

KIDS' PAGE

DISCOVER NEW AND EXCITING STUFF FROM THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM

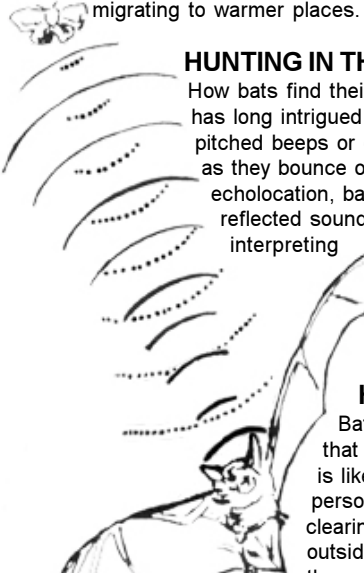
BATS

Few animals are as shrouded in fear and superstition as bats. Stories of bats getting tangled in peoples' hair, vampire bats, and bats with rabies have led to misunderstanding and fear. Few people have actually seen a bat up close, and their opinion about them is usually based on myth and folklore. Actually, bats are fascinating animals that play an important role in controlling insect pests.

Bats are mammals, and like all mammals, they have teeth, a body covering of fure, and they give birth to live young and nurse their young with milk. Bats are the only mammals with wings and the ability to fly. A bat's wings consist of a membrane of elastic skin stretched across the bones of the fingers and hand.

There are nearly a thousand kinds of bats in the world. They can be found almost everywhere, from cold northern regions to warm tropical forests and even deserts.

There are 16 kinds of bats in British Columbia, more than any other part of Canada. Ten of these bats live on Vancouver Island. Although most of B.C.'s bats live in the south, some, such as the Little Brown Myotis, also live in northern regions. Bats survive our cold winters by hibernating or migrating to warmer places.



HUNTING IN THE DARK

How bats find their way around in total darkness is a mystery that has long intrigued scientists. We now know that bats make high-pitched beeps or clicks and listen for the echoes of these sounds as they bounce off things. We call this echolocation. Using echolocation, bats can form pictures in their brains by listening to reflected sounds, just like we form pictures in our brains by interpreting reflected light with our eyes. Most echolocation sounds are at a higher pitch than human's can hear. This high-tech sonar system allows bats to avoid obstacles and hunt flying insects in the dark.

HUNT LIKE A BAT

Bats hunt by emitting high-pitched sounds and following the echoes that bounce off their prey. You can get a feeling for what echolocation is like by playing a simple game with two or three of your friends. One person can be the bat and others the moths. Play the game outside in a clearing or in a room without a lot of obstacles such as furniture. If outside, make boundaries that the moths cannot go outside of. Blindfold the person who is going to be the bat. The bat has to catch the moths by calling out "bat, bat bat". Every time the bat calls, the moths have to reply with "moth, moth, moth". The faster and more often the bat calls the easier it is to home in on the moths. The moths can move around but cannot go outside the boundaries and must always answer when the bat calls. Have someone watching to make sure the blindfolded "bat" doesn't bump into anything.



VAMPIRES

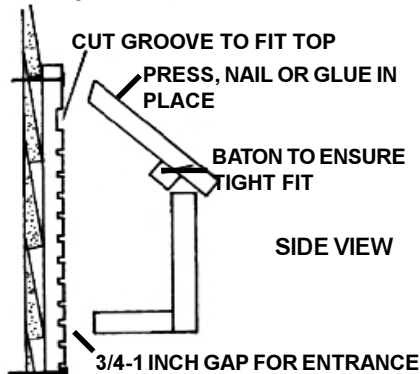
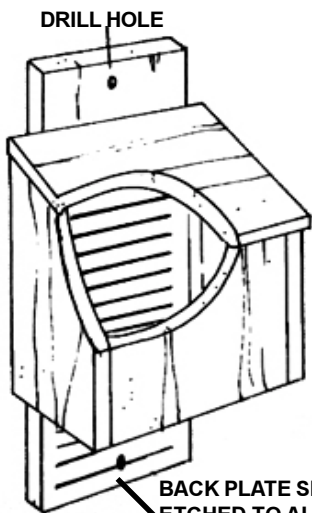
Although most bats eat insects, some tropical species eat fruit, while others eat frogs and even other bats. The vampire bats of Central and South America eat only blood. But they don't suck blood like movie vampires do. Instead, they make a small incision with their teeth, usually in the leg of a sleeping animal and lap up the blood that runs out. Vampire bat saliva contains a chemical that prevents the blood from clotting, so they can have a good feed!

TRUE OR FALSE

1. Bats are blind.
2. All bats are dirty and carry rabies.
3. Bats are one of the most important nighttime predators of insects.
4. Bats will try to fly into your hair.
5. Bats are vampires that will suck your blood.

ANSWERS:

1. False. All bats can see; some can see better than humans.
2. False. Bats are clean animals that groom themselves daily. Although bats can carry rabies, you are more likely to get rabies from an unvaccinated dog or cat.
3. True. Each of Canada's bats can eat hundreds of insects an hour.
4. False. Bats don't like to be in people's hair.
5. False. Although there are vampire bats in some tropical regions, most bats eat insects.



BUILD A BAT HOUSE

Too many mosquitoes flying around your yard? What you need is a bat living nearby. You can encourage bats to live near your house and give them a place to sleep by building a bat house. It's also a good way to learn more about bats. Bat houses should be built out of untreated wood and roughened or grooved on the inside so the bats have something to hold on to. Put it 3 to 6 metres above the ground facing south. To get plans for building a bat house, contact Bat Conservation International (www.batcon.org). They even have a North American Bat House Research Project that you can join.

Most bats rest and sleep, hanging upside down by their hind feet. Bats sleep this way because they expend almost no energy to maintain this position - as a bat hangs, its weight causes the foot tendons to automatically grip, holding the animal firmly in place.

A single Little Brown Bat can catch 600 mosquitoes in just one hour.

A colony of Little Brown Bats can eat about 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of bugs in just one night.

BAT WORD SEARCH

BAT HOUSE INSECT NIGHT	BATS LITTLE BROWN BAT PREDATOR	ENDANGERED MAMMAL VAMPIRE	FLYING MOSQUITO WINGS
Z	V	P	A
B	E	T	Y
F	M	B	D
M	I	T	A
O	W	J	B
N	R	D	A
G	P	L	P
N	E	A	J
I	N	M	O
Y	S	M	Z
L	N	A	H
F	X	M	T
B	L	I	T
A	T	A	M
H	R	O	T
A	Y	H	U
B	F	V	A
H	I	G	H
F	O	T	X
B	H	N	E
G	A	I	W
T	S	G	A
T	O	G	L
J	B	H	I
Q	U	I	T
B	O	O	S
H	R	B	U
I	A	R	T
A	R	T	I
S	E	L	N
X	N	S	C
T	W	M	T
R	I	S	C
B	U	D	V
A	D	R	E
K	I	A	D
D	R	E	C
C	A	D	R
R	E	C	E
A	D	R	E
P	F	G	P
F	G	P	O
P	O	N	S