

Protecting Wildlife for our children's future



## Real Life Vampires Don't Wait For Halloween To Be Blood-Thirsty

RESTON, Va (October 27)—Who is your favorite vampire? Do you swoon over Edward Cullen and Bill Compton, or are classic bloodsuckers like Count Dracula and Lestat de Lioncourt more your style? As fun as it is to obsess over and be scared by these fictional vampires, the real things are much more fascinating. Here is some blood-curdling information from [National Wildlife Federation](#) on living, breathing vampires that might just be stalking you.

### Vampire Bats

Meet *Desmodus rotundus* and his cousins *Diphylla ecaudata* and *Diaemus youngi*, known respectively as the common, hairy-legged and white-winged vampire bats. Found only in the Americas, their collective range goes from Mexico down through Argentina. These bats feed exclusively on the blood of other animals. The common vampire bat typically goes for mammals, including domestic cows and horses, while the other two species prefer to feed upon birds—although the occasional human does make it on the menu. Thankfully, the bite of one of these bats won't turn you into a vampire although the wounds can become infected.

### Mosquitoes

For mosquitoes, it's the ladies who are the bloodsuckers. Both sexes feed on flower nectar as their main source of nutrients. Only when she's ready to reproduce does the female mosquito seek out a blood meal. She needs the added protein boost in order to lay her eggs and create a whole new generation of lady vampires.

### Lampreys

These eel-like creatures are something right out of science fiction horror. Their disc-shaped mouths are filled with circles of razor-sharp teeth, which they use to bore into the flesh of their victims. They can remain attached for days or even weeks, all the while sucking in blood and body fluids. One species, the sea lamprey, has been introduced into the Great Lakes where it has become a problematic invasive exotic species. This lamprey can grow to almost 2 feet in length and the native lake fish it feeds upon often don't survive the draining.

### Bed Bugs

The goodnight rhyme “nite nite, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite” takes on macabre twist when you learn that in the last few years, these little vampires are on the rise. Nearly eradicated in the North America for 50 years, bed bugs are back with a blood-

sucking vengeance, showing up everywhere from high-end hotels to college dorms to rural bedrooms. After their victims fall asleep, bed bugs emerge from their hiding places in cracks and crevices and insert their sucking mouthparts in a series of bites along the blood vessels, drinking as they go and leaving a series of red, itchy welts.

### **Oxpeckers and Vampire Finches**

There are several bird species that form symbiotic relationships with larger animals. The larger animals tolerate the birds' presence on their bodies, leaving the birds free to feast upon ticks and other parasites that are lodged in the skin feeding upon the animals' blood. It's a win-win situation. But oxpeckers are birds that take it one step further. Not only do they feed upon invertebrate parasites, they are happy to consume bits of flesh and blood of their host animals while they're at it. Vampire finches inhabit the Galapagos Islands and supplement their diet of seeds, insects and nectar with the blood of other birds, usually the blue-footed booby. They peck a hole in the flesh of the booby to get the larger bird's blood and strangely, the boobies hardly seem to notice.

### **Leeches**

Few animals evoke the "icky-creepies" in people as much as worms do with their slimy squirminess and their faceless, legless bodies. When such a creature also feeds upon human blood, it only adds to the horror factor. Such is the case with leeches. These parasitic worms attach themselves to their host and bloat themselves on blood. While most leeches are external parasites, some species will swim into nasal cavities and stay there, feeding and growing. Capable of holding undigested blood in their stomachs, parasitic leeches can go months between feedings.

### **Candiru Catfish**

There are several species of diminutive candiru catfish that inhabit South American rivers. Some seek out larger fish and use their spiny mouths to attach themselves to the gills of their victims, where they make an incision with their teeth and drink their fill of fish blood. Some species actually burrow inside the bodies of their prey, leaving a wound that looks like a bullet hole. Once inside they suck blood from the internal organs. This is the fish that gained international fame recently when one swam up a man's penis, where it fed for several days before having to be surgically removed. Few things are more horrifying than even the thought of that!

*Even scary wildlife isn't safe from habitat destruction, global warming, pollution and other human-caused problems. Read more about real life wildlife vampires and NWF at [www.nwf.org/nationalwildlife](http://www.nwf.org/nationalwildlife).*

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