

Neil

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

Sam

And I'm Sam.

Neil

the relationship 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 of the gods.

Sam

Bats play an important part in stories and myths from around the world. And a large illuminated 'bat ' 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 newspaper headlines identifying bats as the possible source of Covid-19, should we think of them as friend or ?

Sam

We'll be answering all these questions soon, but first, Neil, time for another interesting 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 hand to **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 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.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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 _____…

Sam

…and medical scientists study them hoping to discover the secrets of their anti ageing and _____.

Neil

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

Sam

Here she is telling BBC World Service programme, The Documentary, about another useful service 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 _____ that bats provide billions of dollars every year to the US agricultural industry through their voracious consumption 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 _____ insects is **voracious** – very strong and eager.

Sam

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

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Neil

Before we get into this, we need to explain some terms. The Covid which people around the world have been suffering from is the 'outbreak virus'. But if you go backwards there's an intermediary known as the 'progenitor virus' between this and the 'ancestral virus', which is [ ] or centuries older.

Sam

Ninety-nine percent of scientists would agree that the 'ancestral virus' of Covid 19 came from bats. But it's the go-between 'progenitor virus' that everyone is searching for now.

Neil

One of the scientists leading this search is Linfa Wang, a professor at Duke Medical School who is known as the 'Batman of Singapore'. Here he is explaining his work to BBC World Service's, The Documentary:

Prof Linfa Wang

Of course the **holy grail** right now for Covid-19 is to discover where is that progenitor virus and also in which kind of animals or humans, right? And usually, the progenitor virus has to be 99.9% identical to the outbreak virus and so our study was set up to do that. If you can catch that virus and you [ ] the genomic sequence is 99.9% [identical] then **that's brilliant**.

Sam

Professor Wang thinks that finding the source of Covid-19's 'progenitor virus' would be like finding the **holy grail**. This expression - the holy grail - is associated with the cup believed to have been used by Jesus Christ at his [ ] [ ]. It means something extremely difficult to find or get.

Neil

If you can discover the 'progenitor virus' then, in the words of Professor Wang – **that's brilliant!** – an exclamation meaning 'that's very good!' or 'amazing!'

Sam

So although bats are sometimes, wrongly, blamed for causing Covid, they are good friends to farmers, environmentalists, and scientists – as well as [ ]! Are bats friend or foe? You decide. So anyway, what was the answer to your quiz question, Neil.

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Neil

Ah yes, I asked Sam: How many different species of bat are there around the world? What did you say?

Sam

I said there were, b) two and a half thousand different species of bats. Was I right?

Neil

You were close, Sam, but the correct answer was… a) there are one and a half thousand different species of bats around the world. With so many I guess some of them might be _____ than others.

Sam

Let's recap the vocabulary from this programme about the relationship between humans and bats, starting with **carnivores** which are animals that eat meat…

Neil

Insectivores, _____, are animals, like most bats, that eat only insects.

Sam

A **pest** is an insect or small animal that is harmful or _____ crops.

Neil

Bats eat pests **voraciously**, or very eagerly.

Sam

The **holy grail** refers to something that's extremely difficult to find or get.

Neil

And finally, you can use the phrase, **that's brilliant!** to say, 'that's great!' or 'amazing!'

Sam

Once again our six minutes _____. See you again soon for more topical chats and trending vocabulary here at 6 Minute English.

Neil

And don't forget you can download our app to find programmes on many more _____, from African animals to zodiac signs and zombies, all here on the BBC Learning English website. Bye for now!

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