

“The Vain Bat,” A Taíno Legend

The Taíno people, part of the Arawak tribe, lived in the Caribbean, on the land now known as Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico for thousands of years. Words from the Taíno’s native language include canoe, hurricane, barbecue and hammock.



1	When time was yet in the cradle, there was no uglier creature in the world than the bat.
2	The bat went up to the sky to look for Creation Spirit. He didn't say, "I'm bored with being hideous. Give me colored feathers." No. He said, "Please give me feathers, I'm dying of cold." But Creation Spirit had not a single feather left over.
3	"Each bird will give you a feather," Creation Spirit decided.
4	Thus the bat got the white feather of the dove and the green one of the parrot, the iridescent one of the hummingbird, the pink one of the flamingo, the red of the cardinal's tuft, the blue of the kingfisher's back, the clayey one of the eagle's wing, and the sun

	feather that burns in the breast of the toucan.
5	The bat, luxuriant with colors and softness, moved between earth and clouds. Wherever he went, the air became pleasant and the birds dumb with admiration. Some said the rainbow was born of the echo of his flight.
6	Vanity puffed out the bat's chest. He acquired a disdainful look and made insulting remarks.
7	The birds called a meeting. Together they flew up to Creation Spirit. "The bat makes fun of us," they complained. "And what's more, we feel cold for lack of the feathers he took."
8	Next day, when the bat shook his feathers in full flight, he suddenly became naked. A rain of feathers fell to earth.
9	He is still searching for them. Blind and ugly, enemy of the light, he lives hidden in caves. He goes out in pursuit of the lost feathers after night has fallen and flies very fast, never stopping because it shames him to be seen.

This version of the folktale is found at [Bedfordshire Bat Group](http://www.bedsbatgroup.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=574#taino)
 (http://www.bedsbatgroup.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=574#taino).

Illustration: <http://melanippos.deviantart.com/art/Bat-and-the-rainbow-162120591>

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