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BCI Members Get Involved in 1989

1989 was a busy year for members who took advantage of many opportunities to educate others about the values of bats and promote awareness of the need to protect them. Members made good use of BCI's audiovisual programs, presenting them to a variety of audiences throughout the world. They helped their communities safely evict bats from buildings and provided habitat for bats by putting up bat houses. Members who are educators brought awareness of bats into their classrooms with special events. Those who are wildlife rehabilitators rescued injured bats and are now using them as goodwill ambassadors for lectures. Many others took the time to write their local newspapers to set the record straight about bats and also had an impact when they wrote in response to BCI "Action Alerts."

We appreciate all the reports that you have sent us over the past year, and although we cannot mention them all, we want each of you to know how important your activities are to the future of bat conservation. Raising awareness in your own community really does make a difference. This is just a sampling of what some of you have been doing.

Bats in the classroom and library

Ruth Martin, a teacher at the Fulton Academy of Geographic and Life Sciences in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, directed the school's first Bat Week as part of an endangered species series. Basic facts about bats were displayed throughout the school halls. Among the many activities, contests were held to design a bat t-shirt and students wrote original bat stories. They also built bat houses in their science classes and presented them to a local nature reserve. The positive response from students was overwhelming and on the final day, they brought their parents to Bat Night in record numbers. Speakers from the Pittsburgh Zoo introduced the audience to a live flying fox, and Batman and Dracula made guest appearances, trading myths for facts.

In Sunnyvale, California, Susan Sylvan, head of the Fremont High School science department, initiated a Halloween Bat Day with all teachers wearing BCI t-shirts for the event. Each science class studied a different aspect of bats, the physics class learning about echolocation, the chemistry class studying the chemical composition of bat guano, and biology classes focusing on the role of bats in various ecosystems. Susan hopes that Bat Day will become an annual tradition.

Charlotte Desilets put together an educational display on bats for the library where she works in Washington, D.C. Utilizing books from the library, photos from magazines, and hand-lettered posters with information about bats, Charlotte's display drew a great deal of interest, giving her the opportunity to give informal bat talks to those making inquiries.

Speaking of bats

Many members are utilizing BCI's audiovisual programs for showings to local civic groups, nature centers, and schools. In Austin, Texas, retired chemist Cecil Hale uses both programs to give bat talks to Elderhostel groups and other clubs, handing out BCI membership information. Also in Austin, Pat Larsen, Carol Beardmore, and Vicki Hatfield log many hours giving special programs for youngsters at local schools.

Like many others doing bat research, Jackie Belwood of the University of Florida in Gainesville also speaks to schools and clubs, doing local television talk shows and newspaper interviews as well.

Robert Martin, who taught biology at the University of Maine in Farmington for 20 years, figures that he has spoken to over 8,000 school children around the state. His speaking fee? That the school join BCI.

Bat houses for rent

Earning an Eagle Scout badge by building bat houses has been popular with younger BCI members. Eric Hughey in Tampa, Florida, designed his own houses and built 18 from local cypress, placing them in Upper Tampa Bay Park. In addition, Eric created an educational display for the Visitor Center to describe his project and educate visitors about the value of bats. Eric's project won a "Take Pride in America" award from the Florida Department of Natural Resources, an awards program that recognizes individuals and groups who make outstanding contributions on behalf of the nation's public lands.

In King Island, Georgia, Joel Respass, hoping to control the local insect population, built 15 bat houses and put them up in Crooked River State Park. The park is surrounded by marsh and is home to at least 10 species of bats. Joel's project also includes two bat information boards placed in the park. He hopes to expand his bat house project into the community.

Another bat house project in Dothan, Alabama, resulted from the efforts of the Kale family who combined forces with the local Boy Scout Troop and the Outdoor Adventure Explorer Post to build a dozen bat houses. The scouts and explorers presented them to Landmark Park, a favorite campground for the two groups. Spearheaded by Rhonda Kale, an advisor to the Explorer Post, the project gave both groups an opportunity to learn more about bats and to educate their community.

In Brooklyn, New York, Joseph Butera purchased three bat houses from BCI and donated them to the Bronx Parks Department who erected them in two parks. Their donation prompted an article about bats with mention of BCI in the New York City Parks and Recreation Department's newsletter. Wildlife Management Specialist David Kunstler said "Even if bats don't use the boxes, Urban Park Rangers will use them as educational tools and will be able to dispel some damaging myths."

Help ... there's a bat in my house

Several members help in their communities when bats sometimes become a nuisance in buildings. As a firefighters Mark Barletta of North Haven, Connecticut, is in a good position to provide such a service. His fire station receives numerous calls between July and mid-September to remove bats, mostly individuals, from homes and attics. Mark captures them and releases them back at the firehouse.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Lee Gilman's phone rings several times a week for help and advice on how to evict colonies of bats from buildings. Lee hits let appropriate local agencies know that he provides this service. Calls are referred to him from the Charlotte Nature Museum and pest control operators who know that using pesticides against bats in North Carolina is illegal. Lee lets callers know how to do the job without harm to bats and in more difficult cases, goes to the house to seek solutions. As program chair for the local Audubon Society, Lee also lectures about bats to schools and civic groups.

Educating your local health department

One of the most important things BCI members can do is to provide educational materials to health departments and see that key officials get the facts about bats. Sue Ellis and Elizabeth DeVone of Blackwood, New Jersey, both help their local wildlife rescue by rehabilitating injured bats. When Elizabeth assisted a former Board of Health member with an injured bat, it led to the opportunity to give a presentation about bats to current members of the Board. With BCI's slide program, "Bats o America," and two rehabilitated bats, the pair gained enthusiastic new fans for bats-so enthusiastic, in fact, that the Board donated \$100 for Bat conservation!

Let us know what you are doing. Send your up-to-date report and photos to "Members in Action," Bat Conservation International, P.O. Box 162603, Austin, TX 78716. Although we may not be able to acknowledge all responses in BATS your reports are important and help us to plan for future educational programs.



Enthusiastic students learned about bats during "Bat Week" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



In Tampa, Florida, Eric Hughey's bat house project and display won an award from the Florida Department of Natural Resources.

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