Bats Unlimited: Justified Fear?

Sarah Jo Klein

Beginning at a young age, many humans find themselves fearful of bats. This fear possibly arises from myths, movies, and associations with the devil. Animal experts try to quell the widespread fear of bats, claiming that bats do not harm humans. Indeed, bats are not inclined to physically attack humans, and are vital to the population control of insects. Bats also are responsible for pollination many plants.

Despite the good attributes bats have, there is one overwhelmingly bad attribute that justifies human’s fear. Bats are the natural reservoir for a multitude of viruses that infect humans. Some of these viruses are the rabies virus, SARS coronavirus, Zaire ebolavirus, Menangle virus, and Lake Victoria marburgvirus. Each of these viruses causes major health problems when humans become infected, such as hemorrhages, encephalitis, and sometimes death. Although bats themselves may not pose a threat to humans, the many diseases residing inside them pose a large health risk to mankind, justifying human’s natural aversion to the flying mammals.