

Flying Foxes

In 1770, the explorer Captain Cook was sailing with his crew to Southeast Asia. During the journey, a crew member went to shore and encountered a strange being. He reported seeing something large and black crawling slowly through the grass. It had wings and two horns on its head. He thought he'd seen a devil in the flesh!

In fact, the creature was a giant tropical bat called a flying fox. What the sailor took to be horns were just the bat's large, pointed ears, which resemble those of a fox. The flying fox's body can be the same size as the body of a small dog. The bat also has a broad wingspan that can reach nearly six feet across!



Flying foxes may move slowly on the ground, but they are strong and fast in flight. They can fly over 100 miles at a time, often crossing the sea between islands. They might travel over 30 miles a night as they hunt for food.

Yet flying foxes don't hunt people or animals. They eat nectar and fruit, spreading pollen and seeds over great distances as they forage. As a result, they play an important part in preserving the health of the forests and orchards in Southeast Asia.

Captain Cook's crew had no reason to fear flying foxes—in fact, the men had a reason to thank the bats. During their journey, the men relied on forests for fruit and wood. Most likely, flying foxes were helping to keep these forests healthy.

Quiz Questions

1. What is the main idea of this story?

- a. Flying foxes travel many miles as they forage for fruit and nectar.
- b. Captain Cook and his crew were explorers who relied on flying foxes.
- c. Flying foxes are huge tropical bats that help keep forests healthy.

2. What did the crew member think he had seen crawling through the grass?

- a. a dog
- b. a devil
- c. a fox

3. What does the word **encountered** mean in this story?

- ___ a. crawled on the ground
- ___ b. resembled a devil
- ___ c. met unexpectedly

4. How do flying foxes help keep the forests and orchards in Southeast Asia healthy?

- ___ a. by spreading pollen and seeds
- ___ b. by hunting over great distances
- ___ c. by scaring people away

5. What does a flying fox look like?

6. Select the best word for each definition.

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|----------|---------------------------|
| crew | farms for fruit trees |
| tropical | from hot and wet areas |
| nectar | all the workers on a ship |
| orchards | depended on |
| relied | sweet juice from flowers |

7. Fill in the blanks with words from the list below.

A member of Captain Cook's crew _____ a strange creature. He thought he had seen a _____! But really it was a _____ bat called a flying fox. The bat has pointed ears that _____ the ears of a fox. The flying fox helps spread _____ through the orchards.

devil, encountered, pollen, relied, resemble, tropical