

## VOLUME 20, NO. 2 Summer 2002

### The Vampire Video

A Unique Program Spreads Bat Conservation Throughout Latin America

Steve Walker

Bat Conservation International programs, partners, and allies now span the length and breadth of Latin America, home to the largest and most diverse collection of bat species in the world. The seeds for this critical expansion southward were sown in 1993 through a vampire control video.

Vampire bats are, indirectly, one of the biggest threats facing Central and South American bats. Vampires, found only in Latin America, often feed on the blood of livestock and occasionally transmit rabies to cattle. Latin American ranchers quite reasonably want to end these losses, and that has traditionally involved burning or dynamiting bat roosts in caves or hollow trees -- killing thousands, even millions, of bats at a time. Tragically, however, such tactics usually had little or no impact on vampires while devastating whole colonies of beneficial bats that reduce insects and propagate tropical forests.

Then BCI began an education campaign for veterinarians and cattlemen. The centerpiece was a 30-minute videotape -- *Control del Murcielago Vampiro y La Rabia Bovina* (*Control of Vampire Bats and Bovine Rabies*). BCI members Tom and Marilyn Fifield generously funded the fieldwork and assisted with the filming in Costa Rica, with additional support from the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Leading experts on vampire and rabies control, Rexford Lord of Venezuela and Victor Hugo Sancho of Costa Rica, appeared in the video and served as science advisors.

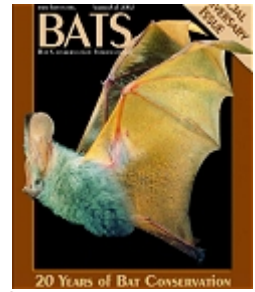
The video, available in Spanish, English, and Portuguese, explained how to control vampires without harming beneficial species, while also featuring the essential ecological and economic roles of other Latin American bats.

Lord, with BCI support, presented the popular video at symposia throughout Latin America. It also aired on national television in several countries. Now, a decade later, *Control del Murcielago Vampiro* is still presented at meetings of cattlemen's associations and used as a routine part of veterinary training throughout the vampires' range.

This single educational program has had a greater impact on bat conservation in Latin America than all previous efforts combined. It gave bat conservation enormous visibility and credibility.

Soon, biologists and veterinarians throughout Latin America were investigating how they could work with BCI to address additional conservation issues affecting bats. In 1994, BCI and the Institute of Ecology of Mexico's National Autonomous University established the enormously successful Programa para la Conservacion de los Murcielagos Migratorios (Program for the Conservation of Migratory Bats), or PCMM.

Though it focused initially only on bats that migrate between the United States and Mexico, PCMM, under the direction of BCI Scientific Advisor Rodrigo Medellín, has now expanded its mission to include all 140 Mexican species. It has earned the support of



 [View PDF version](#)  
[2.99 MB]

federal, state, and local governments, as well as academia, industry, and environmental organizations in both countries.

PCMM's reputation and its Spanish-language educational materials have spread rapidly, becoming models for the rest of Latin America. By 1998, similar programs were established in Venezuela, under the direction of Jos   Ochoa, and in Bolivia, with Luis Aguirre. Bat conservation initiatives are also under way in Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, and Guatemala in collaboration with BCI and PCMM.

The past decade of cooperative engagement in Latin America has made remarkable progress on behalf of the region's more than 290 bat species. Yet thousands of bat roosts are still being destroyed every year and many more will be lost unless we expand the educational resources only BCI and its Latin American partners can provide.

STEVE WALKER is Executive Director of BCI.

All articles in this issue:

- [Past & Future](#)
- [The Gray Bat's Survival](#)
- [An Epic Gate](#)
- [Bat Scholars](#)
- [Workshops for Bats](#)
- [North American Bat House Research Project](#)
- [A Priceless Resource](#)
- [Bats in the News](#)
- [Bats & Mines](#)
- [The Vampire Video](#)
- [Loyal Friends Keep BCI Strong](#)
- [The Challenges Ahead](#)
- [The Future is Built One Piece at a Time](#)