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# BATS



## BATS ARE MAMMALS

A long time ago, people used to think bats were birds without feathers. But now we know that there is no such thing as a featherless bird. We know that bats are MAMMALS, just like people.

Some of the things that tell us bats are mammals:

- bats are warm blooded
- bats nurse their babies with milk
- bats have fur

But bats are very special mammals. They are the only mammals that can fly (without an airplane!) Flying squirrels are mammals too, but they don't really fly. They jump from high in a tree and glide through the air like a kite. Bats flap their wings and fly like a bird.



## DINNER TIME

**VAMPIRES:** When most of us think of bats, the Vampire Bat is one of the first to come to mind. Vampire bats don't really turn into Count Dracula, they rarely bite people and they rarely kill their prey. Vampire bats prey mainly on cows, horses and other large mammals. They make a shallow wound with their razor-sharp teeth then they lick up the blood. Each bat only drinks about an ounce of blood each night.

Although Vampire Bats may be the ones most commonly remembered, there are many other kinds of bats. Bats can be found in most parts of the world -- forests, deserts, jungles and cities! There are close to 1,000 different species of bats. With all of these different bats, it's not surprising that they don't eat all the same thing.

A lot of bats, including the flying fox, eat fruit. Although some of these bats are pests to people who own orchards, they play an important role in nature. The fruit bats spread the seeds of the fruit they eat -- they are responsible for scattering up to 95% of the seeds needed for new trees in tropical rain forests.



There are also a number of bats who eat insects, fish, frogs and small animals. Meat eating bats fly out at night (they are "nocturnal") to hunt for their food when many of the other predators are fast asleep.

## BAT BABIES

During spring, bats return from migration or awaken from hibernation and the females begin having baby bats called "pups". Bat pups are tiny when born, but grow up fast. Some species are flying and hunting on their own within a month of birth. Bats, like people, usually only have one baby at a time although on occasion they'll have twins. Pups are born without hair -- they look tiny, scrawny and pink. They drink milk from their mothers like all mammals do. They are born with strong legs and claws because they have to hang on to mom when she's roosting and to the cave when she's not there. If the baby loses its grip and falls, it will die.

## BAT SENSE

Bats smell, hear, taste, feel and see just like people do. The term "blind as a bat" isn't really accurate. Bats have perfectly good eyes for seeing in the daylight. The problem is, they do most of their hunting at night! Instead of relying on their sense of sight for night-time vision, bats make rapid high-pitched squeaks called "ultrasounds". These sounds are too high for most people to hear. If these sounds hit something, they bounce back -- sort of like when you hear your echo in a mountain or a bathroom when you shout. The bat hears the echo and can tell where the object is. This is called "echolocation". Not every species of bat is able to echolocate, but most can.

## TO THE BAT CAVE...

Bats feed at night (they are "nocturnal") and spend the day sleeping in caves or in tree tops. The place where a bat sleeps is called its "roost".

Bats hang **UPSIDE DOWN** from their roosts when they sleep.

Although some bats roost in groups of only one or two, for the most part bats are very sociable animals. They usually sleep together in huge groups.

Some caves may be home to thousands of bats. The largest bat colony in the world is in Bracken Cave, Texas. During the summer, this cave is home to as many as 20 MILLION Mexican free-tailed bats. That's a LOT of bats!

