

## The Vampire Bat

This incredible creature, the only mammal capable of true flight, inhabits the caves, tree hollows and mines of Mexico, Central and South America. However, it has an unwarranted reputation that strikes fear into the hearts of many humans.

These agile bats have an average wing span of 18 centimetres; this is approximately twice the length of their body. The distinctive flat nose, rounded ears and deeply grooved lower lip give it the recognisable features of a vampire bat. Fur on its back is short and dark, although paler on its hidden underside.

These amazing animals feed on the blood of the following creatures: cows, pigs, horses and birds. Contrary to popular opinion, they do not suck, but lap the flowing blood after making a small incision with their sharp front teeth. Blood flows freely due to an anti coagulant found in their saliva. The host suffers no pain whilst the bat is feeding, but a disease called rabies can be spread as a result, making these creatures extremely unpopular with cattle farmers. For the bat though, blood is essential. If they are unable to feed on two consecutive nights, they may die unless another from their colony is willing to regurgitate and share their meal.

These fascinating bats are extremely well adapted for obtaining their unusual diet, being able to walk, hop and jump. They are, therefore, able to climb unnoticed onto an unsuspecting host. After feeding, they use their thumbs (which are designed for pushing upwards) and their strong hind legs to propel their heavy body into the air. In addition, they have sharp eyesight and can use echolocation to find prey. Furthermore, these efficient predators have built-in heat sensors that allow rapid identification of a suitable feeding spot.

Despite their fearful name, these fascinating nocturnal creatures pose no threat to humans and are exceedingly well adapted to their environment.