



# Don't be afraid

These magical creatures are our friends  
– and they're not just for Hallowe'en

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October draws in and plans for Hallowe'en begin. When I think of this festival, there are some traditions that readily spring to mind: witch, ghost, zombie and wizard costumes, carving a spooky face in a pumpkin, a big bowl of sweets ready by the door to greet the trick or treaters, and an iconic animal, which has come to be associated with the darkness of this underworld-themed evening – the bat. No Hallowe'en house is complete without a sinister bat hanging in the doorway.

We sometimes fear what we can't see or don't understand, and bats often fall into this category. These fascinating animals are nocturnal. They fly at night and their dexterity in the air is unrivalled. With the human eye, we can often just make out a small creature, which twists and turns against the blue-grey sky at dusk. Once darkness falls, we can no longer visually track them, but make no mistake, these mysterious animals are all around us, doing what they do best – hunting insects. Bats use echolocation to assist them to hunt in the dark. They produce high-frequency soundwaves

via their nose and mouth and listen for the echoes, which are returned when they bounce off an object. Humans cannot hear these bat calls as they are outside our aural range. However, a bat detector will translate the sound into a frequency we can hear. The results are magical. For me, listening to bat calls and watching them dance around the sky, melts away any fear of this enchanting animal, and shatters their cryptic persona.

At this time of year bats are also synonymous with vampires, the fictitious blood-sucking monster immortalised by Bram Stoker in his gothic horror novel, *Dracula*. There are, in fact, just three species of bats that feed ▶



Bat detecting

EMMA BRADSHAW

Flying Pipistrelle bat

on blood, out of approximately 1,400 species globally. These three 'true' vampire bat species can only be found in the Americas, so rest assured you will not come across them here in the UK. The British Isles is currently home to 17 species of bats (known breeding), and we are fortunate to have 10 of those species living in Cheshire. All our bat species feed on insects and do an incredible natural pest control job, with some bats consuming up to 3,000 bugs every evening.

Globally, bats are incredibly important to humans and the environment. Along with suppressing insect populations, there are bats that feed on nectar

*'Watching them dance around in the sky melts away any fear of this enchanting animal'*

and will pollinate flowers as they move from plant to plant. There are around 500 plant species that rely on bats for pollination, including the agave plant, which produces tequila. Fruit-eating bats will also disperse seeds in their guano (bat poo), helping to fertilise the ground and grow new plants.

In the UK, our bat species are beginning to slow down as winter approaches. They will shelter in roosts for longer periods of time before entering hibernation, where they will remain until the spring. You never know, you might be lucky



**ABOVE:**  
Nathusius's  
Pipistrelle

enough to get a glimpse of a bat in the sky around Hallowe'en but perhaps more likely, you will have to make do with your bat ornaments as you celebrate at the end of the month.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust is dedicated to protecting UK bat species, preserving bat roosting, foraging and commuting habitat within its reserves.

The trust, in co-operation with Cheshire Bat Group, monitors bat boxes placed within the Marbury Reedbed Reserve in Northwich, which are known to provide roosting habitat for the rare Nathusius's Pipistrelle. During the summer it hosts bat walks at the local reserves.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Ecological Consultancy CES Ecology also provides professional bat surveys to protect UK bat species from developments, as all species of British bats are protected under both European and British Law. CES Ecology appropriates mitigation schemes to benefit bats within developments and the local area. ♦

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**BELOW:**  
Leisler's bat;  
close-up of a  
flying Pipistrelle



TOM MARSHALL