

VOLUME 22, NO. 1 Spring 2004

Volunteers Make the Difference

Amy Sugeno

Volunteers are the real stars in dispelling hurtful myths about bats, and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, a BCI partner, recently honored the volunteers who explain the benefits of bats to some 15,000 visitors a year at Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area. The annual Volunteer Appreciation Lunch celebrated their achievements. Located near Fredericksburg, Texas, about 75 miles (120 kilometers) west of Austin, the abandoned railroad tunnel shelters as many as 3 million Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), as well as several thousand cave myotis (*Myotis velifer*). The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department purchased this 920-foot (280-meter) tunnel and surrounding land in 1991 specifically to protect and manage the bats.

Thousands of people visit Old Tunnel each year, from May through October, to watch dense clouds of bats leave the tunnel for a night of hunting down insects. Visitors, after being wowed by the spectacular emergence, learn about bats through interpretive presentations and question-and-answer sessions. Group tours can be scheduled, and hiking and picnicking are encouraged.

Few of those opportunities for public education would be possible without dedicated volunteers, most of whom show up one night a week for six months – for a group total of 2,000 hours of service. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department trains the volunteers as Certified Interpreters. They also are invited on special field trips, including a visit to BCI's famous Bracken Bat Cave.

The 2003 volunteers were: Heike Carrel, Bob Garvin, Carrie Koennecke, Myrna Langford, Ed Johnson, Sharon Johnson, Dennis Collins, Kady Collins, Dan Engler, Margaret Engler, Bernice Gonzales, Nina Grantham, Linda Jones, Lon Jones, Elizabeth Parsons, Richard Parsons, Edna Platte, Ann Shafer, Maggie Tatum, Wilma Teague and Jane Whitacker.

For more information about the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area, the bats or the volunteer program, contact Amy Sugeno at Amy.Sugeno@tpwd.state.tx.us or (830) 367-7923. Amy Sugeno is Manager of the Old Tunnel Wildlife Management Area.



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