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A Caribbean bat visits Key West

The first Cuban fig-eating bat ever reported in the United States was discovered hanging from an Arjuna almond tree in Key West, Florida, last December by two Duke University students.

A group from Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences was surveying for moths in the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Gardens, when Wes Brooks and Betty Rear-don heard noises in a nearby tree, looked up and saw a small bat staring back at them.

Wes photographed the scene and Betty sent the image to, among other places, the Florida Bat Center, which forwarded it to Dr. Ted Fleming of the University of Miami. He identified it as a Cuban fig-eating bat (*Phyllops falcatus*). Until now, this bat has only been found in Cuba, Hispaniola and Grand Cayman Island. It was believed extinct on Grand Cayman until BCI member Annie Band spotted a group of Cuban fig-eating bats a few years ago.

The Florida Bat Center has been studying the occasional appearance of Neotropical bats in the Florida Keys, the southernmost point in the United States. Executive Director Cynthia Marks says the Keys are close enough to Caribbean islands that such bats show up there on rare occasions. One Jamaican fruit-eating bat (*Artibeus jamaicensis*) was identified in 1995 and another in 1996, while Cuban flower bats (*Phyllonycteris poeyi*) were found in 2001 and 2002. Pallas's mastiff bat (*Molossus molossus*), now fairly common in the Keys, is a native of Cuba that apparently spread to Florida.

Last February, the Bat Center briefly captured and examined the wayward Cuban fig-eating bat, confirming its identity and its health. It was found in the exact same spot in the same tree where it had been photographed two months earlier. Debris on the leaves indicated the bat had been using the location regularly, and the center says it seemed to be alone.

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