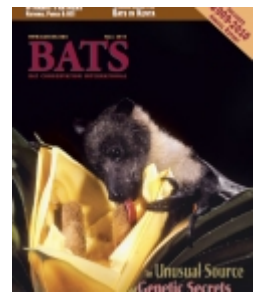


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News & Notes

Teamwork promotes bat awareness

Two groups of Lubbock, Texas, students and their teachers came together for a unique educational lesson in bats and bat houses “ and in the value of combining varied skills to produce results. The two classes are part of the school district's Byron Martin Advanced Technology Center, which provides career-oriented courses in technological fields.



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The project began when Penny Carpenter, who teaches geographic information systems (a powerful blend of mapping, statistical analysis and database technologies), asked her students to research the benefits of bats and the threats they face. The goal was to help students understand spatial relationships and to promote environmental awareness. The young people learned that bats, which benefit humans by consuming countless insect pests, suffer from a continuing loss of habitat.

At Bat Conservation International's website, the students also discovered an idea that was new to most of them: bat houses. They found the notion of attracting bats to a bat house intriguing and gathered BCI information about bat-house design and tips for attracting bats.

Then Carpenter asked building-trades teacher Dewayne Wallace if his students might be interested in building a bat house for the exercise. With BCI website-guidance in hand, they built not one, but 18 bat houses “ large, three-chambered units with air vents and textured interiors. A local Home Depot manager donated primer and paint and the completed houses were delivered to the GIS students.

"I try to design projects that are real-world and relevant for my students," Carpenter said. "I believe this makes their learning more meaningful, especially when they can apply the skills they learn in class."

So she posed a basic geographic question to her students: Which of the Lubbock Independent School District's 53 campuses were most suitable for bat houses? The students discussed the requirements for successful installations and began collecting data and adding layers of information to their maps. Because water is a key factor for successful bat houses, they imported a water-body layer, along with other data, atop their map of schools.

Spatial analysis identified 11 campuses within an acceptable 0.4 mile (0.6 kilometer) of at least a small body of water.

The students contacted the principals of the 11 schools, explained their project and why each campus was a good choice, and requested permission to install a bat house. Unfortunately, the school district ultimately decided against placing bat houses at schools. So the students agreed to make bat houses available to a science teacher at each school as educational tools for teaching bat awareness.

The remaining houses are being donated to such public sites as the South Plains Food Bank's farm and orchard. One was also given to the Lubbock Lake Landmark State Historical Park for educational activities.

The students were a bit disappointed that the houses weren't installed at schools, but they were nonetheless delighted with what they had learned about bats and that their efforts taught the importance of bats to many adults and students in their city's schools.

Really Big Bat Houses

Community bat houses based on BCI's architect-designed plans have been built at opposite ends of North America, as conservation organizations seek refuges for thousands of displaced bats. One of the big "bat condos," which can house up to 30,000 bats, was built in British Columbia in western Canada and the other in Florida in the southeastern United States.

The Canadian condo went up at the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, where a battered old barn had become a safety hazard and was scheduled for demolition, reports Richard Dalon, manager of the site. The barn was a maternity roost for thousands of little brown myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*) and Yuma myotis (*M. yumanensis*).

Dalon said the Province of British Columbia paid for construction of the bat condo, which is roughly 10 feet (3 meters) square and mounted on utility poles. This first community bat house in western Canada was built by contractor Paul Van Deursen from plans biologist Cori Lausen obtained free from BCI.

Some bats took up residence this past summer and Dalon is working with Lausen and Creston Valley Biologist Marc-Andre Beaucher to monitor the bats' use of the condo. The biologists and builder made several modifications to the plans to improve construction and accommodate Canadian weather conditions.

The second community bat house, built at a 4-H Club camp near Pensacola, in the Florida panhandle, was designed as the focal point of an education program to teach youngsters about the importance of bats, said ecologist Holly Ober of the University of Florida. It was supported by the Florida and Escambia County 4-H Foundations.

Ober, a leader of the project, said the house is located in a rapidly urbanizing area that now offers a mix of urban, agricultural and fragmented forest habitats. A large pond is nearby. The bat house is expected to attract several bat species, primarily Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*).

"We used blueprints provided by BCI to build the house and modified them slightly to ensure the house would be hurricane-proof," Ober said. Construction was done by carpentry students from Pensacola Junior College.

Plans for this community bat house (including information on modifications by these two teams) are available without charge from BCI. Visit www.batcon.org and click the "Get Involved" tab.

Apply for a BCI Scholarship

Bat Conservation International has awarded 291 scholarships since 1990 to support important bat research in 59 countries. And we're still going strong. Online applications are now being accepted for the 2011 Student Research Scholarships. The deadline for receipt is December 15, 2010.

These scholarships, of up to \$5,000 each, help promising young scientists at universities around the world conduct research that contributes to the knowledge needed to conserve bats and their habitats.

Qualified research should address at least one of these issues: answering ecological or behavioral questions that are essential to conservation or management; resolving an economic problem that will improve support for conservation; or documenting key ecological or economic roles of bats. Students in degree-granting programs at any university are eligible to apply.

Scholarship applications must be completed online at BCI's website (www.batcon.org/scholarships). (More information is available at the website.) Applications are judged by a panel of non-BCI scientists, and awards are announced in March.

With matching funds from other conservation organizations, government agencies and private foundations, the \$724,250 that BCI has invested in these scholarships has helped generate a total of \$5.7 million in conservation-related research worldwide.

The BCI awards include about 10 Bats in International Forestry Scholarships, which have been supported since 2005 by BCI's invaluable partner, U.S. Forest Service International Programs. These scholarships support research conducted in developing countries. Students from any university are eligible for these awards, and all qualified applicants are automatically considered.

BCI provided 17 scholarships for the 2010-11 academic year. Among them were:

• Jorge Ayala (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) Physiological constraints on the geographical distribution of nectar-feeding bats, Mexico.

• Corneile Minnaar (University of Pretoria, South Africa) Artificial lighting and insectivorous bats, South Africa.

• Gabriel Reyes (Humboldt State University, United States) Social calls in the migratory hoary bat, USA.

• Alona Gukasova (Saint Petersburg State University, Russia) A new system of summer bat-population monitoring on nature reserves, Ukraine.

Smashing pennies for bats

Crystal Cave in western Wisconsin offers a dramatic geological display that draws more than 20,000 visitors a year, plus another 12,000 or so youngsters on educational visits. The privately owned cave also provides a winter home for hundreds of bats of several species.

And thanks to BCI Members Blaze and Jean Cunningham, who own the cave, many of those human visitors make a small donation to BCI's White-nose Syndrome Emergency Response Fund. The vehicle for these donations is the cave's popular "penny press" that produces souvenir tokens. Tourists insert a penny and two quarters, and the machine smashes the penny into a thin oval and imprints it with a cartoon caveman and the name of the cave. For three months out of the year, those two quarters go to BCI.

The Cunninghams, members since about 1997, close the cave from November through March to protect hibernating bats from disturbance, and Jean notes that throughout the year, "we do not allow anyone to disturb the bats in any way." And, she says, "Education about the behavior, benefits and conservation needs of bats is a big part of any visit to this cave. We felt it is important to make sure everyone understands the problems bats now face" because of White-nose Syndrome.

"Pressing a penny," Jean says, "is an easy, inexpensive and fun way for our visitors to get involved in the donation process. Some people just hand over money and tell us they 'don't want the penny, but make sure the bats get this donation.'"

BCI also gets penny-press donations from Talking Rocks Cavern in Missouri and Raccoon Mountain Caverns & Campground in Tennessee, with a similar donation plan to begin soon at Natural Bridge Caverns in Texas. Friends like these help BCI protect bats and their habitats. Your support can make a difference.

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