

VOLUME 10, NO. 1 Spring 1992

Sorry, no PDF
available

National Geographic Society Receives BCI's First Distinguished Achievement

The National Geographic Society has played a key role in highlighting the importance of bats and their conservation needs. Since BCI's founding, the Society's president, Gilbert M. Grosvenor, has lent his considerable prestige as an honorary trustee. Many Society staff also have helped, especially Mary G. Smith, senior assistant editor for research grant projects. We are extremely pleased to present the National Geographic Society with BCI's first Distinguished Achievement Award. No other group has done more to help BCI reverse negative stereotypes about bats.

Articles in the 1982, 1986, and 1991 issues of the *National Geographic* magazine were a major factor in stimulating international awareness of the plight of bats, also adding to BCI's credibility as a young organization. Through the magazine, which reaches 40 million readers worldwide each month, BCI's membership and conservation activities now extend into 55 countries.

Today, bats are also featured in more than a dozen Society books, and in film strips and other materials for school children, many of which have been translated into foreign languages from French to Chinese. "Merlin's Bats," a "National Geographic Explorer" segment, which first aired in 1985, still reaches millions in reruns. A *National Geographic* "President's Page" featuring BCI generated an enormous response, and additional coverage included a major news conference and dozens of syndicated newspaper articles and radio spots.

Merlin Tuttle first learned the sophisticated techniques required for successful wildlife photography from Geographic staff photographer Bates Littlehales. Without the generous support of *National Geographic* magazine and the Society's Committee for Research and Exploration, a major portion of Tuttle's collection of 80,000 bat photographs would not have been possible.

Through sponsorship of research, the National Geographic Society has contributed greatly to our understanding of bats. Several major projects conducted by Merlin Tuttle and BCI were funded by the Society, including his work on African flying foxes and BCI's recent bat-cactus study. The latter was the first of its kind to document the key role of endangered long-nosed bats in maintaining the Sonoran Desert ecosystem.

The full impact of these contributions is incalculable. How would BCI's efforts have fared without its unique photo collection or without the thousands of members who first learned about BCI and the needs of bats through the National Geographic Society? How many people would have taken a young organization devoted to bat conservation seriously without backing of the well-known and respected National Geographic Society?

Merlin Tuttle has had many opportunities to find answers to these questions. Early in BCI's history, when he contacted the owner of Judges Cave, home to one of eastern North Amer-

(continued on page 19)

-ica's most important bat colonies, he was thought to be a prankster. The owner, a real estate developer, assumed Tuttle was "batty" for even suggesting help in saving the cave and its bats. He decided to bulldoze it shut, completely disbelieving that the bats were beneficial.

In one last attempt to communicate to the owner how important this issue was, Tuttle asked him if he was a member of the National Geographic Society. Tuttle was delighted to learn that the owner not only was a member, but that he had just purchased the Society's book, *Wild Animals of North America*, which contained a chapter about bats. He promised not to do anything until he read what the Society had to say. To his surprise, the chapter was not only positive; it was written by Merlin Tuttle. Now convinced that Tuttle knew what he was talking about, he agreed to a meeting. Soon after, he proudly helped BCI, the Nature Conservancy, and the State of Florida to give permanent protection to the site as a nature reserve.

A similar incident occurred soon after BCI had gained Nature Conservancy cooperation to purchase and protect Hubbards Cave, home to one of the world's largest bat hibernating populations. At the same time, the Tennessee National Guard wanted the area as a weapons practice range. Just as an unavoidable conflict seemed to be shaping up, "Merlin's Bats" debuted on "National Geographic Explorer," emphasizing why America's cave-dwelling bats are important and why they need help.

When the Tennessee National Guard area commander happened to watch the program, he was so impressed that he offered full Guard cooperation to help save the bats of Hubbards Cave. Guardsmen transported all construction materials for the massive protective gate, including some 120 tons of steel, through extremely difficult terrain.

Such cooperation is increasingly possible as people everywhere begin to understand bats. Many BCI members and others have worked hard to ensure such progress, but we especially thank the National Geographic Society for their crucial assistance. We wish them continued success in increasing knowledge of life on earth.



National Geographic Society President Gilbert Grosvenor (center) receives BCI's first Distinguished Achievement Award from Merlin Tuttle (second from right). Looking on are William Graves, editor (left); Mary Smith, senior assistant editor, and Verne Read (far right), BCI chairman. Grosvenor was presented with an engraved bronze bat-cactus sculpture, honoring a project the Society funded. The award will reside in the Explorer's

Hall.

All articles in this issue:

- [ON THE COVER](#)
- [A Decade of Bat Conservation](#)
- [THE FIRST TEN YEARS](#)
- [National Geographic Society Receives BCI's First Distinguished Achievement](#)
- [The Next 10 Years: A Look to the Future](#)
- [Educating Through the Media](#)
- [Zuri: Bat Superstar](#)
- [Photography and bat conservation](#)
- [Working at BCI](#)
- [Celebrate BCI's 10th Anniversary Through a Gift for Life and Legacy](#)
- [A New Home for BCI](#)
- [A personal note from the founder of BCI](#)
- [The Good Fortune of Bats](#)