

Kids & Bats in Brazil



Schoolchildren in northeastern Brazil mostly figured bats were villainous creatures – evil, blood-sucking animals that spread disease and should be eradicated. Then the Amanaié Foundation and its partners went to work on their Flying Mammals Project in the state of Alagoas. Now, says biologist Ana Cristina Brito, at least 2,200 youngsters realize that bats are “not the villains but the heroes of nature.”

With support from a BCI Global Grassroots Conservation Fund grant, Brito and her team developed and implemented a wide-ranging package of bat-education materials and presentations for eight communities in the state. Partners Quantica Study and Research Center and Andirá Brazil worked with the Amanaié Foundation.

Ten college students were trained to teach children 5 to 12 years old about bats and conservation in this tropical region. Then the team took its fun-filled videos, lectures, classroom activities and games on the road, explaining the values of bats as seed dispersers, pollinators and insect-hunters. Along the way, they caught the attention of magazines, newspapers and radio and television stations that not only described the work with children but also reported the real facts about bats.

The first step, Brito says, was evaluating the children’s perceptions and knowledge of bats by administering individual surveys. Unfortunately, she reports, the kids know virtually nothing of bats’ importance for the environment, associating them instead with evil, vampires and fear.

These harmful prejudices seem associated mostly with movies and books, as well as misinformation in the local media. Many youngsters, for example, were convinced that “the bats transform in rats when they are old.”

After the project’s first year of visiting schools and communities around the region, the children demonstrated their new knowledge about bats as essential to healthy forests and crops. They even learned to identify some of the diverse bat species in their region and describe their habitats, benign behavior and how bats improve their towns and lives.

The Amanaié Foundation team is planning a permanent bat-education exhibit for the region about the benefits, biology and species of bats in Alagoas. The goal is to keep the project going into the future to help conserve the bats of Brazil.

Ana Brito and the Amanaié Foundation hope to continue their Flying Mammal Project with support from BCI’s Global Grassroots Conservation Program. You can help. Please donate at www.batcon.org/grassroots.

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