

Bats and the Origins of Outbreaks

One example is the Ebola virus, which caused deadly outbreaks in Western Africa. The Nipah virus, also carried by bats, . Health experts say Nipah is serious enough to possibly cause a “serious **epidemic**.”

The coronavirus family of viruses also includes diseases such as (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Scientists have discovered that SARS and MERS , with other animals serving as **intermediate hosts**.

The only other animals coming close to hosting as many viruses as bats are rodents. There are about 2,300 species of rodents, making up about 40 percent of all **mammals**. While

Scientists believe the many types of species in both groups can create more possibilities for viruses.

. Most eat insects such as beetles, moths and mosquitoes. Some bats eat fruit, nectar, seeds and **pollen** from flowers.

Bats also provide many benefits to the environment. Some bats play important parts in plant pollination and spreading seeds. Bats can pollinate more than 500 species of plants including avocados, bananas, dates and mangoes.

In Southeast Asia, durian, a highly valued fruit, can be effectively pollinated only by the Dawn Bat. In this way, bats are important economically for people.

Insect-eating bats also serve to naturally control insect populations. These bats eat millions of insects at night, including some that cause severe damage to crops.