Female vampire bats share blood meals (taken from birds and livestock – don’t worry!) while huddled together. Research is currently being conducted to study how this unique social trait could untangle the evolutionary function of friendship – why and how did humans evolve to make friends?

Female vampire bats roost together in groups of 8-12 and share food with kin and non-kin alike. Why share with those who are not your family? One theory argues doing so creates a sort of safety net for grocery-shopping bats. If a bat becomes separated from its family, it would be able to rely on a greater number of “friends” with which to gain food. It is likely that early humans also practiced this form of natural reciprocity with non-kin.

Friendship is hard to understand scientifically – but these vampire bats have a social system simple enough that researchers can manipulate it and measure the response in a lab setting. Studying bat friendship will hopefully point the way to the biology underlying generosity and different styles of friendship among humans.

References