



Step through two sets of black curtains into the darkness of the Bat Jungle. Listen to the echolocation pings and social calls collected by a bat detector. Look down through vast, slanted windows into the dimly lit habitat of plants, vines and murals. Although it is daylight outside, about 40 bats of eight species are convinced it is night, their time to fly, feed, interact, explore or just hang from vines and branches. Their biological clock has been reset and their “night” begins at 9 a.m. so visitors can watch bats.

This remarkable new habitat at Monteverde, in the Cloud Forest of Costa Rica, is the creation of tropical-bat biologist Richard Laval, who has worked in the region since 1973, his wife, Meg, and a few partners with conservation backgrounds. The Bat Jungle is a centerpiece of Paseo de Stella, a tourist destination that also offers a history museum and restaurant.

Laval said the project, a for-profit venture that opened in March, provides “a means whereby I can reach a large captive audience with my message of bat conservation.” Educational displays, which prominently feature materials and photos from Bat Conservation International, describe bats and their values for the rain forest. Admission is free for local residents.

One of the most popular exhibits: the food scales. Step on the scales and you learn the amount of insects (in buckets), fruit (in bananas) or nectar (in liters) you would have to eat each night if you were a bat of the same weight.

The viewing area, Laval said, “is much more than a flight cage. It is a bat habitat designed to resemble the cloud forest” where the bats come from. The walls and ceiling are covered by a huge mural designed by Meg Laval and another artist. “The bat feeders look like stalks of bananas, and nectar-bat feeders are hummingbird feeders painted black and decked with fake flowers.”

After a few minutes, visitors’ eyes adjust to the dim light, and they can see the bats clearly. The bats are local fruit- and nectar-feeders. A greater broad-nosed bat gave birth recently, and visitors can now watch the fuzzy pup with its mother.

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