



MEXICO CITY – “Every night, as humans sleep, the flying mammals work feverishly. They pollinate plants such as the agave. ... Guano is a valuable fertilizer. And bats eat up to ... their [full] body weight in insects every night, making them one of the simplest, safest, most cost-effective forms of pest control available.”

That’s the way the *Washington Post* described the enormous economic value of bats in a recent story about an international conservation effort by Bat Conservation International and partners such as Pronatura Noreste, Fondo Mexicano and Punto Verde Consultores.

But, wrote reporter Ceci Connolly, “that message has not reached most people. For decades, intentionally or otherwise, property owners, hikers and sightseers have trampled habitat, dumped garbage and set fires, decimating the bat populations in many parts of the world.”

Now, however, “a unique cross-border alliance” aims to document the losses and replenish the bat populations of northern Mexico, the *Post* said. The project includes identifying and mapping past and present bat roosts, educational programs for farmers and even purchases of land to protect especially vulnerable bat colonies.

In what is apparently the first purchase of a bat cave by Mexican conservationists, Pronatura Noreste, armed with BCI data, purchased Cueva de la Boca outside Monterrey in September. The cave, which historically held an estimated 20 million Mexican free-tailed bats, now has a population of some 1.2 million bats.

Pronatura limits access to researchers, but plans are underway to build facilities to safely open it to the public in hopes of generating tourism revenue.

“If we had a healthy population of bats, we would have pest control and healthy crops at no cost to society and no bad effects on health,” A. Nelly Correa, of the Center for Environmental Quality at the Monterrey Institute of Technology, said in the article. “And it would be a plus for the economy as bats can become a tourist attraction.”

The *Post* said Mexican free-tailed bats are especially valuable because they eat huge amounts of corn earworm moths, a particularly costly agricultural pest that damages corn, cotton and other crops throughout most of North America.

“These bats are of enormous ecological and economic benefit on both sides of the border,” BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle told the newspaper. BCI and Fondo Mexicano, a private organization focused on biodiversity projects, have commissioned assessments of an additional 150 hard-to-reach caves along the border. The bat population in those caves has fallen from about 55 million to 15 million.

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