

Secret lives of microbats investigated

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The secret lives of microbats in the mid-west region of Western Australia are being revealed through a new research project at Murdoch University.

Murdoch University PhD student Diana Prada has begun a three-year investigation into the region's microbats, to better understand these creatures and the diseases they host.

"We currently know very little about these animals in the region despite bats making up almost one-quarter of all known mammal species," Ms Prada said.

"These insectivorous microbats play a major role in controlling pests for the agricultural industry as well as contributing to biodiversity, so their

survival and their health are important."

Diana and her PhD supervisors Dr Bethany Jackson, Dr Mark O'Dea and A/Prof Peter Spencer have embarked on an ambitious project to learn more about this largely unknown group of mammals.

They aim to learn more about the [genetic diversity](#) of the microbat populations, and their genetic connectivity while examining potential disease threats to the bats as well as humans.

On the first field trip of the season the team captured, sampled and released more than 250 bats from the Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Mt Gibson Wildlife Sanctuary and nearby Bush Heritage Australia's Charles Darwin Reserve.

"We trapped seven different species of microbats and later in the year we will be in the lab generating all the data. We want to work out the genetic diversity of the populations and how viruses are distributed amongst the bat populations," Diana said.

"These results will give us insights into any potential health risks for the [bats](#), as well as people coming into contact with them, and also give us important baseline information to conserve these cryptic animals."

The research team has now moved into new areas, capturing animals at other locations around the Perth hills and further south.

The project is conducted in reserves managed by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Bush Heritage Australia and it is partially funded by the Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment.

Provided by Murdoch University

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