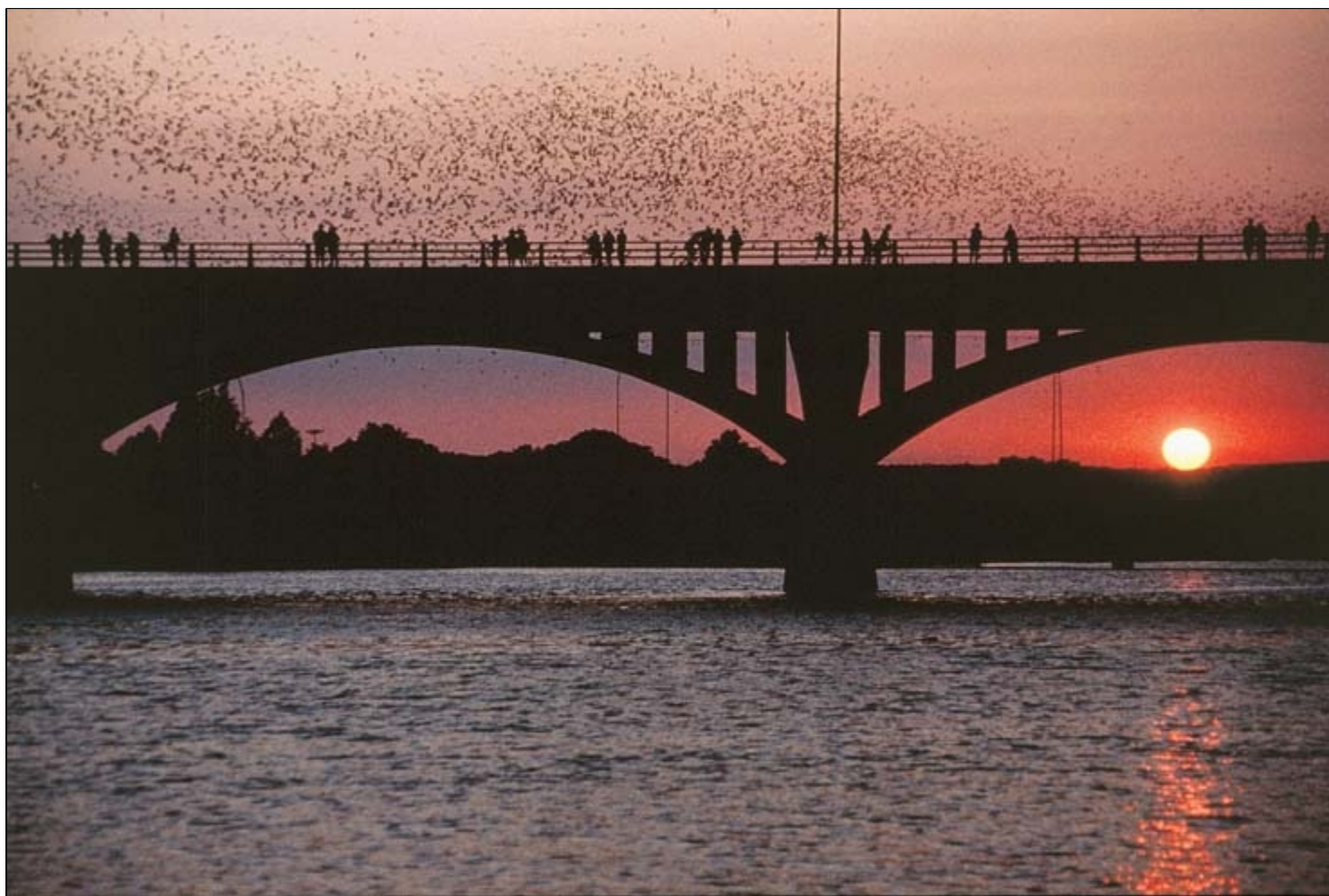


August 2006, Volume 4, Number 8
Bats in the News - The "Bat Capital of America"™



"The story of Austin's love affair with bats starts at the Congress Avenue Bridge, which spans Town Lake," Flakus n
"What makes this structure so special is what exists underneath and what emerges every night during the summer. T
home of an estimated million and a half bats."

Bat Conservation International's Brent Lyles explained to *Voice of America*: "Bats are really mysterious and, in a se
part of the mystique about them, I think that is part of what attracts some people to bats."

When the bats first came (in the early 1980s), the city mostly considered the bats a threat and many Austinites dema
eradication. But BCI, now headquartered in Austin, convinced the public and local officials that the bats were a bene
said.

"Ten years later, the *Austin American-Statesman* was running headlines that said, 'Attention bat lovers, the furry frie
back.' Today we get 100,000 people every year watching the bats come out," Lyles said.

The bats' evening emergences peak during the summer months and can be viewed all along the shoreline, as the bats
search of moths and other insects to eat. The newspaper provides a grassy viewing area near the bridge that's a major
site.

Lyles noted that many local people come back again and again to enjoy the spectacle and often bring friends and rela
out of town. BCI representatives are on hand on weekend nights to talk to people about bats, "but really it is the peop
that make this attraction work."

"The kids just really love it," one local dad told the radio network. "They say, 'Let's go see bats!' And it is cheap, ch
entertainment."

Every summer night the bats eat about 15 tons of insects, including corn earworm moths that pose a threat to nearby
Their value to agriculture, *VOA* said, "may be even greater than the roughly \$10 million they bring to Austin every y
tourism attraction.

And, as Lyles explained: "Attitudes are changing about bats. So many people say, 'Oh, bats – my grandfather used t
but I know that they are good to have around.'"

All articles in this issue:

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