

Jamaica, 2023

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Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat, *Artibeus jamaicensis*

Between Christmas and New Year's of last year, my family and I spent a week on the North Coast of Jamaica. This trip was more of a family vacation, but I did a little bit of mammalwatching along the way. The main group of mammals in Jamaica are the bats - there are 21 species known to reside there. Many of these are found in just a few caves on the island, so I attempted to make plans before I went arranging visits to these caves.

The first major cave I attempted to connect with was Windsor Caves, which hosts an astounding 12 species of bat. When I emailed Dr. Susan Koenig, the resident Wildlife Ecologist in charge of the cave, however, I found out that they had decided to close the caves to public access since Covid began in order to reduce the likelihood of other diseases spreading. They are attempting to analyze the DNA of the bat species present to make sure they do not pose any threats, and will look into reopening the caves once this data is analyzed. From what I heard, however, it seems to be pretty slow going, and it may be awhile before they decide it is safe for visitation. They do allow people to come and watch the outflight of nearly 200,000 bats at dusk every night, however, so that seems to be

a quite exciting and interesting alternative. I quickly made plans with Dr. Koenig to go and see the outflight while I was there, but unfortunately, she ended up coming down with Covid herself the week before I got there, so I was unable to go and see the caves at all. Bummer.



Buffy Flower Bat, *Erophylla sezekorni*

Since that didn't work out, I attempted to contact some of the other caves in the area and try to organize a visit. I attempted to email about visiting the St. Clair caves, which host a number of species, but never got a response. I did hear back from the Green Grotto Caves, however, who told me to go on the public tour and that there would be bats there. I decided to do this, and took an afternoon to drive up and take the about an hour long tour.



Sign showing the species of Bat found in Green Grotto Caves

Since I was limited to the areas on the tour, and unable to visit the other harder to get to areas of the cave, I was able to see only 3 of the 9 species that are found there. **Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat** (*Artibeus jamaicensis*) were the first ones seen, altogether in a huddle as one of the first stops of the tour. We would see many of them throughout the cave as we continued, and they were by far the most common species. The other two species were both found by the entrance as we looped around, individually in some of the small holes in the roof of the cave. These species were **Buffy Flower Bat** (*Erophylla sezekorni*) and **Leach's Single-Leaf Bat** (*Monophyllus redmani*). From what I heard talking to the guide that led our tour, it sounded like most of the other species of bat that live in these caves are farther back, where the tour doesn't lead to. The Urban Development Company (UDC) of Jamaica, however, conducts research on these bats, and from what I hear are there surveying almost every Wednesday. If you were to reach out to them asking about joining, it sounded like they would be happy to welcome you, and would likely be able to take you to find all nine species as well.



Leach's Single-Leaf Bat, *Monophyllus redmani*

The only other mammal I saw was a **Small Indian Mongoose** (*Urva auropunctata*) on the road to Rose Hall Great House. I kept my eyes peeled for the endemic **Jamaican Hutia, or Coney** (*Geocapromys brownii*), but didn't see any signs of them. From what I hear, they seem to be pretty difficult to find.

Species List:

Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat (*Artibeus jamaicensis*)

Buffy Flower Bat (*Erophylla sezekorni*)

Leach's Single-Leaf Bat (*Monophyllus redmani*)

Non-native Species:

Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*)