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Members In Action Dharma Webber

A nursery colony of Mexican free-tailed bats has roosted near a public hiking trail in Northern California's El Dorado County for more than 20 years. But because of a recent increase in colony size and an extreme hot spell, pups began dropping onto the trail. After one pup was collected by a youngster and taken to a local elementary school, the area was designated a public health hazard.

That's when Indigo Wings entered the picture. The nonprofit public-education and bat-rescue organization in Placerville, California, a dedicated partner of BCI, appealed to the El Dorado Public Health Officer and the Animal Control Department.

To protect the colony and minimize future contact with the public, we sponsored an Eagle Scout project for Boy Scout Brandon Brinsko to provide a nearby "bat lodge" to shelter the bats well out of harm's way.

Working with BCI experts Mark and Selena Kiser, we designed a lodge consisting of four BCI bat houses. Brandon and his troop built the lodge and, with help from El Dorado Parks and Recreation, raised it into place. The colony was preserved and Brandon earned his Eagle Scout rating.

While rescuing individual bats is rewarding, the future of wild bat colonies lies in the hands of the public. Indigo Wings educates thousands of people, primarily children, about bats each year. Education is the most critical component of our efforts.

In other conservation action, we recently conducted a bat education training session for El Dorado County Animal Control with living examples of six bat species the staff might expect to encounter. We described each species' habitat and most likely response to an attempted capture. We also demonstrated bat-friendly nets and capture techniques that were safe for both animal and officer.

More than half of California's 24 native bat species are in decline. Yet not a single species receives full protection under California law. Indigo Wings' mission statement prominently features the phrase: "Never be silent." When people share the truths about the world's only flying mammals and work to dispel myths, each of us can help shape the future of bat conservation.

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All articles in this issue:

- ▶ [The Mine in My Life](#)
- ▶ [Bats & Mines](#)
- ▶ [Bats at Last!](#)
- ▶ [Vampires in the House](#)
- ▶ [Learning the Secrets of Bats](#)
- ▶ [Members In Action](#)

- ▶ [Solar-powered Bats](#)
- ▶ [A Rare Bulgarian Bat](#)
- ▶ [Gating Idaho's Risky Mines](#)
- ▶ [Conserving Borderland Caves for Migratory Bat](#)