

Radar Love

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Halloween being just a short time away the thoughts of ghosts, goblins, ghouls, bats..., "Did I say bats?", are embedded in our minds. Often when people think of bats, they think of nasty blood sucking creatures that fly around at night.

The most feared bat of all times would have to be the blood thirsty vampire bat. To help sooth your fears, bats do not turn into vampires nor do vampires turn into bats. However, the vampire bat does drink blood.

The blood- thirsty vampire bat requires about two tablespoons of blood every day. The bat obtains this blood by attacking prey from the ground while they sleep. Sneaky aren't they?. The bat uses heat sensors in its nose to help locate a vein close to the skin and then sinks its fangs into the victim. As the blood flows from the cut, the bats laps it up. Yum, yum. Saliva from the bat prevents the blood from clotting until the bat completes its meal which takes, oh, about 20 minutes. There is also an anesthetic in the bat salvia that keeps the victim from hardly feeling a thing. Isn't that a soothing bite of information? Get it, "bite" of information?

Bats are the only known flying mammals. Except for a few unique features their anatomy is similar to that of most other mammals. Some people believe that bats are flying mice. In fact, bats form a separate and distinguishable group of mammals more closely related to moles and shrews than to rodents.

Bats occur worldwide. Of the approximately 850 species of bats only 30 occur in the United States and 17 of those occur in Florida. All bats eat insects and are highly beneficial to man because of their tremendous appetite for night-flying bugs, including mosquitoes. Bats locate insects at night using a very sophisticated sonar system known as echolocation which is the emitting of supersonic sounds and listening for the echos.



Bats are most frequently seen on warm nights feeding over bodies of water, around buildings, forest edges, or around lights. During the day, bats shelter themselves in a variety of dark, secluded places. Bats like small, dark spaces that are poorly ventilated and that heat up during the day. In Florida, tree cavities, snags, and especially unpruned cabbage palms are important roost sites. Various man-made structures such as window shutters, drain pipes, billboards, roof tiles and attics have become popular homes for our flying friends.

Bat Facts and Trivia

- A single little brown bat can catch 600 mosquitoes in just one hour.
- Worldwide, bats are the most important natural enemies of night-flying insects.
- The 20 million Mexican free-tails from Bracken Cave, Texas eat 250 tons of insects nightly.
- Loss of bats increases the demand for pesticides which can jeopardize the whole ecosystem of other animals, plant species, and harm humans.
- Contrary to popular belief, bats are not blind
- The world's smallest mammal is the bumblebee bat of Thailand, weighing less than a penny.
- Giant flying fox bats that live in Indonesia have a wing span of nearly six feet.
- Mother Mexican free-tail bats find and nurse their own young, even in huge colonies where millions of babies cluster up to 500 per square foot.
- The common brown bat of North America is the world's longest lived mammal for its size, with a life span exceeding 32 years.
- Fishing bats have echolocation so sophisticated that they can detect a minnow's fin as fine as a human hair, protruding only two millimeters above the water's surface.

Attracting Bats

Bat populations are on the decline throughout the U.S. The loss of habitat due to disturbance of their natural roosting sites is the major factor in their decline. The disturbance of bats at their roost is commonly the results of active and persistent persecution by people who are not aware of the bat's gentle nature and beneficial activities.

With the loss of the bats' natural roosting sites it is important to provide alternative habitats. Snags, uncut wood lots, and viable wetlands with open water are important bat habitats. You can also provide man-made roosting sites by constructing a bat house or what I would call the "Bat Cave." A word of caution, bats can carry rabies. Be very careful if you must handle a bat.

For information on bat house construction and bats in general, please visit the web pages listed below. I hope to have provide you with the enthusiasm to learn more about bats.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/images/1617223104> (University of Florida IFAS bat house blueprint)

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw007> (University of Florida IFAS bat information)

<http://www.batcon.org/> (Bat Conservation International)

<http://endangered.fws.gov/bats/bats.htm> (US Fish and Wildlife Services)

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