

## VOLUME 8, NO. 2 Summer 1990

Sorry, no PDF  
available

### BCI Responds to Another Bat "Flap"

Ann Landers' recent "advice" column referring to bats drew a sharp reaction from many BCI members. One of her readers wrote about an incident from 13 years ago in which he claims he was attacked and bitten by a fruit bat *in Austin, Texas*! He received both tetanus and a series of rabies shots, to which he had an unfortunate allergic reaction, leaving him legally blind and hearing-impaired. Both the letter and Ann Landers' response exemplify the extent of ignorance about bats and the challenge of our mission.

BCI responded with letters from several staff members, including one from Merlin Tuttle:

Dear Ann:

I am responding to your recent letter about fruit bats. The writer claims to have been attacked by an Austin "fruit bat," and in your response you state that his "is one of dozens of letters documenting miserable experiences with fruit bats, the variety touted to be harmless." These claims illustrate the extent of misinformation about bats and how easily it is accepted as fact. No fruit bats have lived in the United States or Canada for at least 10,000 years!

Furthermore, having investigated literally thousands of claimed bat attacks, I can assure you that the vast majority are erroneous, based on needless panic. I have never seen an aggressive bat, despite having studied millions of them worldwide for the past 30 years.

Like all mammals, an occasional bat can contract rabies, but even a sick bat rarely becomes aggressive and normally bites only if handled. To put dangers from bats in perspective, please note that more people are killed *each year* by their spouses or family dogs than have died in all recorded history from contact with bats.

I sympathize with the Austin writer for his unfortunate allergic response to the rabies vaccine. He is one of thousands of people who suffer annually from adverse reactions to vaccines and other medication. Most rabies vaccinations result from contact with dogs, not bats, but most of us still like dogs. We also should understand that there is at least some unavoidable risk in taking *any* medication. There is no vaccination or animal on earth that is entirely safe, but we recognize the values of both.

Austin's famous Congress Avenue colony of free-tailed bats attracts thousands of people who enjoy their spectacular emergences. The bats also consume approximately 15,000 to 30,000 pounds of insects *nightly*, including vast numbers of crop and yard pests. If these bats were dangerous they certainly would not be so popular.

--Merlin D. Tuttle

This is the second time this year that Ann Landers has printed letters from misinformed readers maligning bats. In her response this time, she told readers that she had "no interest in joining a bat club" and that bats were still "not high on my hit parade." Members responded earlier this year by sending her a complementary membership in BCI and deluging her with brochures (to which she said "no more!"). Our advice to the well-known

advice columnist? Better to stick with what you know.

All articles in this issue:

- [ON THE COVER](#)
- [A Year of Filming Bats Around the World](#)
- [The Bats at the Bridge](#)
- [The Northern Bat of Sweden: Taking Advantage of a Human Environment](#)
- [The Northern Bat's North American Relative](#)
- [THE FLYING FOXES OF KU-RING-GAI](#)
- ["We found a baby flying fox!"](#)
- [Habitat for Free-tailed Bats Protected](#)
- [BCI Trustee Receives Conservation Award](#)
- [WISH LIST](#)
- [The One Step](#)
- [BCI Responds to Another Bat "Flap"](#)
- [LETTERS](#)
- [Founder's Circle Members Join Film Crew in Costa Rica](#)
- [A bridge to come home to](#)