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Bats in the News - Blitzinâ€™™ for Bats



Some people love bald eagles, and others are enamored of snakes and salamanders, “but these men and women love bats,” says Wildlife Biologist Keith Hudson of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. More than 100 bat-lovers gathered recently for a massive, three-day “Bat Blitz” to assess the status of bat populations at Alabama’s Bankhead National Forest.

“Some are [with] state and federal wildlife agencies, some are professors or students from colleges and universities, some work at zoos,” Hudson told *The Times Daily* newspaper of northwest Alabama. “The one thing they all have in common is a passion for bats.”

The Bat Blitz, which drew volunteers from as far away as Vermont and Texas, is sponsored by the Southeastern Bat Diversity Network, which schedules a blitz each year at a difference site in the American South.

Researchers used mist nets and harp traps to collect, identify and record more than 300 bats of 11 species, the newspaper reported. Each bat was released after examination. Hudson told *The Times Daily* that the blitz collected more data in three nights than he and other local biologists could have gathered in two years.

“The data collected during the blitz will help us make management decisions for the forest [and] will also be used for years to come by scientists all across the country when they prepare research papers about bats,” said Tom Counts, district wildlife biologist for the forest.

The newspaper quoted Counts as saying the survey found that most of the Bankhead National Forest’s bat species “are in good shape. We think a lot of that is because we have a healthy forest.”

Hudson said the Bankhead National Forest is one of the best places in Alabama to study bats, since 12 of the state’s 15 bat species live there. Some, such as the northern long-eared bat, roost in caves, while forest bats, such as the big brown bat, spend the daytime hours roosting in trees.

Counts told *The Times Daily* that, “Once you spend just a little time studying [bats], you realize just how neat they are. They are the night shift of purple martins. The martins eat insects all day and bats eat them all night.”

Tim Carter, an assistant professor of biology at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, agreed, noting that bats play an important role in nature. “They are just as important as song birds,” he said. “In some areas, bats are just as numerous as song birds. The only difference is song birds are out when we can see them and bats come out at night.”

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