



WINGED

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

OR CUTE, FURRY, FLYING MAMMALS?

BLOOD SUCKING, nighttime creatures of horror that attack unsuspecting victims deep asleep... nothing makes your hair stand on end like the idea of a vampire lurking in a dark alley, or a swarm of bats streaming from an underground inferno. The shadowy world of vampires flourishes in novels and movies but bats live solidly in the sunshine of the real world. Or do they?



KEEP READING OUR FACTS BELOW ABOUT THESE SPOOKY HALLOWEEN CREATURES IN THE EVERGLADES AND A LITTLE FARTHER AFIELD!

VAMPIRES EXIST

They really do, in bat form at least – and they're rare, of more than 1,200 bat species, only 3 are vampires. And they do drink blood! Despite the fearmongering, their preferred prey are not humans, but birds, other mammals, and livestock. Unlike their voracious human-like counterparts, bats drink only a modest tablespoon of blood at a time. If you find yourself in the range of vampire bats – Mexico down to South America, you don't need garlic or crucifixes

to ward them off at night a simple screen will do the trick. Despite their blood-thirsty nature, vampires do have a softer side. For instance, vampire bats are renowned for their altruism. They'll starve without a meal for 2 or 3 days, but they help each other out and give food to hungry friends. Vampire bats also like to groom their closest buddies, and will adopt orphaned pups, or baby bats. They're starting to sound not so scary after all.



Florida Bonneted Bat

BATS ARE GUARDIANS OF THE NIGHT

Most bats are nocturnal, but there are some, larger fruit-eating bats that are active during the day. Despite the phrase “blind as a bat”, they can see, but many use echolocation to navigate at night. Echolocation is similar to radar, meaning bats send out high-frequency sound pulses and listen to the returning echoes to understand where objects are. Bats often have big ears and other funky looking facial features to help with echolocation. This ability is extremely sophisticated, they can detect objects the width of a human hair. So bats are never going to get tangled in your hair. Some do wear hats though, the Florida bonneted bat is a unique species found only here in South Florida. Actually, it’s their large ears that resemble a bonnet. Unfortunately, these cute, dark brown bats are endangered by habitat loss, habitat degradation, pesticides, and climate change.

BATS ARE HARBINGERS OF DEATH

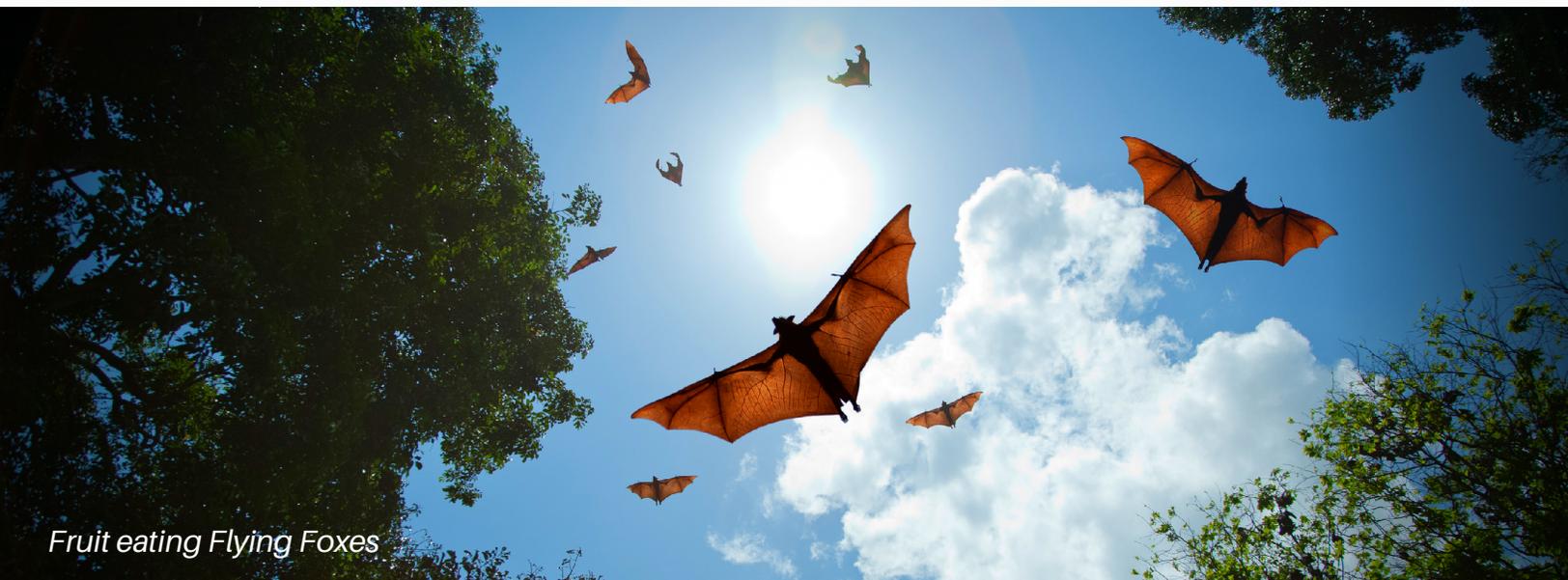
Again true! If you’re an insect at least. Most bat species eat insects, which is a great help to farmers and agriculture. One study estimated that bats provide between \$3.7 - \$53 billion in pest control services for American farmers every year. One particularly impressive slayer is the Brazilian free-tailed bat, the same species that lives in huge colonies in Austin (Texas) and in Carlsbad Caverns (New Mexico). Females that are feeding pups can eat up to an impressive two thirds of their body weight every night in insects, some of these are major agricultural pests. We’re fortunate to have these eradicators in our backyard too. In fact, the link between bats and Halloween may have come from their insect-rich diets. The precursor to Halloween was Samhain, a Celtic harvest festival. During the holiday, the Celts lit giant bonfires, attracting lots of flying insects, and also hungry bats!



Evening Bat

BATS DWELL IN HAUNTED HOUSES

Folklore beliefs abound as bats being evil portends, the souls of dead and disembodied spirits, and children of the devil, which sounds rather ghoulish to me. But there's also beliefs about bats bringing good luck, numerous offspring to your livestock, and being a useful addition to love potions and folk medicine. Bat's blood and other organs were claimed to cure all sorts of ailments from baldness to epilepsy. So I'd calculate this one as a wash. While bats can live in houses, the probability of them magically bearing good versus evil seems fairly equal in folklore. Beyond the scenes of horror movies, where do bats actually live? Here in South Florida, Evening bats and Northern yellow bats like to roost in decidedly un-frightening, palm tree fronds. The Seminole bat lives in pine trees and Spanish moss, while other bat species roost in trees, buildings, and bridges.



Fruit eating Flying Foxes

EXORCISMS OF THE YARD

Correct, bats are very skilled at casting out undesirable beings at home. To be clear, if you find bats in your house or another building, it's illegal to kill or trap them in Florida. Bats have no connection to rodents except that they're small, furry mammals. You can hire a pest control company that will humanely exclude the bats from your house. On the other hand, if you need help driving out pests like mosquitos and other insects, consider putting up a bat house to attract their special powers to your yard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING BAT HOUSES IN FLORIDA:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw290>

INFORMATIONAL SHEET ABOUT BATS IN HOUSES:

https://www.speakcdn.com/assets/2440/haveyou-got-bats-web-comp_english.pdf

LINK FOR LIVE VIDEO OF BAT HOUSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA:

<https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/bats/streaming/>