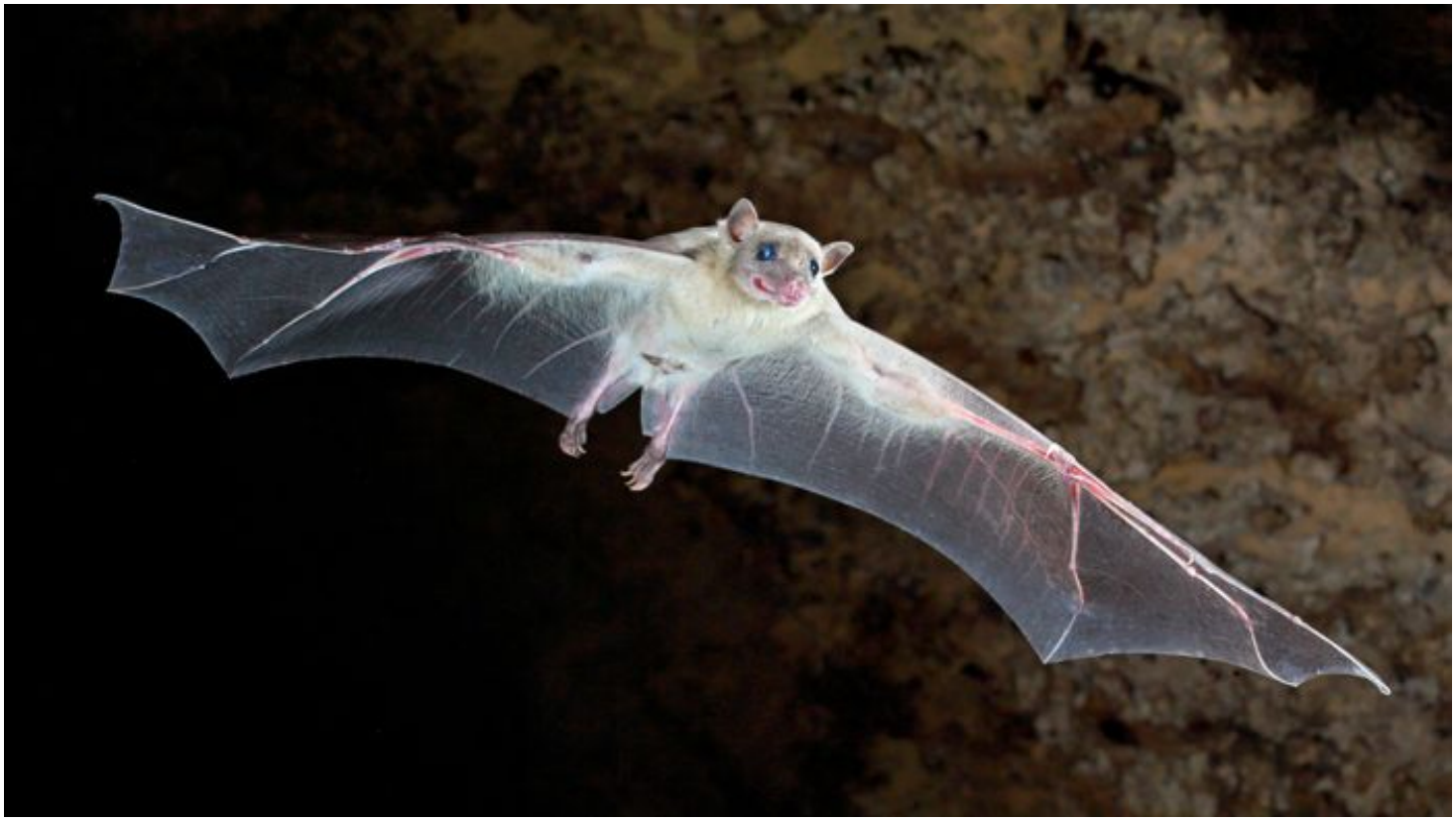

Egyptian fruit bats that roost together host the same fur bacteria, which may help group members to recognize one another by smell. Credit: Jens Rydell

MICROBIOME · 10 DECEMBER 2018

How snuggling close affects bats' microbiome

Members of a bat colony pass fur bacteria to each other.

Egyptian fruit bats share the microbes living in their fur with their neighbours.

Colonies of the Egyptian fruit bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*) include several dozen to many thousands of animals. The bats hang from cave ceilings in tightly packed, noisy masses, which sometimes erupt into squabbles, complete with screeching and cuffing.

Yossi Yovel at Tel Aviv University and his colleagues studied ten bats from a captive colony and four from a wild colony. For 13 weeks, the researchers collected weekly samples of the bats' fur and gut secretions, and analysed them for bacteria.

The bacteria in the gut differed between individual bats. However, colony members tended to have the same combination of bacterial species in their fur, probably because the bats share fur bacteria by touching one another.

The mix of bacterial species on the animals' pelts changed over time, suggesting that the bat's microbiome is influenced by the environment, the authors say.

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Microbiome

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