

Bats

Bats traditionally have been animals that frighten people. Concerns that they get tangled in your hair, suck blood or carry rabies are untrue, uncommon or overly exaggerated.

Bats are mammals. They are warm blooded, nurse their young and have fur. They are the only mammal that can fly. (Flying squirrels are mammals but they really don't fly, they glide like a kite.) At one time, people even thought that bats were birds without feathers! Bats flap their wings when flying. But watch a bat closely while it's flying and you will see that it looks like they are pulling themselves through the air, kind of like the butterfly stroke while swimming. That motion is different from a flying bird.

Bats, like humans, usually have one baby at a time. Their babies are born in the spring upon returning from migration or after awaking from hibernation. The babies, called pups, are tiny when born but often are flying within one month of birth. They are born with strong legs and claws because they hang onto mom when she's roosting and onto a roof or some other structure when mom is away. If the pup loses its grip and falls, it will die.



Merlin D. Turtle, Bat Conservation International

A ½ ounce Little brown bat can eat up to 1200 insects in an hour.

Bat wings are made of two thin layers of skin stretched over the bat's arms and fingers. Bats have a thumb and four fingers just like humans. The bat wings go all the way down the side of the bat's body and partway down its legs. Bats smell, hear, taste, feel and see just like humans. The phrase "blind as a bat" is not true. Bats can see very well in the daytime. Since they feed primarily at night most bats use echolocation. They use high pitched squeaks called ultrasounds which are broadcast out into the night. If the sounds hit something they bounce back. It's not unlike us humans hearing an echo when shouting by a mountain side. Because bats need to hear ultrasounds they usually have big ears. Bats have the best hearing of all land mammals.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A Big brown bat has a wing span of about 10 inches.

There are about one thousand species of bats. Different species of bats eat different things. Some bats eat fruit, fish, frogs or small mammals. One species of bat, called the Vampire bat does suck blood, usually from large mammals such as cows or horses. In Minnesota and North Dakota we don't have naturally occurring Vampire Bats. We have the Big brown bat and the Little brown bat. These bats eat insects and that's why we want them at the Living Lab. A Big brown bat can eat 3,000 to 7,000 insects a night and many of these will be mosquitoes!

In order to encourage more bats to live by the Lab and eat mosquitoes, we have installed several bat houses. After they are occupied these house will be home to dozens and maybe hundreds of bats. In some parts of the world, such as in much of Europe, it's very common for people to install bat houses. Maybe when bats are better understood in this country we will see more bat houses.

Like all mammals, bats can carry rabies, as can animals such as dogs and

humans. But the incidence of rabies in bats is very low. It would be rare to see a sick bat. But if you do see one on the ground, leave it alone and don't touch it.

Bat houses can vary in size from about the size of a shoe box to the "Missouri" style house which can be larger than a desk.

Bats like to be warm in the morning so bat houses are best placed on the east side of a house or tree where they will receive morning sun. Bat houses are usually painted black or covered with tar paper so that it absorbs the heat from the sun. The best habitat for bats is near a river, lake or marsh. At the Living Lab we have two bat houses installed on the east side of buildings.



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An adult Big brown bat is about 5 inches from nose to tail.