

Planning Your Visit

The Nature Conservancy's Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve is open seasonally between mid-May and early October.



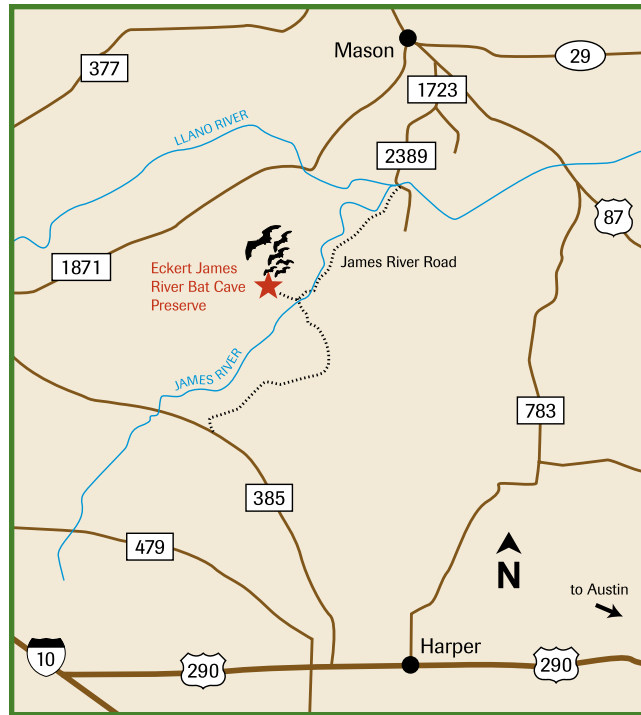
The public can view evening emergences with interpretive tours Thursdays through Sundays between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Sunrise tours to view bats returning from their nocturnal hunts are occasionally offered. The preserve is open to the public seasonally, but emergence times can vary by as much as an hour so visitors are encouraged to call for current information.

Please remember that the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve is a true wilderness area. Electricity, restrooms, water and food are not available, and pets are not allowed on preserve grounds. The cave is approximately 500 yards from the parking area and is only accessible by a trail leading over a slight incline that is not wheelchair accessible. Benches are provided for seating near the cave entrance.

Entrance fee:

Adults — \$5.00/person

Children age 5 and under are free



Enjoy Your Visit

Located approximately 16.5 miles from Mason, the preserve is reached via a partially unpaved road off of FM 2389 that fords the James River. From FM 2389, the preserve is 8.3 miles north on the east side of the road.

For information, visit nature.org/texas or call (325) 347-5970 during the season and (512) 263-8878 otherwise.



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Witness Nature in Action!



The Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve



nature.org/texas

About The Preserve

Nestled in the Texas Hill Country southwest of Mason is the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve, home to one of the largest colonies of warm-blooded animals in the world. Between May and September each year, more than one million Mexican free-tailed bats make the cave their home to birth and raise pups before returning to Mexico. Bats play a critical role in maintaining nature's delicate balance. Like birds and some insects, they are agents of seed dispersal and cross pollinate many plant species. Bats also control insect populations; each night a Mexican free-tailed bat consumes nearly its body weight in mosquitoes and crop pests like cutworm and corn borer moths.

While tranquil during the day, the cave grows into a bustling hive of activity in the evenings. In the hours before sunset, the bats grow restless—hundreds flutter and chirp around the mouth of the cave. A stream gradually emerges from the

cave's deep recesses, spiraling upward to form an ever-growing dark funnel of bats. As the column reaches hundreds of feet into the evening sky, it creates a living "tornado of bats" that towers high above the cave. Eventually, the bats at the top of the spiral break off, forming columns that stream out over the countryside to feed. It's an incredible spectacle, and one you don't want to miss!

The Conservancy's goal is to protect the bats and their critical habitat and to provide access for the public to visit and witness the dramatic evening emergence in a manner consistent with protection and safety of the bats and visitors. The preserve is also an important scientific research site and information gleaned there helps inform bat conservation strategies across the state.

Visit nature.org/texas to learn more about Mexican free-tailed bats.

A MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BAT CAN EAT ITS BODY WEIGHT IN INSECTS DAILY — MEANING A FULL COLONY CAN EAT MORE THAN 50 MILLION CROP-DESTROYING MOTHS IN ONE NIGHT! THAT'S WILD!



Mexican free-tailed bat © Merlin D. Tuttle, Bat Conservation International



Audiences gather to watch the bats emerge © Lynn McBride

History

The Eckert family acquired the property in 1907. In the early 1900s, W. Phillip Eckert mined the bat guano in the cave and sold it to local farmers for crop fertilizer. W. Phillip's son, Lee Eckert, continued his father's legacy of bat conservation and guano mining and left the site to his wife and children when he passed away in 1967. Richard Phillip Eckert and Virginia Eckert Garrett donated the cave to The Nature Conservancy in 1990 to honor their father, Lee, and grandfather, W. Phillip.