



Lake Erie Nature & Science Center

## Bats: True or False

### All bats have rabies

**False.** Only a very small percentage of bats tested are found to be rabid. When bats contract the rabies virus, they often show symptoms quickly. There is no reason to believe that a healthy appearing bat has rabies. Since rabies can be a fatal disease for humans, it is important to understand the disease. The only way to get rabies is from direct contact with the saliva or brain tissue of an infected animal. You cannot get rabies just by seeing a bat in your attic or yard. Unfortunately, the only sure way to tell if a bat is positive for rabies is to submit the dead bat to a laboratory for testing. If a bat bites you, attempt to safely capture it and contact your local health department and family physician right away.

### Bats drink blood

**False.** Only vampire bats drink blood. There are just three species of vampire bats in the world, and they are found in Mexico, Central America and South America. They feed on animal blood by biting the animal and licking (not sucking) the blood as it drips down the animal's body. All 11 species of Ohio's bats are insectivores and consume fifty percent or more of their body weight in insects each night. In other parts of the world, there are species of bats that eat fruit, nectar and pollen.

### Bats are blind

**False.** Bats can see. However, all species of bats found in Ohio have very small eyes. Most bats rely more on echolocation than their vision to locate food and avoid obstacles during flight. Bats emit high frequency sounds (inaudible to the human ear) and listen for those sounds bouncing back off objects. Through this echolocation, bats can find an object as small as a piece of human hair.

### A bat found inside during the winter should be moved outside.

**False.** If a bat is found inside in an attic, chimney or barn, it is likely in hibernation and can be left alone. If a bat is found active in the house or accidentally awakened, then it should **not** be placed outside or allowed to go back into hibernation. When a bat wakes from hibernation it uses much of its stored energy. If allowed to re-enter hibernation, it will not have enough energy left to stay in hibernation very long. If it wakes up before insects are available, it will starve to death. Bats found active inside during the winter, should be safely captured and brought to Lake Erie Nature & Science Center to be examined and artificially hibernated.

To hibernate them, we first re-hydrate them, feed them for a few days and then place them in our "bat refrigerator." Because this is "artificial" hibernation, we wake the bats every few weeks to monitor their condition. We feed them for a few days, place them back in the "bat fridge" and repeat this process until spring. In Ohio, bats typically hibernate from late October until early April.

### Bats are beneficial animals.

**True.** Bats are extremely helpful creatures. In the US, bats eat millions of pounds of insects each night. Farmers actually attempt to attract bats in order to protect their crops from insect damage instead of using toxic insecticides. Fewer insects may decrease transmission of zoonotic diseases such as West Nile Virus.

Elsewhere in the world, fruit bats disperse seeds and pollinate many of our food plants. Fruit bats specifically are responsible for pollinating much of the rainforest. A healthy bat population reflects a healthy environment.