

# ADVISORY ON BATS

**What are they?** Bats are the only mammals that are capable of true flight and are essential to our environment and the ecosystem. Of more than 1000 species of bats in the world, 20 of them can be found in Singapore. The bat population is fast declining due to destruction of its habitat and extermination arising from human misconceptions and fears. Bats are generally harmless to humans and they do not show aggression unless they feel threatened or are attacked.



← Cave Nectar bat pollinating a banana flower

Fruit bat eating ciku fruit →



## Important Ecological Roles

**Pollinator and seed disperser** Fruit bats are pollinators and seed dispersers and as such they help to regenerate forests and ensure the survival of these forests. The agricultural trade is also supported by bats that aid in the pollination of certain plants, such as durian and petai. The sale of durian and Petai help to generate \$120 million in Southeast Asia and \$2.8 million in Malaysia's Klang Valley respectively.

### **Control of the insect population**

Insectivorous bats feed on insects such as mosquitoes, beetles, and crickets, thus helping to keep the insect population in check. By feeding on insects, they also help to support agriculture as they reduce the damage the insects cause to crops, as well as decrease the need for pesticides.

## Common myths: are they true?

### **Bats are blind.**

All bats have eyes and can see. The larger fruit bats have good eyesight but the smaller insectivorous bats have poorer eyesight. The latter are active at night and use echolocation or sonar to locate objects, including prey, i.e. they emit high frequency calls that bounce off objects and help the bat to locate where the object is, its size and other features.

### **Bats are flying mice.**

Bats are not flying mice; they are not even remotely related to rodents.

### **Bats tend to get tangled in people's hair.**

Bats are able to sense their surroundings very well and will try to avoid you.

### **Bats are aggressive and will try to bite you.**

Bats generally do not attack, but may use their teeth to defend themselves if cornered or threatened.

### **All bats carry rabies.**

Less than one percent of bats carry rabies. In fact, no bats have ever been reported to have rabies in Singapore.

You should not handle a grounded bat as it may result in a bite in self-defence.

### **All bats carry the Nipah virus.**

Fruit bats are one of the many natural hosts for Nipah virus.

### **Bat droppings (guano) are poisonous.**

Bat guano is a rich fertilizer. Spores of one fungus species that can grow on bat guano can cause histoplasmosis if inhaled.

Histoplasmosis occurs naturally in the environment and bat guano is just one of the many ways to be exposed to it.

### What to do when I have bats in my property?

- ✓ **Do not be alarmed.** Like most wild animals, bats are shy. You are advised to leave bats alone. They will fly away after they have done feeding.

#### To minimise the occurrence of bats feeding and roosting in your property:

- ✓ **Do ensure that all fruits are harvested** from the fruit trees within your property.
- ✓ **Install lighting at areas where you think bats may visit** as bats prefer dark and damp places.
- ✓ **Apply lubricants or glossy paper on areas they perch or roost.**
- ✓ **Keep the outdoor lights of the house turned on**, such as the patio/balcony lights.
- ✓ **Hang old compact discs (CDs) outside.** Bats do not like light and a shining compact disc may also spook them off.
- ✓ **Take away what they love** – for fruit bats, if you have fruit trees, you are inviting them into your garden. If you do not want them, try not to have fruit trees.



Cave Nectar bat attracted by Petai flowers



Cave Nectar bat on Petai flower

If you have further queries, please contact AVA at 1800-476-1600 or through our online feedback form at <https://www.ifaq.gov.sg/ava/apps/feedback.aspx>.

Photos by Chan Kwok Wai and Nick Baker.