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SAC-WINGED BAT

SCIENTIFIC NAME 🦇 *Saccopteryx bilineata*
ENGLISH NAME 🦇 greater sac-winged bat
SPANISH NAME 🦇 murciélago de saco
RANGE 🦇 Mexico to Brazil



THE BAT THAT WEARS DEODORANT

H

ello. How are you doing?”

The tiny bat didn't answer me. He just twitched his nose nervously and then dropped as if shot, disappearing into a cave-like abode created by the big buttresses in the root system of the gigantic ceiba tree (*Ceiba pentandra*).

I turned and sighed. This was one of the loveliest places in the world—Arenal, Costa Rica. The giant tree's branches hung out over Peaceful Mountain. Far below lay Lake Arenal. Behind me was a recently constructed hotel resort. The owners had done a wonderful job perching their hotel on the great tree's hillside and snuggling it in among nature without disturbing the wilds.

As I stood and gazed over the lake, my mind flooded with memories. Then I turned again and gazed at the majestic tree.

Thirty-some years ago, when I was only ten years old, my dad had owned the very land this massive tree stood on. The tree was ours too, of course. I had spent many a pleasant hour enjoying the lovely scenery and the abundant flora and fauna on this hilltop we called Peaceful Mountain. More than once I had camped in this very spot, a favorite of our family's.

Now I turned back to the bats. About a dozen were hiding among the tree's buttresses. I imagine I had seen their great-great-great-grandfather at the same tree. At that time I had named them Amish bats because they wear suspenders. What I didn't know then was that these bats also wear deodorant.

Each little bat perched alone on the side of the tree trunk in a peculiar manner. Most bats hang from their hind feet, their bodies

swinging in midair. Sac-winged bats also hang from their hind feet, but then prop their bodies out and up by resting on their forearms—or forewings. This gives them a very elite and arrogant look.

I called my son over, and he started taking these photos. But he had a real problem. Every time he got close enough and focused the camera, the bats dropped. That is their unique way of escaping. Finally my son stepped up on a low buttress and reached into their

The original ceiba tree on Peaceful Mountain.



The Bat's Scent Sack



Underside of the scent sack in the wingpit area.



Upper side of scent sack. One opened. One closed.



cave with the camera on automatic focus and shot away. He got several photos, and we left in high spirits because we were again able to enjoy some of God's specials firsthand.

These small bats are always sticking their noses up as if putting on airs. Maybe it's because of the fancy white stripes running down their backs just like a pair of suspenders.

If I had talked to Mr. Bat, I would have said, "Hey, you look cute in your suspenders, fuzzy fellow."

If he could have answered me, he might have said smugly, "I also wear deodorant!"

That's hard to believe, right? But that's how nature is—full of surprises. Some bats even wear deodorant!

When the male sac-winged bats try to scare off their male rivals or when they approach a female to mate, they hover right in front of them. Under their wings is a little sack. As they hover, they open the little pockets and a strong, musty odor is released. The beating wings fan the odor toward the fellow bat, and it either interests or disgusts her.

Later I attended a church service in a crudely built chapel. The sac-winged bats thought the rough board walls and the dark surroundings were a lot like the ceiba tree—dry and protected. Several of them made their home there. While we sang, the Amish bats joined us in the chorus. One sang bass and the other alto. They really added a touch to the choir!

While I preached my message out of 1 John, I had a problem concentrating. The bats were performing on the back wall behind the congregation. One was wafting his deodorant toward another, and oh, how they squeaked!

On another visit I stopped in at the chapel with my son and we got some of these photos. I caught one bat with my butterfly net and took him by his wingtips, eager to see if what I'd read was true. Did they really wear deodorant?

Sure enough, in the general area of his armpits—oops, I mean wingpits—were the little pouches.

Now the time came for the real test. When studying nature, you need nerve and imagination! Have you ever smelled a bat's armpit? I did!

I opened the little sack first, just like it does when it emits the smell toward friend or foe. Then I lowered my nose. *Zap!* This little bat just about bit my nose! I'm glad it didn't, since it has a terrific bite. Its nose is extra-long, and its upper lip is very mobile, allowing it to shift around, ensuring a larger gaping bite.

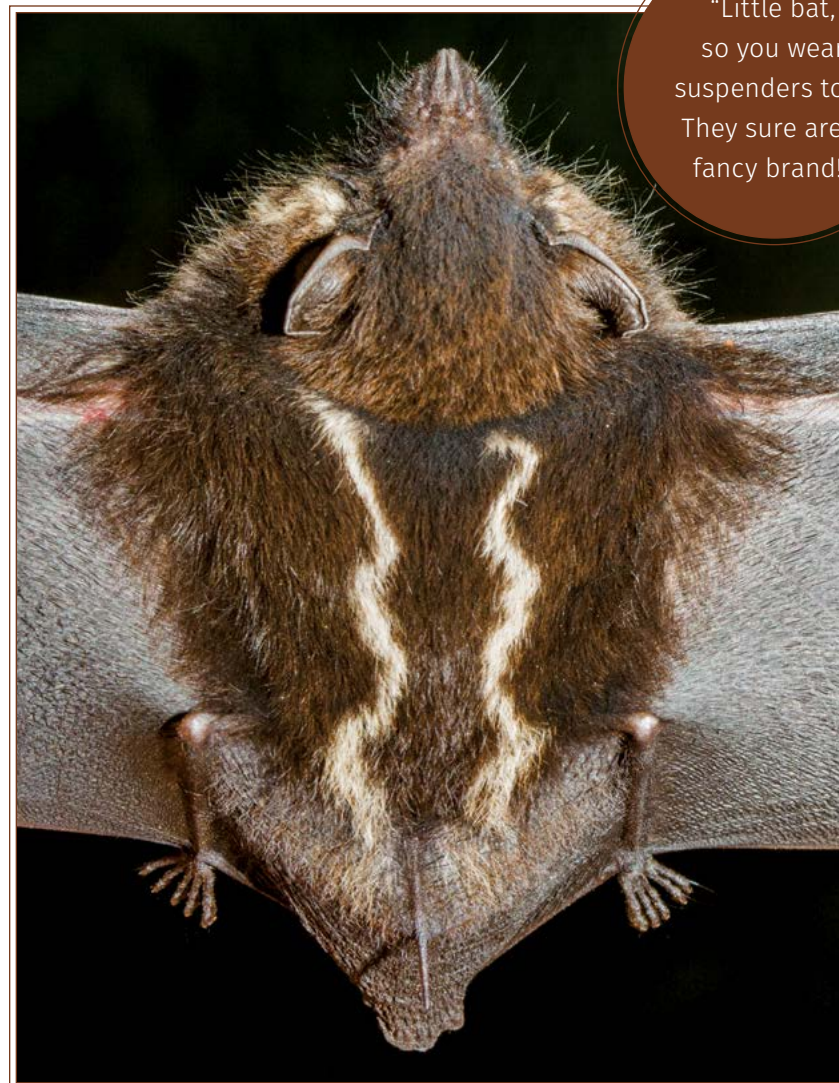
I tried smelling the armpit again, coming from the other side. "Hmmm, so that is how a bat's deodorant smells?" Probably delicious for his friends, but for me it was just a stinky, musty, typical bat smell.

The male sac-winged bat fills his little pocket with urine and glandular secretions. Now that I know what bat deodorant consists of, I understand the pungent odor.

Most folks despise bats and link them with evil and Halloween.

But they are wrong! Bats aren't evil. The devil did not create them. He can't create anything, much less design something so unique and complex.

God made bats, so they are good. No, they don't have to be your favorite animal, though they are one of mine.



"Little bat, so you wear suspenders too? They sure are a fancy brand!"



"What a gaping grin!"
"The better to bite you with, my dear!"

But let's be honest. Bats are very well made and useful. I've heard that if suddenly all the bats were removed from the earth, it would very quickly go haywire with all kinds of unhandy insects, including mosquitoes. So we even praise the Lord for His bats and whisper, "Thou art the God that doest wonders!" (Psalm 77:14). 🌸