

Young People's Guide to Bats

What do you know about bats? Perhaps you think they're the spooky black rubber things you see at Halloween.

Actually, bats are warm-blooded mammals just like you and me. Bats feed milk to their babies, just like we humans. But bats can do lots of things we can't do.

Bats are the only mammal with the ability to fly. Not only can they fly, but they are nocturnal and can fly in the dark. They can tell where they are by using echolocation. A bat makes an ultrasonic noise and uses the echo to tell where it is and where to find its dinner.

Bats that live around here are insectivores. They make their living by catching insects that fly at night, like moths and mosquitoes. This is one of the reasons why bats are good friends to people. Just one bat can eat thousands of insects every night. Bats reduce the number of pests that damage farmer's crops, so farmers don't have to use as many pesticides. Foresters depend on bats to eat the moths whose caterpillars kill trees. You and I depend on bats to eat mosquitoes that might be carrying diseases that make us sick.

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An eastern red bat mother and pups roost in a tree.

Glossary

of Big Words found on this page:

mammal - higher animals that nourish their young with milk

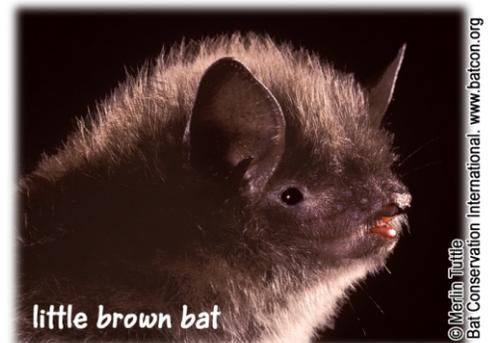
nocturnal - active at night

echolocation - locating objects by a sound's reflection

ultrasonic - sounds higher than a human can hear

insectivore - an animal that eats insects

pesticide - something used to repel or poison insect pests



little brown bat

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Bats roost in trees or in large colonies in caves or mines. Some bats migrate to warmer climates when the weather turns cold. Other bats spend their winters hibernating underground.

People who visit caves in the winter and disturb hibernating bats, make bats use valuable energy they need to live through the winter. Other dangers to bats include a fungal disease called White-Nose Syndrome, and industrial wind energy turbines, which kill thousands of bats that fly too close to their blades.

That is why some of our bat species have become threatened. When there is the danger of extinction, our government adds that species to the endangered species list. The gray bat, Indiana bat and the Virginia big-eared bat are three species in our area that are on the endangered species list. Look up what species are endangered in your state at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/>



Jessica Kerns shows one each of the red bat, hoary bat and tri-colored bat killed at wind turbines in the Allegheny Highlands.

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hoary bat



eastern red bat



tri-colored bat

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Glossary of Big Words found on this page:

- roost** - a place where flying animals rest
- migrate** - movement from one place to another for seasonal reasons
- hibernate** - slowing body functions to use less energy
- fungus** - yeast, molds, or mushrooms that live off a host plant or animal
- species** - a group of animals or plants that are of the same kind
- endangered** - threatened with extinction
- extinction** - no longer in existence

Bats are our friends and represent an important link in the chain we call the balance of nature.