

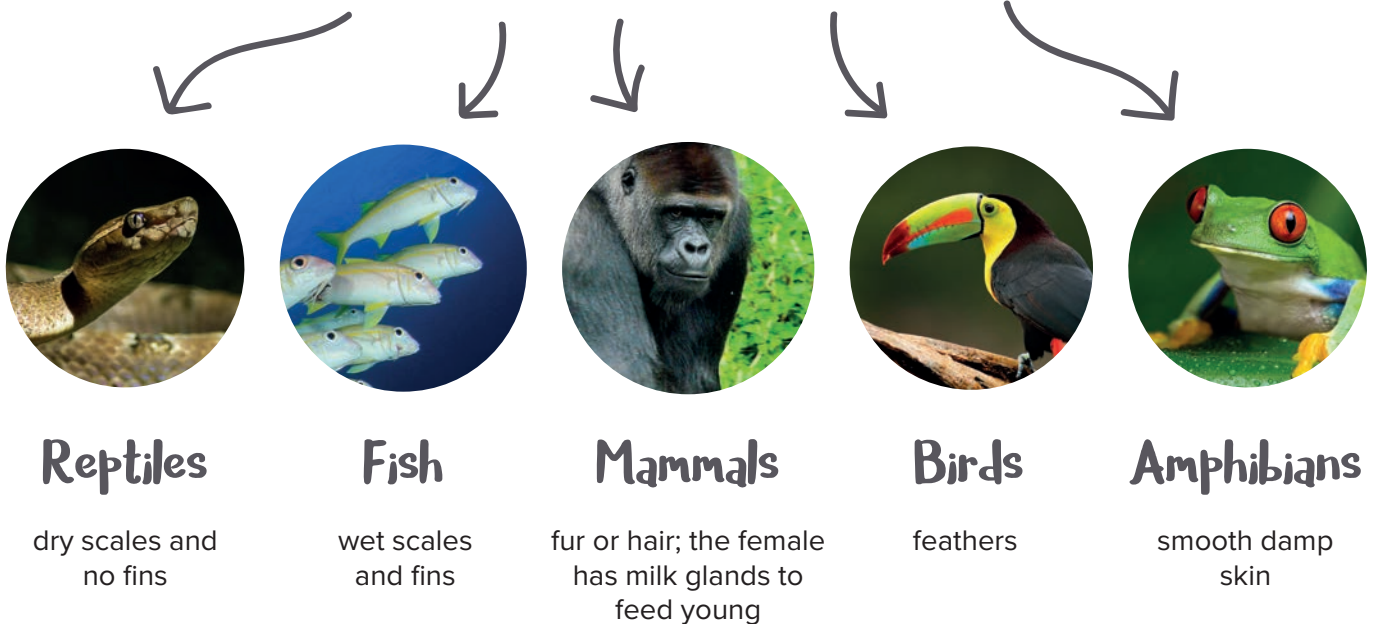
What are bats?

There are more than 1,300 species of bat worldwide – but what ARE bats? Where do they fit in the animal kingdom? Even now, some people are confused by these furry animals that fly with their hands.

Bats, like us, are mammals, one of the five groups of animals that have a backbone. Run your finger down the middle of your back and you will feel a row of bumps. Each is part of your vertebrae, the bones that make up your backbone. Because they are separate you are able to bend and turn.

All five groups of vertebrates are able to move in this way, yet are very different.

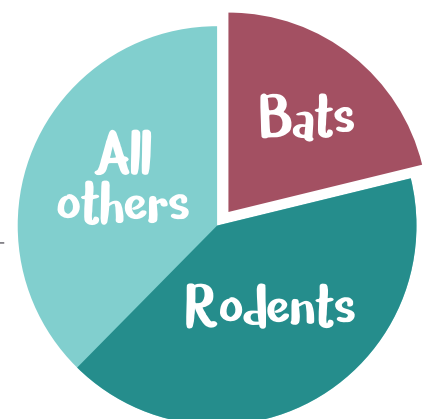
Animals with backbones (vertebrates)



Scientists give animals scientific names which are used all over the world. They sort or classify the animals by putting them into groups of orders which are similar in some way.

We are members of the order of PRIMATES, together with the monkeys and apes. Bats belong to the order CHIROPTERA from the Greek words for hand-wing. The largest group is the order of rodents, RODENTIA, which includes rats, mice and squirrels. Bats make up the second largest group. About one-fifth of all mammal species are bats.

The main groupings of mammals worldwide



Bat Families

Bats are found all over the world except the north and south poles. The different species of bat have been arranged by scientists into 18 families, although they live in very different places you would have no problem in recognising every one as a bat.

Bats are split into two major groups

One family is so different from the others that it is put into a separate group (or sub-order) known as megabats. The other 17 families are grouped together as Microbats.



Megabats (*Megachiropterans*)

Megabats have large eyes and noses. They rely on smell and vision to find their food, as they feed on fruit, flowers, nectar and pollen. Amongst them are the largest bats in the world, the flying foxes, one with a wingspan of nearly two metres. But some are tiny, such as the little nectar-feeding bats. Different species weigh from 20g to 1.5kg. There is only one family of megabats, living in the Old World tropics.



Microbats (*Microchiropterans*)

Microbats have large ears, and are able to echolocate, though some depend on echolocation more than others to find their food. Most feed on insects, but some also eat pollen, nectar, fish, frogs, other bats and blood. Most are small, the smallest weighing only 1.5g, though the largest has a wingspan of a metre. Microbats live all over the world except the Arctic, the Antarctic and a few isolated islands.