



## 101 Uses for a dead bat.

No. 76

### Inspire Salvador Dali



*A Salvador Dali-like image of a bat by an unaccredited artist*



*Portrait of my dead brother  
Dali's mother told him that he was a reincarnation of his dead brother (also called Salvador) who died nine months before Dali was born. The dark shape at the top left represents a bat.*

The surreal (and quite frankly bizarre) artist Salvador Dali was given an injured bat when he was six years old. It was placed in a bucket overnight, but died of its injuries. Dali was fascinated by the ants which he found crawling over the body, and anticipating Ozzie Osbourne by a fair few years, To quote no less an authority than George Orwell "When Dali returned to it was being devoured by a mass of ants. He impulsively bit into the seething mass delirious with pleasure"

Ants became a symbol for death and decay in his paintings and bats also made their appearances.



*Shirley Temple, The Youngest, Most Sacred Monster of the Cinema in Her Time*

The bat on Shirley Temple's head also arose by association. Dali cut Shirley's head out of a magazine and it felt to him as if he was decapitating her.



### It's not just Salvador Dali who bites the heads off bats

One of our guides from the Hungary holiday made his way into the national press over the summer. Péter Estók of the [Max-Planck-Institute for Ornithology](http://www.max-planck-institute.de), Germany, first saw a bat being captured by a tit in a Hungarian cave in 1996. Ten years later, he and fellow bat ecologist Björn Siemers recorded 18 examples of pipistrelle bat predation by great tits, over the course of two winters in the same cave in the Bükk Mountains.

The birds seek out bats as they wake from hibernation and usually eat them in the cave, though sometimes they carry them to a nearby tree.

"The birds don't kill the bats before they start eating them," says Siemers, "but the bats eventually die when the birds peck open their brain case." As the bats are still very cold, only a degree above ambient temperature, they are extremely slow and easy for the birds to subdue. Nevertheless, it is a considerable feat for the tits given that a pipistrelle weighs approximately 5 grams and a great tit only four times as much.

In their defence it seems that the birds only do this in time of food scarcity and are attracted to the low 15 kHz sounds a bat makes on coming out of hibernation. Gareth Jones of Bristol University said. "It's a big jump for the tits, given that their normal prey is caterpillars."

Journal reference: [Biology Letters](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2009.0611), DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2009.0611 (in press)

In deference to squeamish readers I have not included the picture of the decapitated bat that accompanied this article. For the blood thirsty amongst you it is on the website on Chiroptivia 3.

<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17749-killer-birds-bite-off-bats-heads.html>

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## Another Blow to the Disney View of the Natural world



Still reeling from the perfidy of tits another illusion was scattered when it was reported that ground squirrels in Tanzania were attacking a fruit bat, which then fell to the ground dead. It had two broken wings and a skull injury. What provoked the squirrel is not recorded. On UK Bats, Patty Brigs speculated whether British squirrels might snack on hibernating bats

Source

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth\\_news/newsid\\_8261000/8261364.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8261000/8261364.stm)