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The Forgotten Pollinators

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..



The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM) in Tucson, Arizona, has successfully launched their "Forgotten Pollinators" program, a campaign to promote awareness about the importance of bees, butterflies, bats, and other animals that pollinate wild plants and crops (BATS, Fall 1995).

The role pollinators play in ecosystem health and human nutrition is too often overlooked. Consider that many plant-derived medicines in our pharmacies, and over three-quarters of the crop plants that feed the world, rely on pollination by insects or other animals to produce healthy fruits and seeds. It has even been estimated that one out of every three bites we eat is of a food or food product that relies on an animal pollinator.

BCI is proud to be participating in the ASDM's revolutionary campaign. We have been invited to join the Forgotten Pollinators advisory board and to participate in education and conservation initiatives that focus on bat pollinators. Just this past August, we co-sponsored an international workshop at the Museum called "Protecting the Pollinators: Techniques for Land Managers." Over a period of three days, Steve Walker, BCI's Associate Executive Director, and Janet Tyburec, Education Programs Director, lectured and participated in panel discussions and field trips that gave participants new solutions to roost protection and other habitat problems.

Drs. Gary Nabhan and Steve Buchmann, co-founders of the Forgotten Pollinators educational outreach campaign, presented awards to two colleagues for their efforts to help sustain bat pollinator/plant interactions that benefit humankind. Debra Noel, Habitat Specialist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZG&F) in Flagstaff, was recognized for having founded the AZG&F's "Bat Management Program." Noel, whose initial interest in bats began at a BCI workshop in 1993, is largely responsible for making Arizona the most progressive state in the nation for bat protection and awareness. Dr. Rodrigo Medellin, a founder and co-director of the Program for the Conservation of Migratory Bats of Mexico and the U.S. (see "What is the PCMM?"), was recognized for his collaborative agreements across the U.S./Mexico border to locate, monitor, and protect

migratory bats. To date, Medellin and his team have located and mapped over 1,400 bat roosts throughout Mexico and the Southwest, and are currently assessing the threats to those roosts. Medellin is also largely responsible for getting "cave environments" added to the Mexican Ministry of the Environment's protective legislation.

An important outgrowth of this workshop was the formation of committees to develop protection strategies and research protocols for the Society of Conservation Biology. The committees will focus on five key areas of plant/pollinator conservation: 1) the decline of honey bees; 2) an examination of the decline of invertebrate pollinators; 3) an investigation of the decline of vertebrate pollinators; 4) protocols for monitoring rare plants; and 5) the agricultural implications of pollinator declines. Steve Walker and Janet Tyburec will serve on the committees as advisors on vertebrate pollinators.

BCI has been asked to advise on more than just bat concerns, however. Our experience leading collaborative initiatives will provide valuable models for the program's educational and research components on behalf of threatened non-bat pollinators as well. The approach of the Forgotten Pollinators campaign promotes total ecosystem health, emphasizing the fragile relationship between plants and animals. Not only will bats benefit, so will humans and a host of other organisms necessary for protecting the delicate balance of nature.

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or refer to:
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Gary Nabhan (far left) and Steve Walker (far right) present awards to Debra Noel and Rodrigo Medellin for their leadership in protecting bat pollinators.

All articles in this issue:

- [On the Cover](#)
- [Bat Awareness in Mexico Begins with Children](#)
- [Bats Aloft: A Study of High-Altitude Feeding](#)
- [Bats in the Hallway: A Different Kind of School](#)
- [Founder's Circle Roams from Africa . .](#)
- [The Forgotten Pollinators](#)
- [In Tribute William A. Walker 1922-1996](#)
- [New Bat Facts](#)
- [Conservation Awards Will Benefit Bats](#)
- [A Note to Our International Members](#)
- [Wish List](#)
- [Correction](#)
- [1996 Sets New Record for Scholarship Awards](#)
- [Bat Conservation and You: Members' Stories Wanted!](#)
- [Free-tail Workshop a Success](#)
- [MEMBER OPPORTUNITIES FOR 1997](#)