

True or False?

Ask the children (and adults!) to count on their fingers how many of these statements are true. (No discussion or chatting!)

1. Bats are furry
2. Bats feed their babies on milk
3. Bats fly with their hands
4. All British bats eat insects
5. Bats are not blind
6. All British bats use their ears to help them find their food in the dark
7. British bats hibernate in winter
8. All British bats are protected by Law
9. There are over 1,000 different sorts of bat in the world
10. Vampire bats are only found in Central and South America

Ask: How many did you think were true? Did anyone think they were all true? Ask the adults too.

ALL THESE STATEMENTS WERE TRUE!

Go through the statements again, with discussion

1. Bats are furry

What group do bats belong to? All birds have feathers. All have fur. Bats are MAMMALS.

2. Bats feed their babies on milk

The most important thing that makes mammals different from other groups is the fact they feed their babies on milk – cats, dogs, cows, mum, auntie – when they are first born. *(Can you think of some other mammals?)*

Bat mums usually only have one baby a year, around June, and not every year. They get together with other bat mothers somewhere warm and safe while they are looking after their baby. We call this a maternity roost. They feed their babies on milk for several weeks after they are born before moving away.

3. Bats fly with their hands

Bats are the only mammals that can fly. Like us they have two legs and two arms. The bones of a bat's hand and arm are very like ours, with skin stretched between the very long finger bones and the body to form the wing membrane.

4. All British bats eat insects

Although bats in other parts of the world eat many things, including fruit, flowers, fish but most of them eat insects. All UK bats eat insects, with some also taking other invertebrate like spiders.

5. Bats are not blind,

That's just one of those myths! Bats can probably see as well as you or I at twilight, and do use their eyes when there is enough light. They can only see in black and white – but that's all we can pick out when it gets dark. And even for us in the dark ears are more useful than eyes.

6. All British bats use their ears to help them find their food in the dark

They can find their way in the dark much better than us because they can 'see' with their ears.

What do you hear if you stand under a bridge and shout? *An echo.* Bats send out shouts as they fly. If a shout hits something, an echo

bounces back, but the echo from a tree is very different to the echo from an insect. So as the bat beams its voice around like a torch, the echoes carry a sound picture of everything around. This system is called echolocation (locating or finding things by their echoes), rather like sonar.

The sounds are so high-pitched that we cannot hear most of them unless we use a bat detector, which lowers the pitch to within our hearing range. (Bats also make sounds we can hear – when they chatter before they leave a roost, or calling to each other as they fly).

7. British bats hibernate in winter

There are few insects about in the colder months, so bats gradually become less active, store food as extra fat, then tuck themselves away somewhere cool to hibernate. Everything shuts down – their heart beats and breathing is very slow so they use very little energy. They do sometimes wake, maybe to have a drink or to move to another roost, but it is important they are not disturbed at this time.

8. All British bats are protected by law

Bats need lots of food and many different places to roost (or shelter) through the year. People have cut down trees and built houses and roads over places they used to feed and roost. There are far fewer bats than there used to be, so all our bats and the places they roost are protected by law. Advice must be asked before work is done that might change the places they use.

9. There are over 1,000 different sorts of bat in the world

There are 17 species (different kinds) of bat in Britain, though some are very rare.

Throughout the world there are more than 1,000 species. The biggest numbers are found in the tropics, but they are found everywhere except the arctic and Antarctic.

10. Vampire bats are only found in Central and South America

Yes, there are such things as vampire bats, but of all bats worldwide, only three species are vampires. Two of these feed on the blood of birds, and only one on other bats. All three are found only in Central and South America.