

Bats – Frequently Asked Questions

courtesy ABC Local Radio

Let's confirm or deny a few stereotypes.... are bats blind..... do they suck our blood..... are they actually vampires in disguise...

No, bats are not blind. In fact Flying-foxes, the megabats, have quite large eyes and superb night vision. Microbats only have small eyes but also use echolocation - they can actually 'see with sound'.

Bats do not suck our blood, and they are not vampires in disguise. This misconception has come from Vampire Bats, of which there are only 3 species, all of which are only found in Central America and which do feed on blood, but mainly cattle and horses.

**** Where do all the misconceptions around bats come from...**

Hollywood has not been very good PR for bats. They are always in the spooky parts of movies, and associated with witches and vampires. Even some super-hero cartoons, the baddies have bat wings, while the goodies have bird wings.

I think it all stems from them being creatures of the night, and therefore a bit mysterious.

**** So what are some bat facts that are true..... what makes these animals interesting...**

Well, they are amazingly beautiful creatures, when you hold a microbat in the palm of your hand - something that weighs about three grams - and realise that it spends winter on the coast then in late spring flies to a cave hidden in forest several hundred miles away to give birth, that it has the whole landscape embedded in its memory, you realise that this is one special animal.

Bats are also incredibly important to the environment. Flying-foxes are essential for the health and regeneration of our native forests. They pollinate eucalypts and also disperse seed for regeneration of other native trees, such as lily pilly and native fig trees.

Microbats can eat half their body weight in insects a night! They are so important for insect control. Especially they are great at eating many agricultural pests. In parts of the United States, they have even put up huge bat houses near their crops to encourage the bats to come and eat the crop pests. In this way the farmers can minimise the use of insecticides on their crops.

Echolocation is an astonishing feat. When we walk into a room, at a glance we can see where the furniture is, who is there, if there are people we know - microbats do that just with sound. When hunting insects, they can tell what size the insect is, if it is one they like to eat, what direction it is going in and how fast it is going in much faster time than it has taken me to say it!

**** Where can we find bats in the Blackheath and blue mountains area...**

Unbeknown to most people, bats are everywhere. Microbats roost in tree hollows, in cracks in the bark, caves and old mines. They even roost under motorways and bridges. If you go to the Three Sisters lookout at dusk you will see bats start to come out and feed on the insects attracted to the spotlights, these bats probably roost in the old mines and tunnels in the Katoomba area. In the mid-mountains at the moment [late summer], the Grey-headed Flying-foxes are visiting because the bloodwood trees are flowering.