



The rusting, round water tank in the Arizona high country is barely 12 feet across and 2 feet deep, and the water is green with algae. But each night, a near-constant stream of bats – sometimes approaching one per second – swoops smoothly down to the water's surface to sip from this vital resource.

Water is scarce in much of the American West, and natural water holes have been disappearing for 150 years in the face of expanding irrigation, dams and urban/suburban development. The water troughs and tanks that ranchers maintain for their livestock are, quite literally, lifesavers for bats and other wildlife.

But all water is not equal. While the Arizona water trough is a safe and accessible resource tapped by thousands of bats, other water supplies can be death traps. A Colorado rancher recently reported finding 46 drowned bats in a single trough made out of an old tractor tire. Although reliable estimates are not available, evidence suggests such wildlife drownings are frequent and widespread.

In many Western states, shortages of safe, reliable water threaten the very survival of bat and other wildlife populations, especially in drought years. Bat Conservation International has taken on the task of increasing the number of accessible water supplies for wildlife. This effort has received leadership support from the Offield Family Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service.

After more than two years of research, field tests, analyses and educational efforts, BCI's Water for Wildlife program this year produced a pioneering publication: *Water for Wildlife: A Handbook for Ranchers and Range Managers*.

The handbook describes the critical water problems facing wildlife and presents the economic – as well as ecological – value of considering the needs of bats, birds and other animals while maintaining water supplies for livestock. The publication provides step-by-step instructions for ensuring that bats and birds that drink on the wing can safely access the water and escape if they fall in.

Water for Wildlife is being distributed to field offices of federal and state agencies, corporations and others involved in Western water issues. We believe it will make a real difference in enhancing wildlife habitat on public and private lands.

This summer, this vital program will coordinate a series of demonstration projects in New Mexico, Nevada and Arizona to show how appropriately designed, wildlife-friendly water developments can increase the local numbers and diversity of bats. We have also scheduled training workshops around the Southwest. BCI members can read the whole story of Water for Wildlife in the Spring 2007 issue of BATS magazine.

You can help keep this vital program growing across the West. Please contact BCI's Department of Development at development@batcon.org.

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