

At Bat! by Kathy Woodward

Fall Festival Great Swamp NWR, September 14, 2019

Person 1: Hi, Welcome to Great Swamp NWR. I hope you are having a good time today.

Person 2: There are lots of fun things to do here today. And we are going to learn some things about bats! (Swinging a wiffle ball bat.)

Person 1: Uhh, why to you have a bat? You didn't really think this is about that kind of bat, did you?

Person 2: No, silly, but I don't know much about the other kind of bats and ...I thought this kind of bat might come in handy if I meet a bat.

Person 1: Yeah, bats really have a bad reputation, don't they?

Person 2: (Turning to the crowd) Did you ever hear anything bad about bats. (Listen to answers.) See, I'm glad I brought this bat!

Person 1: But those things are not true!

Person 2: Are you sure?

Person 1: Yes, I was just reading this book about bats. (Hands book with script to Person 2.) But, better yet, let's ask the expert. Mrs. Bat, I hate to wake you from your nap, but we have some questions for you.

Bat: (Wearing sunglasses-slowly raises head and looks around. Stretch a little and yawns.) Whoa, there are people here.

Person 2: (Holds up bat, as if slightly frightened.)

Person 1: Yes, today is the Fall Festival at Great Swamp NWR and we are learning about bats.

Bat: Are they (Pointing to the audience) friendly? They aren't going to hit me, are they? Lots of people are afraid and try to hurt bats.

Person 1: No one is going to hurt you here. (Motioning for Person 2, to put down the bat.) (Turning to the audience) We aren't going to hurt Mrs. Bat, are we?

Bat: Good, because I love my summer home at Great Swamp NWR. I feel safe here. My babies are born here. There are trees to nap in, fresh air and water... and lots of mosquitoes! I love to eat mosquitoes!

Person 2: Excuse me, so you live in Great Swamp in the summer, but where do you live in the winter?

Bat: Well, I mostly sleep in the winter, because there are no mosquitoes here in December. I hang with lots of my relatives in an abandoned mine in the hills of north Jersey. Some of my cousins fly south in the winter because it is warmer and there are lots of bugs to eat!

Person 2: So you aren't dangerous? I heard you are "nocturnal".

Bat: I am "nocturnal".

Person 1: Do you know what “nocturnal” means?

Person 2: (Looking scared again) Well...no but it sounds dangerous!

Person 1: I bet some of our friends here know what it means to be “nocturnal”.

(Get answers...)

Person 2: So “nocturnal” means to sleep during the day and come out to “play” when the sun goes down.

Bat: Yes, I fly around with my friends and eat a lot of mosquitoes!

Person 2: How do you fly at night and not crash into trees? Do you have headlights?

Person 1: You are funny! Headlights on bats! Haven’t you heard of echolocation?

Person 2: Echo..what?

Bat: Echolocation. Bats send out a sound that people can’t hear but we bats can. When that sound bounces off anything, we know to swerve so we don’t hit a tree, or to swerve to catch a mosquito.

Person 2: You really like mosquitoes!

Bat: Yep, I can eat over 6,000 in a night!

Person 2: What do mosquitoes taste like?

Bat: Yummy. Salty, and a little crunchy. Sorry I don't have any to share.

Person 2: Oh, that's okay.

Person 1: Thanks for eating so many mosquitoes. Should we thank you for anything else?

Bat: No thanks needed for eating mosquitoes. Bats also eat other flying insects that would destroy wheat and corn, so farmers love us! Some of my relatives, the bats in South America and other warm places, like to drink the nectar or syrup from flowers. By doing that, the bats pollinate bananas, avocados, dates, figs, peaches, and mangoes.

Person 2: So the bananas I eat might have been pollinated by a bat? WOW. I didn't know that. Thank your cousins!  
(Pause)

Person 2: But I heard bats get caught in people's hair!?

Bat: Nope. I'm not interested in hair and echolocation keeps me away from people, too.

Person 2: Echolocation is sort of a "super power." Do you have any other "super power".

Bat: I don't like to brag but bats are the only mammals that fly. Pretty nifty!

Person 2: What about birds??

Person 1: Mrs. Bat said "the only mammals that can fly". Birds aren't mammals. Birds lay eggs but bats have baby bats.

Person 2: I wish I could fly!

Person 1: So, I have a question. Why do you hang upside down when you rest and sleep?

Bat: Yeah, I noticed when I flew by a house one night, that you all lie down in blankets to sleep. That looked strange. It would be hard to start to fly again, if we bats were piled on top of each other. By hanging by my feet, on the roof of a cave, or a tree branch, all I have to do is uncurl my toes, and I'm on my way. Want to see a picture I just got from my cousins? They are fruit bats. They live in Mexico but I think they were on vacation in Arizona.

Person 1: I heard a lot of bats are dying because of some illness.

Bat: Hey, thanks for asking. Yep, bats can get sick, just like people and other animals. 12 years ago, a disease called "white-nose syndrome", started making a lot of bats very sick. It was a very sad time. Millions of bats died. One thing, though, people started caring more about bats! Some kinds of bats were already rare, so people are working hard to help bats. I think it's terrific that Great Swamp's Fall Festival is all about bats!

Person 1: Maybe our friends here have questions about bats.

(Take questions from audience.)

Person 1: It looks like Mrs. Bat is getting sleepy. Let's all say "nighty-night", no. "Dayie, day?", no. How about "Sleep tight".

All: Sleep tight!

Person 2: I sure learned a lot about bats, today. I hope you did, too.

## Bats at Great Swamp

hoary bat

silver-haired bat

red bat

tricolored bat

little brown bat

northern long-eared bat

Indiana bat

eastern small-footed bat

big brown bat

### Questions:

- How long do bats live? 20 to 40 years
- What is the biggest bat? The giant golden-crowned flying fox is one of the largest bat species in the world, with a wingspan of over 5 feet.
- What is the smallest bat? The bumblebee **bat**, also known as Kitti's hog-nosed **bat**, is the **world's smallest bat** and the **smallest** mammal in the **world** based on skull size. Weighing in at just around 2 grams, it's so small that you might actually confuse one for a bumblebee if it went buzzing by your ear in the night.
- Are there vampire bats in New Jersey? No, they live in Central and South America and feed on the blood of cattle.
- Can bats walk?