

## Bats



They are softly squeaking, flying mammals that come out around sunset...BATS!

Some people find bats, the only flying mammal in the world, frightening. On behalf of bats and bat lovers everywhere, I say that they have an undeserved bad rap.

Bats are more closely related to people than to birds or rodents. There are nearly one thousand different species in the world. Of the 44 species in the United States, 20 appear in Nevada.

There are many myths about bats – for instance “blind as a bat”. They see quite well. They have great sonar and do not get caught in hair. Vampire bats live only in Latin America and do not kill people. Medical researchers are studying them because of the anticoagulants they produce.

They are generally social animals and travel in groups. Since they are mammals, the mothers suckle their young. They are fastidious groomers with very few parasites. Some bats greet each other by hugging!

Bats have been flying around planet Earth for about 50,000,000 years. In the desert, they evolved alongside

plants and insects that can survive this difficult environment. With all that shared history, these organisms sometimes rely on each other.

Many local bats eat insects. In a single hour, one brown bat can eat twelve hundred small insects, each the size of a mosquito. Imagine how much insecticide we would spray to remove so many insects, that fast. They also eat moths, beetles and spiders.

Some garden pests can hear bats 100 feet away, and avoid places where bats are flying. Hence, bats eat some pests and repel others.

Not only do bats help to keep down insect pest populations, they also help desert plants survive. They pollinate the flowers of several cacti, agave and yuccas.

Bats are having problems. More than half the American species are either threatened or endangered. One threat to bat survival comes from eating insects sprayed with pesticides. Habitat loss is another calamity. Habitat destruction means they have no place to roost, driving them into homes, between walls and into crawl spaces. Bats fly after insects, often around street or house lights. These problems make them unpopular with people who do not know how important bats are.

Given this information about how terrific bats are, you might ask, “How can I help safeguard our bat population?”

Providing bat houses for roosts helps restore habitat. There are many plans for building these on the web. (Do not put the bat house next to your own.) Lemon balm, mint, salvia, or almost any plant that blooms late in the day or early evening will attract the insects bats eat.

If you must get bats out of your house, contact a professional informed about proper methods for removal bat proofing a building, and will not just spray your house with pesticide.

Finally, very few bats have rabies. One way to avoid getting bat rabies is - NEVER pick up a bat. If you can pick one up, then there is a good chance it is sick. Call animal control instead.

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