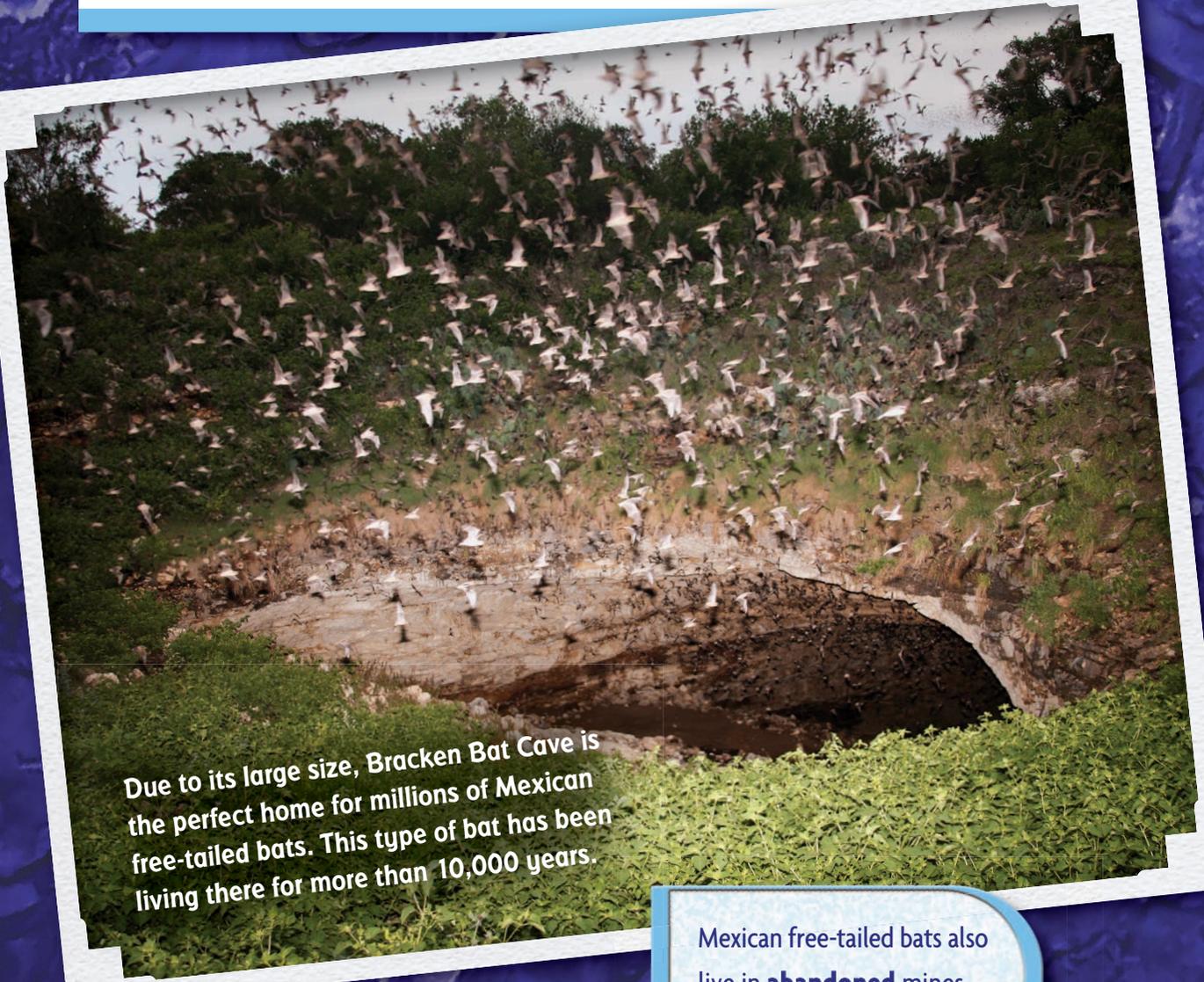
At first, only a few bats fly out of the cave's dark opening. Then hundreds and thousands more swirl out. Soon a huge cloud of as many as 20 million bats has formed in the dark sky. The flapping bat wings make a whooshing sound. Finally, the Mexican free-tailed bats fly out of sight.

A large colony of Mexican free-tailed bats flying at dusk. The sky is filled with hundreds of bats in flight, their wings creating a dense pattern against the twilight. The background shows the dark silhouettes of trees at the bottom of the frame.

**A Mexican
free-tailed bat**

A Supersize Cave

Bracken Bat Cave is huge—large enough to house the 20 million bats that **roost** there. Its entrance, a big hole in the ground, leads to a dark underground city. Unlike a human city that has many buildings, the cave is just one giant room, nearly 100 feet (30 m) wide.



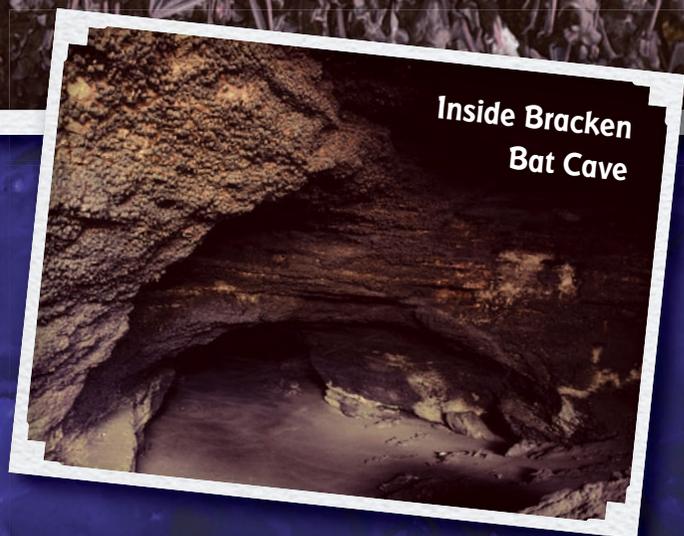
Due to its large size, Bracken Bat Cave is the perfect home for millions of Mexican free-tailed bats. This type of bat has been living there for more than 10,000 years.

Mexican free-tailed bats also live in **abandoned** mines, tunnels, and under bridges.

During the day, the Mexican free-tailed bats rest and sleep safely in this giant city. They hang upside-down from the cave's jagged ceiling. Hooked claws and special **tendons** in their feet let them cling to the stony ceiling without tiring. In this position, they can hide from **predators** such as snakes or quickly launch into flight when it's time to feed.

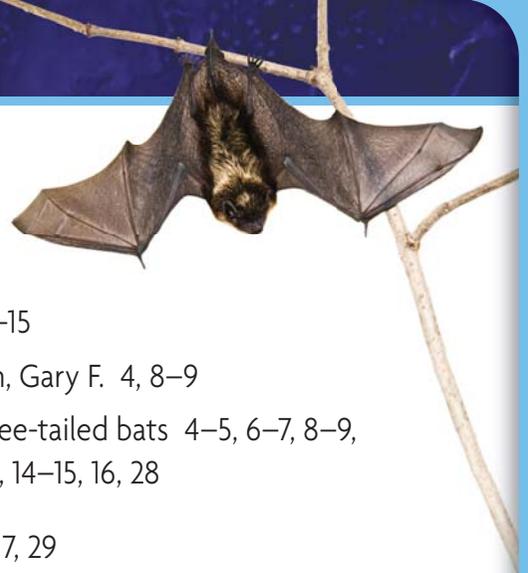


Mexican free-tailed bats roosting in Bracken Bat Cave



Inside Bracken Bat Cave

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About the Author

Joyce L. Markovics is an editor, writer, and orchid collector. She lives with her husband, Adam, and their pet aquatic frog. She owes special thanks to Reuben Richardson, her guide to Anguilla's bat caves.

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**Spectacular
Animal Towns**

The Bat's Cave

A Dark City

Just before the sun sets in a part of South Central Texas, the summer sky comes alive. It's the time when Mexican free-tailed bats leave their home in Bracken Bat Cave to find food. At first, only a few bats fly out of the cave's dark opening. Then hundreds and thousands more swirl out of the underground city. Soon a huge cloud of as many as 20 million bats has formed.

Look inside to enter the bats' dark world. You'll discover how these unique animals hunt, sleep, and raise their young. You'll also find out how they spend their days and what they do during their long, nightly flights.

The Ant's Nest

A Huge, Underground City

The Bat's Cave

A Dark City

The Beaver's Lodge

Building with Leftovers

The Coral Reef

A Giant City Under the Sea

The Honey Bee's Hive

A Thriving City

The Prairie Dog's Town

A Perfect Hideaway

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