

Bat — Keneryaq

ALIKTAANKA KENERYAT. – THE BATS SCARE ME.



Photo: Little brown bat. Courtesy of the USFWS National Digital Archives.

Bats are not widespread in Alaska. There are just five species of these small flying mammals found mostly in forested areas of southeast and south-central Alaska, where trees provide good roosting places. The most common Alaskan variety is the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), which lives year-round in the Kodiak region.

Little brown bats live in small colonies. They are nocturnal animals that feed on insects at night and roost during the day in rock overhangs, trees, abandoned buildings, and chimneys. Biologists believe the little brown bat was one of the early animal colonizers of the Kodiak Archipelago. These animals are common in the region's northern spruce forests, but can also be seen beyond the limits of coniferous trees. Residents of Larsen Bay report that bats may roost in their attics and campers encounter them in the Karluk drainage.

The Alutiiq word for bat—*keneryaq*—comes from the word for fire—*keneq*. Elders say this is because bats are known to circle a fire. One Elder tells a story about a powerful shaman who caused a young woman to become very ill. The shaman took the shape of a bat to spy on the woman but was captured in his bat form and placed into a container of urine. Here he died. After his death, the young woman recovered from her illness.