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~Greetings From Iraq™

That's how a recent email to BCI Science Officer Barbara French began. It seems Ron Ebert, who works for a U.S. contractor in Iraq, discovered bats that seem to be living in a most unusual structure and wondered what species they might be. He writes:

"I've been trying to locate information and photos of bats native to the Middle East, specifically Iraq ... and Baghdad.

"There is a medium-sized (I'm guessing) colony here at Victory Base outside Baghdad, and I'd like to try to identify these bats. ... I'm not positive, but I think the bats in question live primarily in a manmade roost that looks like a giant anthill, made of clay, with holes all through it (photo at right). It's more than 40 feet [12 meters] high. At first, I thought it was a birdhouse of some kind, but others have told me it's where the bats live.

"The ones I've seen appear to have bodies 2-4 inches [5-10 centimeters] long and a wingspan of about 6-8 inches [15-20 centimeters]. They look brownish or gray in color. The area where I am at is relatively sparse, but there are marshy areas and manmade lakes nearby. Insects are plentiful (especially mosquitoes).


"Anyways, I'll keep looking online when I can, but in the meantime, if you know of any sites dedicated to Middle Eastern bats that would be helpful, please advise! Thank you!"

French responded that Iraq is home to about 20 species of bats, including species of *Myotis*, *Miniopterus*, *Eptesicus* and *Pipistrellus*, plus free-tailed, mouse-tailed, tomb and horseshoe bats. She described a few likely candidates and offered Web links to some online descriptions and pictures. And by the way, if you know what that "anthill" might be, please let us know.

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