

Astro-bat feared dead after shuttle launch

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The seven astronauts onboard the space shuttle Discovery had an unexpected companion during their liftoff from the Kennedy Space Center earlier this week, the US space agency said.

According to NASA, the crew was joined by a free tail bat, which clung to the side of Discovery's [external fuel tank](#) as it rocketed toward the heavens.

"[Liftoff](#) imagery analysis confirmed that he held on until at least the vehicle cleared (the) tower before we lost sight of him," a NASA memo obtained by [Space.com](#) said.

"He did change the direction he was pointing from time to time throughout countdown, but ultimately never flew away.

"Infrared imagery shows he was alive and not frozen like many would think."

While glued to the tank -- containing two million liters (half a million gallons) of liquid hydrogen rocket fuel -- animal experts believe the bat also had to contend with a broken left wing and a sore right shoulder, or wrist.

The bat's current health and whereabouts are not known, although NASA believes his [space adventure](#) was short-lived.

"The animal likely perished quickly during Discovery's climb into orbit,"

a NASA official said.

The bat was not the first of its species to attempt space travel. Another bat was seen gripping the external tank of the Endeavour in 1996 and one briefly clung to the Columbia space [shuttle](#) in 1998 but flew off before liftoff.

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