

Wings in the Dark



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- The number of bats worldwide is in serious decline.

Some people might think Geraldine Griswold is batty. Some say she has bats in her belfry.

Griswold doesn't mind the jokes. She loves bats. All types of bats: big bats, small bats, brown bats, fruit bats, even vampire bats. In fact, she currently has about 20 bats hanging around at her home.

She doesn't live in a bat cave. Griswold, who is a traffic reporter for a radio station by day, runs a "bat hospital" at her house in Connecticut by night.

You won't find these little creatures stretched out on gurneys or in wheelchairs, but you might find one or two of them snuggling up to Griswold.

Hardly Winging It

At her home, Griswold cares for bats that are sick, injured, or orphaned. She has taken care of bats with injuries, such as a broken wing, as well as baby bats that have lost their mothers.

She has also cared for bats that have become stranded for the winter because they didn't travel south before cold temperatures set in. With the help of a veterinarian, Griswold nurses these winged mammals back to health and then sets them free.

Griswold is no stranger to bats. She grew up on a farm where bats were a common sight. So it was no surprise how quickly she took to an orphaned baby bat she found squeaking on the ground outside her house ten years ago. She took in the bat and fed it milk from a goat on her farm.

To her delight, the little creature survived the night. Today, the bat-which she named Poppy-still lives with her. Griswold didn't release Poppy back into the wild because the bat is used to living with people.

A Bat Rap

Griswold doesn't keep Poppy all to herself. Poppy is one of the winged creatures that she takes with her on school visits. This Halloween she is speaking at a school in Connecticut. Griswold teaches kids about bats. She is on a mission to change the animal's bad reputation.

Many people associate bats with Dracula, the evil vampire who transforms himself into a bat before sucking the blood from unsuspecting victims. Bats aren't evil, however.

Despite what many people believe, bats don't get tangled in people's hair, and they are not blind. "Bats are so misunderstood," Griswold told *Weekly Reader*.

Many people, she says, are afraid of bats, but they are actually gentle creatures that are important to the environment.

Bats pollinate plants, spread seeds, and, most important, eat insects-including pesky, disease-carrying mosquitoes. "There is no animal worldwide that eats more bugs at night than bats do," said Griswold, who is full of bat trivia.

For example, the 20 million to 50 million bats that live in Bracken Cave near San Antonio eat 250 tons of insects a night. Griswold said that's equal to all those bats eating the weight of about 12 Asian elephants!

The Bracken bats, which can fly up to 10,000 feet high and at speeds of 60 miles per hour, have boomerang-shaped wings.

On the Decline

The number of bats worldwide is in serious decline. They often lose their homes when people cut down trees or destroy their roosts in caves. That's why Griswold tries to educate kids about bats.

After she spoke to a local Brownie troop, the group's members built bat houses in their town. The project turned into a community effort. Bat houses sprung up all over town, providing homes, or habitats, for these creatures.

"The kids are making such a huge difference," she said.

The Many Faces of Bats

Vampire bats can be found in Mexico, Central America, and South America. They drink blood, but it's usually from cattle and horses. A sensor on the bat's nose helps it find blood close to the surface of its victim's skin.

Egyptian fruit bats live mainly in Asia, and Africa. They eat fruit and nectar. Their long noses help them locate ripe fruit. Fruit bats use their sharp teeth to chew fruit and extract the seeds.

The spotted bat's ears are almost as long as its head and body. It uses its ears to detect insects. The spotted bat, which is found in parts of North America, feeds mainly on moths.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does Geraldine Griswold run at her house in Connecticut by night?

- A. a bat cave
- B. a radio station
- C. a "bat hospital"
- D. the traffic report

2. The author divides the text into sections using subheadings. What does the author describe in the section with the subheading "A Bat Rap"?

- A. the decline in the number of bats worldwide
- B. Griswold's experience with caring for bats
- C. correct information people generally believe about bats
- D. incorrect information people generally believe about bats

3. Read this sentence from the text:

"Bats pollinate plants, spread seeds, and, most important, eat insects--including pesky, disease-carrying mosquitoes."

What inference about bats does this information support?

- A. Bats can be very helpful to other species, including humans.
- B. Bats can be very harmful to other species, including humans.
- C. The number of bats worldwide is in serious decline.
- D. The 20 million to 50 million bats that live in Bracken Cave near San Antonio eat 250 tons of insects a night.

4. What will probably happen to the populations of insects bats normally eat as the bats' habitats are threatened?

- A. The populations of insects will probably decrease.
- B. The populations of insects will probably increase.
- C. The populations of insects will probably stay the same.
- D. The populations of insects will probably disappear.

5. What is this text mostly about?

- A. Griswold's "bat hospital"
- B. bats and Griswold's efforts to help them
- C. dangers bats face
- D. incorrect information people believe about bats

6. Read these sentences from the text:

"Griswold is no stranger to bats. She grew up on a farm where bats were a common sight. So it was no surprise how quickly she took to an orphaned baby bat she found squeaking on the ground outside her house ten years ago. She took in the bat and fed it milk from a goat on her farm."

What does the phrase "took to" mean in this sentence?

- A. moved to another place
- B. became afraid of
- C. grew to hate
- D. grew to like

7. Read these sentences from the text:

"Many people associate bats with Dracula, the evil vampire who transforms himself into a bat before sucking the blood from unsuspecting victims. Bats aren't evil, however."

What word could replace "however" in the final sentence without changing its meaning?

- A. therefore
- B. though
- C. thus
- D. then

8. List two pieces of information about bats people generally believe are true, which are actually incorrect.

9. Bats often lose their homes when people cut down trees or destroy their roosts in caves.

How did the Brownie troop that Griswold spoke to work towards solving this problem?

10. What might Griswold be hoping to accomplish by educating kids about bats?

Include at least two pieces of evidence from the text in your answer.
