How Bats Find Food in the Dark



Read the passage. Then answer the questions in full sentences.

Name _____ Date _____

Bats are flying mammals, and they are nocturnal, which means they are active at night. Many bats hunt insects in the dark, so how do they find such small prey? They use echolocation, which means they find their way and their food by listening for the echoes of their own calls.

First, a bat makes sound waves at frequencies too high for people to hear, called ultrasound. The sound waves bounce off objects around the bat. Then the sounds return to the bat's ears, which are finely tuned to recognize its own unique calls.

When a bat detects an insect it wants to eat, it produces a rapid series of calls to pinpoint the exact location of its prey. Then it swoops in and gulps the insect down. This is called a feeding buzz.

Bats can change their calls for different purposes, so they have searching calls, feeding calls and social calls. Each species of bat also has its own unique call pattern. Scientists can identify and study bats by recording their calls with special microphones and recording devices.

Bats that eat insects can eat 50 percent or more of their body weight in insects each night. In the United States, that adds up to more than $3.7 billion worth of pest control every year. When bats are around, there are fewer insect pests damaging crops, and farmers do not have to spend as much money on pesticides, the chemicals that kill pests.

1. **What do bats use to find insects in the dark?**

2. **What does "pinpoint" mean in the passage, and which words help you tell?**

3. **What happens, in order, during a feeding buzz?**

4. **Why do you think farmers might be glad to have bats living nearby?**

Answer key

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1. What do bats use to find insects in the dark?
   Echolocation: they listen for the echoes of their own calls.

2. What does “pinpoint” mean in the passage, and which words help you tell?
   To find the exact spot of something. The words “the exact location of its prey” help you tell.

3. What happens, in order, during a feeding buzz?
   The bat detects an insect, makes a rapid series of calls to pinpoint its exact location, and then swoops in and gulps it down.

4. Why do you think farmers might be glad to have bats living nearby?
   Sample answer: bats eat huge numbers of insects every night, so fewer pests damage the crops, and farmers do not have to spend as much on pesticides.