

Bats in Feistritz an der Gail

There are two hotspots with important bat colonies within the municipal district: St. Martin's Church on the one hand, and the power station building, or bat house, on the other. Three bat species use these buildings as nursery roosts, including the **lesser horseshoe bat** (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), the **whiskered bat** (*Myotis mystacinus*) and the **mouse-eared bat** (*Myotis myotis*).

The **nursery roosts** are occupied in the warmer months and are typical reproduction roosts for native bat species. The almost exclusively female bats give birth to their young and raise them until they are independent. Towards autumn, adults and juveniles leave these roosts to return the following year and provide for new offspring.

25 species of bats, divided into two families, are native to Carinthia. The horseshoe bats (Rhinolophidae) with 2 species, and the Myotis bats (Vespertilionidae) form the remaining families.

Lesser horseshoe bat

This species is one of the two representatives of the horseshoe bat family (Rhinolophidae) and is much more common in Carinthia than its sister species, the greater horseshoe bat. One of the smallest bat species, it is easy to recognise due to its distinctive horseshoe-shaped nose. The dorsal fur of adult animals is brownish, while their belly fur is light grey to white.

Lesser horseshoe bats prefer climatically temperate areas with a wide range of structures as habitats. Deciduous and mixed deciduous forests are their preferred hunting grounds. They use extremely high-frequency echolocation calls to skilfully navigate around treetops at night and capture their very small, air-born prey with high accuracy. They only catch their prey in flight.

Their summertime nursery roosts are often in the attics of old churches, castles, large buildings or private homes. Male specimens use a wide range of roosts, including large rock crevices. In winter, the lesser horseshoe bat prefers to roost in frost-free caves, tunnels and old cellars.

In 2022, 66 adult lesser horseshoe bats were found in St. Martin's Church and around 200 in the bat house.

The current Red List of Carinthia classified the species as NT (Near Threatened, early warning level).

The species is listed in Appendices II and IV of the Habitats Directive.

Whiskered bat

This small, often very contrastingly coloured bat can be found relatively frequently in village settlements, in open or semi-open landscapes in Central Europe. The whiskered bat and its very close relatives, such as Brandt's bat and David's myotis, are very difficult to distinguish on the basis of morphological characteristics. Genetic testing is almost the only way to determine the species.

The whiskered bat uses a variety of crevice-shaped nursery roosts such as wooden panelling on houses, cracks and crevices in roofs or protruding pieces of bark on trees, as well as artificial roosts such as bat boards on various structures such as hunting hides, transformers or barns.

Their prey includes diptera, small moths caught in flight, but also caterpillars, beetles and other arthropods such as spiders.

The colony has had a nursery in one of the two bat boards on the north side of the bat house for several years. In 2022 there were around 100 adult whiskered bats in the bat boards. According to the current Red List of Carinthia, it was classified as LC (Least Concern, not endangered).

The species is named in Appendix IV of the Habitats Directive.

Mouse-eared bat

The mouse-eared bat is the largest bat species in Carinthia. Its wingspan can reach up to 44 centimetres. Its dorsal fur is reddish to yellowish-brown and the belly is a dirty white. The snout and ears are relatively broad.

Its habitat correlates strongly with the presence of deciduous and mixed deciduous forests with sparsely vegetated ground. It usually hunts close to the ground over freshly harvested fields, mowed meadows and pastures. They identify their prey by the rustling noises they make and swoop down from a low height. They prefer large insects such as ground beetles and grasshoppers, but also mole crickets.

The female nursery roosts are always spacious attics in churches, castles and old buildings. The male roosts also vary in type. The mouse-eared bat has similar roosting preferences to the lesser horseshoe bat.

Mouse-eared bats can form nursery colonies consisting of up to 5000 animals.

In St. Martin's Church, an exit count in 2022 recorded around 1600 individuals. According to the current Red List of Carinthia, it was classified as VU (Vulnerable, endangered).

The species is listed in Appendices II and IV of the Habitats Directive.

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