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BCI Field-Study Workshops Expand to Pennsylvania

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Walker, Steve

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. . .to a church attic in Canoe Creek State Park, Pennsylvania. Fog lay in thick, intermittent layers across the gently rolling hills of the Allegheny Mountains. A barnyard rooster and dairy cows were the only sounds filling the air. Then, from every direction, bats began to appear. Tens, hundreds, then thousands swarmed to the entrance, seemingly comparing notes before entering. Finally, in perfect synchronicity, they flew into the roost.

This was the finale to a memorable five days at BCI's Bat Conservation and Management Workshop held this August in central Pennsylvania. Nestled along the Little Juniata, a blue-ribbon trout stream in Rothrock State Forest, the historic Greene Hills Manor provided perfect accommodations and traditional Pennsylvania-Dutch cooking, served family style in a rustic 19th century dining hall.

More than 30 environmental educators, teachers, biologists, wildlife control specialists, and engineers, representing 17 states and 11 state and federal agencies, participated in the two five-day workshops, which were co-hosted by the Pennsylvania Game Commission Department of Environmental Resources and by the Bureau of State Parks. BCI's field-study workshop program has become increasingly popular since it began in 1989. Participation doubled last year when workshops were held in Arizona for the first time, and this year the program expanded again to include field experience in the eastern United States as well. The Pennsylvania workshops were underwritten by the Bass Foundation, which will also endow future workshops.

Merlin Tuttle and Cal Butchkoski, a wildlife technician with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, led field demonstrations and provided lectures to introduce participants to techniques for the study and protection of bats. They were assisted by BCI's assistant program director, Janet Tyburec; the Game Commission's Nongame Supervisor, Jerry Hassinger, and his field crewmen, Jim Kennedy, Jim Hart and Keith Christenson; and Terry Wentz and Kerry Estright-Pruznak from the Bureau of State Parks, Canoe Creek State Park.

The area is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life, including 11 species of bats. Field trips were numerous and diverse and provided an outstanding blend of bat study opportunities. During the evening, we netted bats over placid beaver ponds, along streams, and on volcanic cliff faces high above steep canyon bottoms. One night, there was tremendous excitement over a "huge bat" captured in one of the nets. After carefully extracting the animal from the filament, everyone was amazed to discover that we had intercepted a young flying squirrel!

We also visited numerous bat houses that are part of research being conducted by Lisa Williams in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Game Commission [*BATS*, Spring 1993]. They were of different sizes and dimensions and mounted differently-some on the sides of buildings, others free-standing on poles-but they had one thing in common: all were packed with hundreds of bats. The Game Commission's program to educate citizens about how to exclude bats from buildings and how to build successful artificial roosts can serve as a positive model for other states to follow. The theme "people and bats can, and should, coexist in perfect harmony" underlies all of their community assistance and education programs.

Visiting a protected limestone mine nearby in Canoe Creek State Park provided an excellent opportunity for participants to learn techniques for assessing the seasonal bat population of a site. Since protection, the mine has become Pennsylvania's most important bat hibernating site [see "A Model for Conservation and Education"]. As we sat quietly in the dark in front of the entrance, taking turns with a night-vision scope, we saw a sight few people witness: thousands of bats swarming around the entrance, a pre-hibernating and mating behavior that occurs each fall at a few selected sites.

The workshops not only give participants practical field experience and training available nowhere else, they also help with another and very important aspect of conservation biology: conflict resolution. This special feature of BCI's workshops teaches participants key aspects of conservation diplomacy and how to achieve positive results when faced with a problem. This is knowledge that can help every community.

Participants left with memories of experiences few people are ever fortunate enough to enjoy, and a good feeling about the excellent bat conservation work being accomplished by our co-hosts from the natural resource agencies of Pennsylvania. More important, they left with the knowledge and desire to make a personal difference for bat conservation in their own states.

*-Steve Walker, Vice-president,
Planning and Management*

If you are interested in participating in the next workshops in Pennsylvania or Arizona, please contact Janet Tyburec, Assistant Director of Programs, at BCI, 512-327-9721. Three five-day sessions begin in Arizona on June 12, 1995 and two five-day sessions in Pennsylvania begin on August 11, 1995.

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