

Name: _____

Amazing Bats

By Guy Belleranti

Stories and movies often make bats into scary creatures that attack in the dark of night. In real life, however, most bats are harmless. Many are even helpful to humans.



Over 800 species or types of bats feast on pesky insects that damage crops or spread disease. Another 400 or so bat species eat ripe fruit and plant nectar. These

bats are very useful because they pollinate flowers and disperse seeds. There are also a few species of larger bats that hunt small animals like mice, fish, lizards, and frogs. A very few even drink blood.

The blood drinkers are the three species of vampire bats. However, the vampire bat doesn't suck blood. Instead, it makes a puncture wound with its sharp incisors and then laps the blood up like a kitten. The animal victim usually sleeps through the entire process. While attacks on humans have occurred, the bats common targets are livestock and other animals.

Interestingly, the vampire bat may become useful to humans. You see, a chemical in the bat's saliva thins blood and dissolves blood clots. Studies indicate this could be a great aid in treating people with strokes. In the future, medicine may be made from vampire bats' saliva.

Some people think bats are birds, but they're not. They have fur, not feathers. And their babies do not hatch from eggs; they're born alive. Also, bats have mouths and noses; birds have beaks. Scientists put them in a special mammal group called Chiroptera (Ki-ROP-ter-a).

Bats are the only mammals that truly fly. Flying uses lots of energy, so bats must sleep when they aren't flying. Many bats hibernate in winter, when their food supply is limited. Some also migrate to warmer climates in winter.

Bats are nocturnal, which means they sleep during the day and come out at night. But why? There are several reasons. First of all, night is when most insects are out. There's also less competition for food at night. Also, nighttime is safe for bats because there are fewer predators hunting for food. The temperature is another reason bats are active at night. Since they're covered in fur, bats mostly fly after dark when the temperatures are cooler.

Have you ever heard the expression, *blind as a bat*? You might be surprised to learn that bat's aren't really blind at all. All bats have eyes and can see, but not very well. Those that hunt live prey have an even better sense: echolocation. The bat sends out a high-pitched sound. While people can't hear the sound, the bat, with its specially adapted ears, hears the sound fine. When the sound hits an object it echoes back. From the sound of the echo the bat knows the object's size, shape and location and also if it's something yummy to eat.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. Most species of bats eat...

- a. fruit and nectar
- b. mice, lizards, and frogs
- c. insects
- d. blood

2. Which types of bats drink blood? _____

3. Complete the table to show the differences between birds and bats.

Bats	Birds
	have feathers
born alive	
	have beaks

4. Give three reasons why bats are most active at night.

5. When a bat uses echolocation, it is...

- a. using its eyes to see moving animals
- b. using its nose to smell insects in the air
- c. using its mouth to taste the moisture in the air
- d. using its ears to listen for high-pitched sounds

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

l a e m s h s r

hint: antonym for dangerous

2. _____

s k y p e

hint: annoying; bothersome

3. _____

t a n r e c

hint: sweet liquid found in flowers

4. _____

v l i k t s o e c

hint: farm animals

5. _____

e r a m t i g

hint: move to a place where food is more plentiful

6. _____

p s l a

hint: drinks by licking with a tongue

7. _____

v a s i a l

hint: liquid made in the mouth to help break down food

◆ **Now Try This:** Find each vocabulary word above in the article and highlight it.