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BCI's New "Bats of America" Program
Members get involved in the search for bats to photograph . . .
Tuttle, Merlin D.

Members get involved in the search for bats to photograph . . .

by Merlin D. Tuttle

The desert wind whistled, my breath freezing to the tarp I had wrapped around me, my teeth chattering. I dreaded the moment when my two helpers, BCI members Bert Grantges and Dee Roper, and I would have to get out of our sleeping bags again to check our mist nets. We were camped near a remote desert pond in Utah where we hoped to capture and photograph a Spotted bat (*Euderma maculatum*), one of America's rarest and most spectacular mammals, a species that had eluded me for years. Without the Spotted bat, BCI's new audiovisual program, "Bats of America," would be incomplete.

Even though springtime can still bring spells of cold weather, we hadn't counted on subfreezing temperatures, and we were ill-prepared to battle the thirty mile per hour winds. Nevertheless, Bert and I had come from Texas and Dee from California, and we were determined to do our best.

For several nights we checked our nets at regular intervals, getting very little sleep. Success came on the third night; three Spotted bats were found in our nets, despite the fact that the pond was covered with a thin layer of ice.

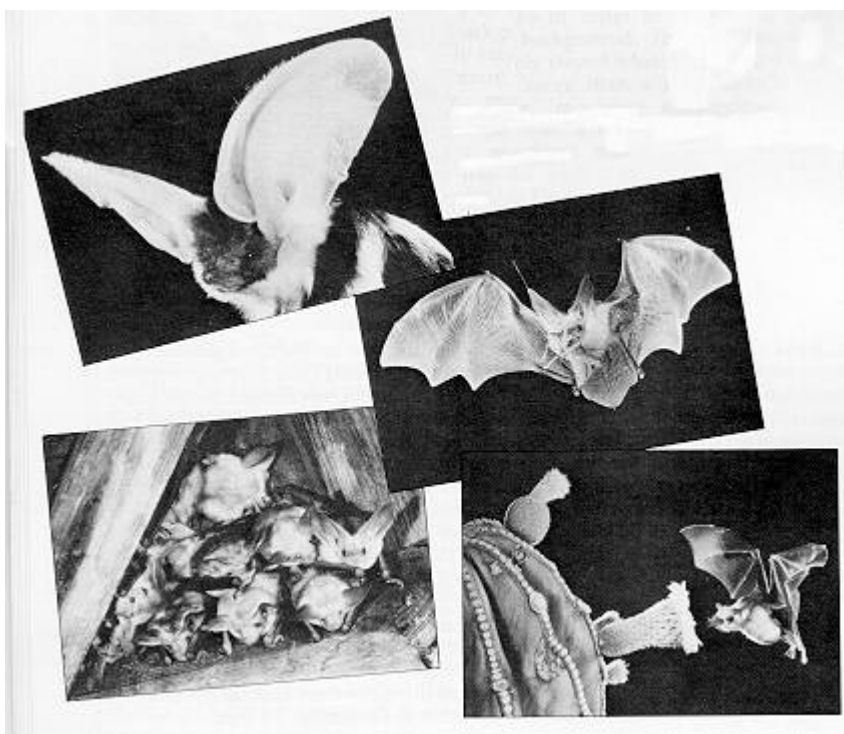
Once the bats were caught, there was even less time for sleep. We had a photo studio ready and waiting in a motel room 15 miles away. With the cooperation of the managers, the furniture had been removed and we had carried in over a hundred pounds of rocks in order to simulate a natural background. The bats, however, rarely stayed where we needed them for more than a few seconds at a time, requiring extraordinary patience to photograph. Two never cooperated, but the third became very tame and was nicknamed "Porky" because of his ravenous appetite and willingness to follow us around for food. Even with his relative cooperation, 29 rolls of film were shot in order to obtain the two spotted bat pictures seen in the new program.

It took several trips to different locations throughout the southwest before I found these bats. The total field time amounted to 25 days, sometimes as long as 20 hours each. Multiple plane fares, rental cars and motel expenses added up. Project costs would have been prohibitive without generous BCI volunteers who loaned their cars and often helped with expenses. Without the help of Trustee Don Grantges, who loaned his private plane for aerial reconnaissance of possible netting sites, and his family who assisted me in the field, I might still be looking for Spotted bats!

Despite the fact that I had been taking photographs of U.S. bats for over ten years, major gaps still remained in my collection of the bats of America. Finding a Western mastiff (*Eumops perotis*), America's largest bat, required a week and similarly hard work in western Texas, made possible through the assistance of member Sally Smyth. The remaining species needed were photographed in a single week, and at minimal expense,

due to the assistance of bat experts Dixie Pierson and Bill Rainey, who personally took me to bat roosts they had taken years to find. Many other experts also helped with invaluable advice and information, but still, "Bats of America" would not have been possible without membership dues and annual contributions.

I especially thank the numerous BCI members, professional cavers, private and government organizations and corporations, whose conservation efforts already have saved hundreds of thousands of American bats, enabling this program to conclude on a note of optimism for the future of bats and our environment. We know that many more bats will now survive as a direct result of the impact these pictures will have on the tens of thousands of Americans who will view them in the years to come.



These are just a few of the photographs in the new audiovisual program "Bats of America."
PHOTOS BY MERLIN D. TUTTLE

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