

Bats 101

Bats are mammals. Like all other mammals, including ourselves and many of our pets, they have hair or fur on their bodies and are warm-blooded. A baby bat feeds on its mother's milk for at least a few weeks after it is born.

Bats are the only mammals that can fly. A bat's wing has very similar bones to the hand (see picture) and arm of a human, with skin stretched between the very long finger bones and the body to form the wing membrane.

We are lucky enough to have 18 species of bat in the UK

Mothers give birth to a single young, which will start flying at 3 weeks old.

Mating occurs in autumn and bats can be seen swarming outside roosts

Bats become torpid (sluggish and cold) as they drop their body temperature and begin hibernation.

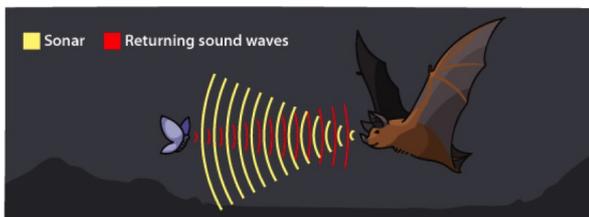
Bats do not make nests, but choose various places throughout the year to roost often with other bats. Some prefer hollow trees, others caves, some use both at different times. Many shelter in buildings, behind hanging tiles and boarding, or in roof spaces.

Food:

Worldwide some bats eat insects, fruit or nectar. There are three species of Vampire bat. These are found in Central and South America even feed on blood but all UK bats eat insects.

Each species has its favourites including midges, moths and beetles, hunting them in their own unique way.

All bats have very big appetites, because flying uses up lots of energy. A pipistrelle can eat 3,000 tiny insects in just one night.



Bats use Echolocation to find their way in the dark and locate food. Bats are not blind but at night their ears are more important than their eyes. As they fly they make shouting sounds. The returning echoes give information about anything that is ahead of them, including the size and shape of an insect and which way it is going. This system of finding their prey is called echolocation – locating things by their echoes. Most of these calls are too high pitched for humans to hear, but they can be heard with a special instrument called a bat detector.

Some bat species:

Brown long-eared bat: This bat's huge ears provide exceptionally sensitive hearing - it can even hear a ladybird walking on a leaf.

Common pipistrelle: Pipistrelles are the smallest and commonest British bats - Body length is around 4cm and it weighs around 5 grams (less than a £1 coin). (Top photo)

The biggest bat is the Flying fox with a wing span of 2m! A single pipistrelle can eat 3,000 tiny insects in just one night.

Daubenton's bat: Known as the 'water bat', Daubenton's bats fish insects from the water's surface with their large feet or tail. (Photo right)

Noctule bat: This bat has long narrow wings and flies in a straight line, very high and fast. It's our biggest bat, but it's still smaller than the palm of your hand! Weighs up to 40g with a wingspan of between 33-45cm.

Why do bats hang upside down?

If bats hung by their thumbs they would have to let go before spreading their wings. By hanging upside down they are able to spread their wings ready for take-off. They also have a good clear view for both seeing and hearing before flight. The tendons in their legs and feet are designed so that the weight of the bat causes the toes and claws to grip the foothold in the roost firmly, even when the animal is asleep.

