

Date of Hearing: June 6, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE
Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Chair
SB 732 (Menjivar) – As Introduced February 17, 2023

SENATE VOTE: 36-0

SUBJECT: Bats

SUMMARY: Declares that the pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) is the official state bat of California and makes findings and declarations regarding the numerous benefits that bats provide to society.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Declares, among other official emblems, that:
 - a) The golden poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is the state flower (Government Code § 421);
 - b) The California redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoia gigantean*) is the state tree (Government Code § 422);
 - c) The California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) is the state amphibian (Government Code § 422.7);
 - d) The California desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is the state reptile (Government Code § 422.5);
 - e) The Pacific leatherback sea turtle (*Rana draytonii*) is the state marine reptile (Government Code § 422.5); and
 - f) The California dog-face butterfly (*Zerene Eurydice*) is the state insect (Government Code § 424.5).
- 2) Does not identify an official state bat.

FISCAL EFFECT: None. This bill is keyed non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill declares that the pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) is the official state bat of California in order to raise awareness of the contributions that the pallid bat and other bat species provide to society, including pest control, public health, and wildfire risk reduction and to promote bat study and conservation. According to the author:

“Bats play an important role in maintaining the ecology of California. Bats eat bark beetles and wood borers which contributes to wildfire risk reduction in California forests. They also consume many insect species, including those that contribute to health risks such as mosquitoes, wasps, and flies. Additionally, bats provide more than

\$1,000,000,000 worth of pest control to California agriculture. [...] As the awareness of the contributions that bats bring to agriculture grows, the frequency of the installation of bat boxes on farms is expanding. By passing this legislation California will become the fifth state in the country to officially adopt a state bat, formally recognizing the impactful role played by the pallid bat species. In addition, [this bill] will acknowledge these fascinating mammals that contribute to the diversity and environmental health of ecosystems around the world.”

- 2) **Background.** California is renowned for its diverse landscapes, rich history, global influence, and its industrious and colorful people. The state represents its natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural identity with a unique array of official symbols. To celebrate this diversity, the state designates a number of state emblems that serve as reminders for residents and visitors alike of the state's distinct identity and the importance of preserving its heritage for future generations. As California continues to evolve and grow, its state emblems are intended to remain steadfast symbols of the state's past, present, and future.

California is home to a range of over two dozen diverse of bat species. Some of the most common bat species found in California include: the big brown bat, which is widespread across North America and is a medium-sized bat with a wingspan of up to 13 inches; the Mexican free-tailed bat, known for its long, narrow wings and migration between California summers and Mexico winters; the California Myotis, a small, insect-eating bat usually found in wooded areas; and the Western Pipistrelle, one of the smallest bat species in North America, found in California throughout the year.

Pallid bat (Antrozous pallidus). This medium-sized bat, characterized by its distinctive pale golden color and large ears, is native to the western United States, including California. The bat can be found patrolling the night skies of the state in a wide range of habitats such as deserts, grasslands, and woodlands. The scientific name is derived from Latin and Greek words: “antrozous” comes from the Greek words “antro” (cave) and “zoe” (life), which together mean “cave life” or “cave dweller.” The epithet “pallidus” is a Latin word that means “pale” or “light-colored,” referring to the bat's pale, golden-brown fur.

The pallid bat plays a primary ecological role as a natural pest control agent. This nocturnal mammal has a diverse diet consisting mainly of insects, with a particular preference for arachnids, beetles, and moths. As a voracious consumer of pests, the pallid bat reduces harmful insects and helps to maintain the balance of insect populations, which in turn benefits California's immense agriculture industry. The pallid bat also plays a significant part in combating vectors that can transmit diseases. Insects in the bat's diet, such as mosquitoes and other species, carry diseases like West Nile virus, Zika virus, and various forms of encephalitis. By preying on these potential disease vectors, the pallid bat contributes to the reduction of disease transmission risks and promotes public health.

Moreover, the pallid bat serves as an essential link in the food chain and supports the overall biodiversity of California's ecosystems. As both a predator and prey, it occupies a vital ecological niche that helps to maintain the balance of various species and habitats. Its presence in the ecosystem is also an indicator of the health of the environment, as bats are highly sensitive to changes in their surroundings.

- 3) **Arguments in support.** Supporters state that the pallid bat is a fascinating and ecologically significant species that plays a crucial role in California's ecosystems and agriculture. The California Bat Working Group asserts that the pallid bat is the ideal species to be name state bat because “pallid bats are distributed statewide and in diverse habitats, including along our coast, in our agricultural valleys, in high elevation mountains, and in our several deserts; the pallid bat is also a strong indicator species of the health of the state’s oak woodlands, grasslands, and savannas; the pallid bat thrives where these habitats remain intact; [...] the pallid bat consumes a wide variety of pest insects and arthropods across California’s varied habitats, providing these ecosystem services throughout the state.”
- 4) **Related legislation.** AB 261 (Kalra) of this legislative session would establish the California Golden Chanterelle (*Cantharellus californicus*) as the official state mushroom. AB 261 is pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 868 (Garcia) of 2021 would have established the date shake as the official state milkshake. AB 868 died in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 1769 (Voepel) of 2018 would have established the California Vaquero Horse as the official state horse. AB 1769 died in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 1782 (Muratsuchi), Chapter 162, Statutes of 2018, establishes surfing as the official state sport.

AB 2439 (Garcia), Chapter 172, Statutes of 2018, establishes the LGBTQ Veterans Memorial at the Desert Memorial Park in Cathedral City as the official state LGBTQ veterans memorial.

SB 73 (Hueso) of 2017 would have established the “San Salvador” as the official state ship of exploration. SB 73 died in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 1067 (Gray), Chapter 49, Statutes of 2017, establishes the almond, walnut, pistachio, and pecan each as the official state nut.

AB 1540 (Bloom), Chapter 264, Statutes of 2017, established the *Augustynolophus morrisoni* as the official state dinosaur.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Central Coast Chapter of the Wildlife Society
 California Institute for Biodiversity
 Kern Audubon Society
 Kern Bat Working Group
 Merlin Tuttle's Bat Conservation
 Norcal Bats
 San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of the Wildlife Society
 Team Chiroptera
 The California Bat Working Group

Western Bat Working Group
Wild Farm Alliance

Opposition

None on file

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