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Nocturnal Navigators
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With Costa Rica's bats battered by habitat loss, disappearing roost sites, and widespread persecution, the National Museum of Costa Rica decided to take action. The result was *Navegantes Nocturnas (Nocturnal Navigators)*, an innovative and extremely popular educational exhibit on bats and their conservation.

Constructed in the San Jose museum's outdoor garden and aimed primarily at students, the exhibit ran from April to June 2000 and drew more than 35,000 people - three times the usual visitation rate.

Visitors encountered model bats, crafted by museum personnel, in every nook and cranny of the garden: a nectar bat visiting a flower, a fishing bat with a fish in its claws, a giant false vampire bat, a large fruit bat carrying a fig, and a harem of white-lined bats. Each bat was accurately reproduced at its natural size and was engaged in its normal activities.

The most popular attraction was an artificial cave that covered about 160 square feet (15 square meters) and held 18 live fruit bats of five species. The bats had been acclimated to a reversed day/night cycle, so they were active for daytime visitors.

A kiosk displayed posters based on the benefits of bats, control of vampire bats, the anatomy of bats, and the image of bats in indigenous cultures. A BCI video of Latin American bats played continuously.

Each child who visited received a bat mask and poster. Guides for school groups were specially trained in bat biology and conservation for this exhibit. Enthusiasm was obviously high among the kids, especially on seeing the live bats. The exhibition was widely publicized in the nation's major newspapers, three television channels, and various radio stations.


Navegantes Nocturnos was created primarily by myself and museum exhibit expert Lidilia Arias, although many others helped with the design, production, and publicity. Bat Conservation International loaned photos by BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle, as well as brochures and other information on bats. The National Museum of Costa Rica financed the exhibit as part of its commitment to educate the public by making science accessible to everyone.

When the exhibition ended, the bats from the artificial cave were taken to their original capture site and released. The exhibit has since been taken into rural areas of Costa Rica, where deforestation and the destruction of roost sites are severe and access to information is sparse.

Translated by Richard LaVal

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