

Notes on Hoary Bats from Yavapai Co., AZ

7 April 2018

I camped overnight at the Santa Maria River, Yavapai Co, AZ, with Jim Higgs, a herpetologist friend from Prescott. We pulled off Highway 96 and drove south on Santa Maria Road to look for snakes and other nocturnal critters. It was late in the day by the time we parked and dropped into the riparian corridor of the Santa Maria River to where some water was surfacing in a few isolated pools. We walked downstream along the line of willows and at 18:30 we saw a **Hoary Bat** in flight, pacing back and forth above the riparian area, roughly 30 m above the ground. With binoculars I could see the silvery fur, rusty face, and pale leading edge of the wing contrasting with the dark trailing edge. Just before it got too dark to see, we noticed another Hoary Bat hanging from a thin branch roughly 6 m up in a Goodding Willow (*Salix gooddingii*). Upon further inspection, we saw 2 more individuals clinging to the trunk of the same tree all within a meter from one another. We saw another 3 individuals in flight, making it at least 6 Hoary Bats just in that stretch of forest. A few smaller bats, most likely Pipistrelles or Myotis, were darting over the water.

The next morning, we excitedly returned to the roost tree and found one individual on the trunk facing the sun. Just a bit farther down we saw two more individuals, one on a trunk and one dangling from a diagonal branch; both bats were roughly 6 m off the ground. All the roosting bats seemed to be in relatively close proximity to the water (< 10 m); we searched in areas away from water and didn't find any.

Coincidentally, Eric Hough, the interpretive naturalist at Hassayampa River Preserve near Wickenburg, observed 2 Hoary Bats the same week. He reports "Both were very close to water: one perched in a willow growing in the water about a meter from shore and about 2-2.5 meters above the surface, the other crawling on the ground on a drying up puddle in a side channel of the river and licking/eating the mud." Apparently, several species of bats are known to eat mud, perhaps to gain salts and other minerals lacking in their diet.

Whether or not all these Hoary Bats are migrating, or summer residents here to stay, remains to be determined. I have never seen them in such numbers, but that is certainly due to lack of searching. I wonder how many I've walked right under in my years of exploring the desert Southwest.

Micah Riegner, Prescott, AZ



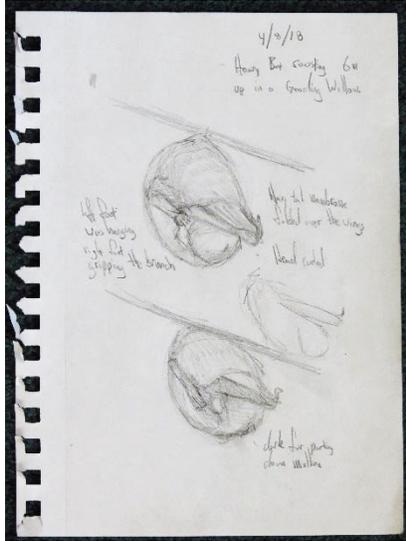
Hoary Bat in flight at around 1800. Note contrasting wing pattern. Photo by MR.



Hoary Bats roosting on Goodding Willow. Note the camouflage. Even the face coloration matches the rusty inner bark of the tree. Photos by MR.



Hoary Bat feeding on mud at the Hassayampa River Preserve. Photo by Eric Hough.



Studies of Hoary Bats by MR.