

Bats and Forest Conservation in Venezuela

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Although bats were the focus of the latest BCI workshop, many fauna and flora will benefit in the near future. In the first of a soon-to-be-annual series of forest management workshops last September, professionals from across Venezuela spent six days studying new approaches to logging that will benefit bats and protect the biodiversity of tropical forests.

With the guidance of trustee Scott McVay and the support of the W. Alton Jones Foundation, BCI co-hosted the workshop with our partners, the Venezuelan Association for the Conservation of Natural Areas (ACOANA) and the Interamerican Center for Environmental Development and Research (CIDIAT).

□ This was the first time that all organizations with authority over forest management policy in Venezuela have come together to share ideas, □ observed Dr. Jose Ochoa, the director of ACOANA and a BCI scientific advisor. The 22 workshop participants included logging company representatives, Venezuelan National Guard officers, and government land-management professionals, as well as biologists from several non-government environmental organizations and professors and post graduate students from three national universities.

BCI's Associate Director Steve Walker joined an impressive cadre of instructors that included many of Venezuela's experts in the fields of zoology, plant ecology, soil science, and forest management. During the two-day theoretical session in Merida, Walker presented lectures on the ecological and economic values of bats in tropical ecosystems and on developing a regional vision for bat conservation in Latin America.

Following the classroom activities, the workshop moved to the Forestry Reserve of Caparo--a 174,370-hectare tract of tropical lowland forest--for four days of field study. Participants were given a first-hand look at the impacts of past logging on bats, and the field work concluded with a group consensus for significant changes to benefit wildlife: Logging will be intensified on only 10 percent of each harvesting area, while the rest will follow a prescription designed to enhance biodiversity.

Teaching about forest ecosystems through bats proved to be a truly effective approach. As entomologist César Molina commented: □ The idea of using a particular taxo-nomic group to discuss solutions to a global problem--the management of primary forests--was very ingenious and ought to be copied in the future. □

Based on this successful workshop, BCI and ACOANA are now planning to expand bat conservation efforts in Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru. Our priorities include a second forest management workshop, a new workshop focused on controlling the impact of vampire bats while protecting other bat species, research to better understand the roles of bats in three important Venezuelan forestry reserves (Caura, Nichare, and Bolivar), and a

census of the endangered Phyllostomid bat species *Lonchorhina fernandezi*.

BCI and ACOANA would like to acknowledge the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Venezuelan Association for the Study of Mammals, the University of the Andes, and the Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources for their contributions to the workshop. Special thanks go out to Dr. Ochoa and his outstanding ACOANA staff, who successfully assembled this diverse group of environmental leaders and handled the difficult workshop logistics with ease.



Participants at BCI's 1996 forest-management workshop in Venezuela spent four days in the field getting a first-hand look at how to include the needs of bats and other wildlife in sustainable harvesting strategies.

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