

THE MYTH OF BATS DEBUNKED

Jacky Judas is a terrestrial biodiversity expert at Emirates Wildlife Society-WWF. Here, he explains the role of bats in our ecosystem.

Recently, I went to assess a situation at a home in Dubai where tenants reported having a colony of bats in their roost. The family desperately wanted to get rid of the bats but only by using a method that would not kill them. They contacted multiple companies, but to their dismay, they were provided with unreliable and inefficient methods like using electrified wires to frighten the bats, or worse, kill them. When I went to assess the situation I was amazed to see a colony of approximately one hundred bats, a kind called Kuhl Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus kuhlii*). I reassured the tenant and his family that these bats, which are widespread elsewhere in the globe, are harmless.

“Myth has it that bats can attack you, suck your blood or attach themselves to your hairs. In reality they are harmless and will try to avoid you. Should they fly close to you at night, it would be most likely to catch an insect nearby. In fact, they will help you peacefully get rid of mosquitoes or other unwanted insects. They play a crucial role in our ecosystem that is important to understand before we take action in managing them.

“Bats are a captivating widespread species, with very sophisticated and diverse ecological adaptations. We should consider bats as our allies to keep a healthy environment, as more bats in a region indicate



Above: Terrestrial biodiversity expert Jacky Judas

Below: The Kuhl Pipistrelle bat



healthier habitats. Not only do bats pollinate our crops, they also contribute to insect regulation; each individual can eat dozens if not hundreds of insects per night, and can essentially make a substantial difference in pest control like managing mosquitoes or invasive moths.

“In the UAE alone, there are nine species of bats that have been recorded to date, but this group has been scarcely studied, and it is likely that other species are present. Bats populations have presumably suffered due to a decrease in their food supply, although this has not yet been studied or recorded. As part of EWS-WWF terrestrial conservation programme, the team is building on the research gap by conducting surveys to better understand the current population status of bats locally, thanks to a generous grant from the Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Fund.

“My advice if you find bats is do not worry. Just let them be and enjoy their presence. At worst, they will make a bit of noise at night or smear the soil with droppings, but their advantages outweigh the negatives. Should you really want to get rid of them, do not kill them – they are protected by law. Bats generally change their roost between the breeding season (March to July) and the rest of the year. If they select your home to breed, they will probably move away voluntarily later in the season (August to September).

“In a general context of a major biodiversity crisis, we are currently losing wildlife populations and species at an unprecedented rate, leading a growing number of scientists to believe that we are entering the 6th major extinction event on earth. That said; it is imperative we help protect species, should it be a bee or a bat in your garden. All have their place and role to play on our Earth.” 🦋



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