



Interviewing a rural resident in Nepal

The Western Region of Nepal, centered around the scenic Pokhara Valley, is home to a rich and diverse collection of bat populations. It is also home to some 6 million people, so it's not surprising that the bats face a host of threats, mostly linked to humans, such as lost habitat, tourism and hunting. Only about half the population can read and write, and many are beyond the reach of television. In this region, mass media mostly means radio.

Broadcast journalist Anjana Shrestha, who's also an active conservationist, used a BCI Global Grassroots Conservation Fund grant to produce and broadcast an innovative series of radio broadcasts to promote bat education and conservation. She and her team produced three 15-minute episodes per week for 10 months for Radio Annapurna, a popular station throughout the region. (The BCI funding was made possible by Columbia Foundation of San Francisco, California.)

Shrestha said the programs were aimed primarily at farmers, tourist guides and people living near important bat roosts, as well as schoolchildren and teachers. She and her team even produced a promotional jingle that was broadcast throughout the day to urge listeners to tune in.

Two of the three weekly programs were devoted to information about bats and their benefits, the myths that surround them, the threats they face and how individuals and communities can help preserve them.

The third program featured a dramatic play about a schoolgirl named Rama who talks to her family, friends and teachers about bats. A weekly quiz on bat facts, with a book on Nepal's mammals awarded to the winners, encouraged audience participation and also gauged public interest.

The project was planned and funded for seven months, but Shrestha says the radio station was so pleased by the results that it offered to continue the programs for another three months without charge.

To measure the impact of their programming, the team tested knowledge and attitudes about bats among students in grades 8 through 10 at two schools in the Pokhara Valley. Questionnaires were filled out before and after the project.

Most students expressed positive attitudes about bats in both before and after surveys, Shrestha said, but their knowledge about bats increased dramatically over the period. Only 10 percent of students correctly answered 12 bat questions in the pre-program survey. A few months later, 86 percent of the same students got all 12 right.

She said responses from tourist guides were especially gratifying, and many expressed concerns that cave bats could disappear without community support for their conservation.

“We feel confident,” Shrestha concludes, “that we have proven the potential, at least in Nepal, to improve bat education and community involvement through continuing, targeted radio programs.”

BCI Members can read the whole story of the Radio Bats of Nepal in the Fall 2011 issue of BATS magazine.

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