

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Sam

And I'm Sam.

Neil

For centuries the [redacted] between humans and bats has been complex. In some cultures, bats are depicted as vampires, associated with Halloween, witches and dark, scary places. In others they are considered messengers of the gods.

Sam

Bats play an [redacted] part in stories and myths from around the world. And a large illuminated 'bat signal' shining in the night sky can mean only one thing – a call for help to the superhero, Batman!

Neil

So do we love or hate these furry flying mammals? And with some [redacted] headlines identifying bats as the possible source of Covid-19, should we think of them as friend or enemy?

Sam

We'll be answering all these questions soon, but first, Neil, time for another [redacted] bat fact. Did you know that bats account for 1 in 5 of all mammal species? There's a huge variety of them, from tiny fruit-eating bats that fit into the palm of your [redacted] to giant **carnivores**, or meat-eaters, with nearly two-metre wingspans.

Neil

That's right. In fact, it's the variety of bat types that might explain our complex feelings towards them. So, Sam, my quiz question is this: roughly how many different [redacted] of bat are there worldwide? Is it

- a) one and a half thousand?
- b) two and a half thousand? or
- c) three and a half thousand?

Sam

Hmmm, I'll say b) two and a half thousand.

Neil

OK, Sam, we'll come back to that later in the programme. Maybe not everyone likes them, but bats do have some friends. Farmers love them for pollinating their plants...

Sam

...and medical [redacted] study them hoping to discover the secrets of their anti ageing and long life.

Neil

Dr Winifred Frick is the chief scientist at Bat Conservation International, a group of environmentalists working to protect bats.

Sam

Here she is telling BBC World Service programme, The Documentary, about another useful [redacted] provided by bats in the United States:

Dr Winifred Frick

Most bats are **insectivorous** and they're really important consumers of different kinds of insect **pests** and here in the United States it's been estimated that bats provide billions of dollars every year to the US agricultural industry through their voracious [redacted] of agricultural pest insects.

Neil

Most bats eat only insects – they're **insectivores**.

Sam

That's good news for farmers because they eat many **pests** - insects or small animals that are harmful or damage crops.

Neil

Even better, bats' appetite for these annoying insects is **voracious** – very strong and eager.

Sam

So far, so good in the [redacted] between humans and bats. But then along came the coronavirus pandemic and with it, newspaper reports that bats might be to blame.