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### Legal Protection Gained for Bats in Sarawak, Malaysia

BCI was delighted to learn from member and workshop graduate Melvin Terry Gumal this past summer that bats have received broad protection in Gumal's home state of Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo, where he works for the Sarawak Forest Department.

In May the Sarawak Parliament unanimously passed the 1998 Wildlife Protection Ordinance, which makes it illegal to hunt, capture, sell, import, or export bats. Violators face imprisonment of one year and a fine equal to \$2,500 U.S. It is also illegal to possess bats, or any part of a bat, without a license, although the Sarawak Forest Department states that it will not be issuing any licenses for possession as it intends to protect all bats. A license is now also required for the sale and use of all mist nets.

In addition to mandating legal protection, the Sarawak government has also begun patrolling markets and known hunting sites to enforce the laws and has initiated programs to teach about bat conservation in rural communities near bat roosts.

This landmark initiative acknowledges the important roles bats play in this region as flower pollinators, seed dispersers, predators of crop pests, and also as tourist attractions. The evening flight of 1.8 million free-tailed bats (*Tadarida plicata*) from Deer Cave at Mulu National Park is considered one of the best wildlife spectacles in Borneo. With 18 species of Old World fruit bats, and more than 95 total species, Borneo's bat fauna ranks among the most diverse in the world.

BCI first began raising awareness of the need for protection for Borneo's flying foxes more than a decade ago when we sponsored Dr. Marty Fujita's educational outreach and post-doctoral research throughout Southeast Asia [*BATS*, Spring 1988].

Congratulations to Melvin Gumal and his colleagues at the Sarawak Forest Department for their efforts in supporting the new ordinance.



Borneo's flying foxes include the Island flying fox (*Pteropus hypomelanus*), above, and the large flying fox (*Pteropus vampyrus*), which, with a six-foot wingspan, is the biggest bat in the world.

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