mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Do bats really drink blood?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi, it's Doug! I just got this in the mail and I'm really excited. Can you guess what this is? I'll give you a hint: Animals that have wings come and sleep in there. It's not a birdhouse—it's a bat house! And if I'm lucky, I'm going to have bats living in this. You'll see what I mean.

Someone named Shayla has a question about bats. Let's give her a call.

[Video Call]
- Hi, Doug!
- Hi, Shayla!
- I have a question for you. Do bats really drink blood?
- That's a great question.

Now, wait a second. Bats drink blood—as like, their food? Here's a close-up of a real bat hanging upside down. Could it really be that this cute little thing drinks blood for its food? What do you think? What do you think bats eat?

Now would be a good time to pause the video and discuss.

Okay. You ready?

It's true, there are bats that drink blood. They're called vampire bats. They're named after vampires, the made-up monsters that people dress up like for Halloween. In stories, vampires suck the blood of people. Vampires may not be real-life, but vampire bats are definitely a real thing.

So, do vampire bats suck people's blood? The answer is, not really. Vampire bats mostly drink blood from animals. You can see it for yourself here. This is a vampire bat on the back of a pig. When vampire bats do this, it doesn't usually even hurt the animal. Most animals barely notice it.

Vampire bats don't live everywhere. They're only found in South America, Central America, parts of Mexico, and the Southern part of Texas. But there are other kinds of bats—lots of them—hundreds of different species.

Most bats don't drink blood, they eat other kinds of food, like here. See if you can figure out what this kind of bat eats. That's the bat flying around, it's chasing something. Here's a slowed-down video. There—got it! It's catching bugs! That's what most bats eat, they eat insects. Animals like mosquitoes, moths, and beetles.

Scientists have discovered that some bats have a huge appetite for insects. One little bat like this can eat over a thousand mosquitoes in a single night. Because of this, some people actually want to have bats near their homes. That's why people hang up bat boxes. It's for bats to live in. The more bats there are to eat mosquitoes, the fewer mosquitoes there are to bite people.

But not all bats eat insects. There are some kinds of bats that eat fruit—like these bats here. They're munching on a pear and a piece of melon. You probably have bats where you live. They don't just live in caves—bats are everywhere. I live in a city and I see them here. You just have

to know how to spot them, here's a tip: if you notice something that looks like a little bird flying around in late evening or nighttime, look closely, because it's probably a bat.

So in summary, there are all kinds of different bats, and they eat different things. Most of them eat insects, but some eat fruit, and a few drink blood.

By the way, the only way bats might be dangerous is if you touch them because sometimes they carry diseases. So never pick up a dead or injured bat off the ground. But bats won't bother you, so there's no reason to be scared of them flying around. They're actually fun to see, and since some of them eat mosquitoes, people find it great to have them around. Go look outside this evening—see if you can find a bat flying around.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Shayla, for asking it!