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News & Notes

Saving bats from barbed wire

Thousands of Australia's largest bats, mostly flying foxes, die slow, painful deaths each year after becoming snagged and entangled on the barbed-wire fences that spread around much of the nation's farms and rangelands. Carcasses of other wildlife, especially gliders (possum-like marsupials that glide like flying squirrels), also are found dangling from the wires. The problem is so widespread that conservation groups have despaired of achieving any real progress.

But now, says Jenny Maclean of the Tolga Bat Hospital in northern Australia, "There seems to be a critical mass of energy to tackle the issue and start the long process of replacing barbed wire with wildlife-friendly fencing."

The Wildlife-Friendly Fencing Project, with a lead grant from the World Wildlife Fund, reports considerable progress since its official launch in September 2006. BCI's Global Grassroots Conservation Fund is supporting production of an educational video to document the extent of the problem and demonstrate cost-efficient alternatives. The Bat Hospital is coordinating the national effort with a growing list of partners.

Among bat species that fall frequent victim to the fences are the spectacled (*Pteropus conspicillatus*) and gray-headed flying fox (*P. poliocephalis*) and the Australian ghost bat (*Macroderma gigas*), all listed as threatened.

The project's educational campaign is now up and running, and its activities and goals have been reported by newspapers, magazines and radio stations around the country and beyond. A brochure will be ready for distribution before the year is out.

Volunteers running the project are seeking landowners willing to modify their fences and demonstrate the feasibility of using safer fencing for a broad range of needs and terrains. Recently developed wildlife-friendly fencing guidelines are built around two strategies: removing or replacing the barbed wire and improving its visibility. Most bat kills involve the top strand of fencing, so replacing it or dramatically increasing its visibility with streamers or fence tape can save bats and other wildlife.


One initial success involves not barbed wire but the almost invisible monofilament netting that is often thrown over backyard fruit trees.

Such netting causes horrific injuries to flying foxes. Most leading outlets that sell the netting recently agreed to discontinue it and instead provide much safer white, knitted netting, along with advice about stretching the nets to further reduce the risk to bats.

Maclean notes that the scope of the Wildlife-Friendly Fencing Project is enormous, and change will only come "slowly" through convincing landholders that they can effectively fence their property without endangering wildlife.

To help Bat Conservation International's Global Grassroots Conservation Fund



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continue its support of this important initiative or to contribute to Global Grassrootsâ€™ efforts around the world, please contact development@batcon.org?

Conservation in India

Grace Trust, a nonprofit group dedicated to empowering women and children in India, added bat conservation to its agenda this year. The Trust developed bat-education materials, explained the importance and needs of bats to key women and students, held rallies and presented community slide shows in the Madurai area of southern India. The new direction was supported by a BCI Global Grassroots Conservation Fund grant, which was made possible by the generosity of BCI Member Janet Willis.

The program began with a training session on the importance and methods of bat conservation for 150 women representing 50 womenâ€™s forums around the region. A university professor and a wildlife-conservation expert led the session. Study materials were distributed, and myths that have been extremely harmful to Indian bats were dispelled. The goal is for these women to return to their communities and neighborhoods equipped to spread the word about bat conservation.

After the workshop, the women participated in a bat-conservation rally that drew 5,000 spectators.

Recognizing the great, long-term payoffs in educating children, Grace Trust sent two experienced conservationists to introduce 250 students from schools throughout the area to the values of bats and the critical need for conservation. The educators noted the needless killing of bats for commercial purposes and traditional medicines, and stressed that young people can have an important role in conservation. Participants, armed with age-appropriate study materials, pledged to carry the bat-conservation message back to their schools. Teams also introduced bat-conservation programs directly to 10 schools.

In addition, 60 students with strong leadership potential were taken on a field trip into the foothills of nearby Sadurakri Mountain for a close-up look at roosting bats “ and at the damage done by commercial hunters of bats. The role of bats in maintaining healthy ecosystems and economies became much clearer for young people after seeing bats in their natural homes.

A Cycle Rally for Bat Conservation, with 60 youngsters bicycling 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) on behalf of bats, drew as many as 10,000 spectators, who were exposed to the idea of protecting Indiaâ€™s bats.

A post-project assessment found that the programs were well received and some attitudes were changed, although much work remains. Grace Trust hopes to build on this yearâ€™s experience and expand bat conservation as part of their greater mission.

A most unusual photo

Kimberly Thoman was standing on the patio of her home in Parker, Colorado, at about 8 p.m. on October 2, when two noisy airborne bats almost crashed into her in their apparent haste to land. The pair wound up on a branch of a honey locust tree, about six feet (two meters) off the ground, where they proceeded to mate.

Kimberly and her husband, Brian, who grabbed his camera, watched the bats for about 10

minutes, during which he took this remarkable picture – the only photo ever taken of mating hoary bats (*Lasiurus cinereus*). It may also be the strongest suggestion yet that hoary bats, like eastern red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*), may actually begin the act of mating in mid-air. Red bats have been seen flying in tandem while apparently copulating and have occasionally been reported falling to the ground prior to completion.

Brian Thoman said darkness prevented his wife from determining whether the two bats were already mating in flight or just flying together before their hurried landing. She heard loud vocalizations during the flight, but not after the landing. v told Kimberly that I’d bet nobody had seen this before,” Thoman said. “I realized the photo could be useful to researchers.” He contacted BCI for information.

“That photo,” said biologist Paul Cryan of the U.S. Geological Survey in Fort Collins, Colorado, “is the best evidence of nocturnal aerial courtship and mating in hoary bats that we have ever seen and is suspiciously similar to observations made on eastern red bats.”

He said there are only two previously known observations of mating hoary bats, both on the remote Southeast Farallon Island in the Pacific Ocean, about 30 miles (42 kilometers) west of San Francisco. Cryan has been helping to study hoary bats that use the island as a stopover during migrations.

He said that while bat species display a great diversity of mating behaviors, specifics are documented for very few, probably less than 10 percent.

Cryan noted that hoary and eastern red bats both roost in trees or foliage much of the year and make significant migrations in the spring and again in the fall. Both species live largely solitary lives during the summer and appear to mate in the fall, possibly during migration.

Hoary and red bats also are among the most commonly killed species at wind-energy facilities. “I’m going out on a limb here and suggesting that aerial mating by hoary and eastern red bats might have something to do with their susceptibility to wind turbines,” Cryan said.

He said most wind-turbine fatalities of these two species occur during the fall mating period, with significantly fewer reported during the spring migration. Flocking behavior has been reported in both species during late summer and early fall. Cryan’s hypothesis suggests that red and hoary bats, searching for mating partners during the fall migration, may use the tallest trees on the horizon as gathering points where they begin courtship and mating. Tall trees are both easy to find and typically provide extensive roosting options.

The problem occurs, Cryan suspects, when the tallest “trees” around turn out to be wind turbines.

Apply for BCI Scholarships

Bat Conservation International invites students at universities worldwide to apply for its 2008 Student Research Scholarships.

Young scientists around the world are conducting original, conservation-relevant research – and honing skills for the future – with support from BCI’s Student Research Scholarships. Since 1990, this program has invested more than \$550,000 to help support

research by 237 students in 51 countries. Students, selected on the basis of a review by outside experts, receive scholarships of \$2,500 to \$5,000 each for research that enhances bat conservation. BCI Scholars have added significantly to our knowledge of bats, their values and conservation needs, and many are now leaders in science and conservation.

BCI's partnership with the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, now in its second year, has greatly expanded the program and increased the size of awards. Thanks to this collaboration, we are now providing 10 additional scholarships annually for work in developing countries. For the current academic year, BCI is supporting 21 projects in 13 countries.

For the first time this year, the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and Travis and Bettina Mathis are jointly supporting a program that offers graduate students the opportunity to double their award (\$5,000 - \$10,000) if they focus their research on subjects chosen by BCI as having special value to bat conservation.

This year's Special Scholarships are restricted to research on bats' pollination of Old World mangroves or durian. Anecdotal observations suggest that both are highly reliant on bats for pollination. The durian is the most commercially valued fruit in much of Southeast Asia and nearby Pacific Islands, but farmers often mistakenly assume that bats reduce (rather than enhance) durian production. Coastal mangroves are ecologically essential but are disappearing at alarming rates. Their primary bat pollinators are also disappearing rapidly but remain largely unrecognized as essential elements in mangrove-conservation planning. Studies documenting the role of bats as durian and mangrove pollinators are urgently needed.

For more information, a list of current BCI Scholars and their research, or to apply for 2008 BCI Student Research Scholarships, please visit BCI's website at www.batcon.org. Scholarships are listed under the heading "BCI Grants." The deadline for applications is December 15, 2007.

BCI is also accepting applications for its North American Bat Conservation Fund grants, competitive awards of up to \$5,000 each to support conservation and conservation-related research in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The application deadline is also December 15.

The BCI Global Grassroots Conservation Fund accepts applications year-round for grants aimed at helping locally initiated conservation efforts outside North America, especially in developing countries.

A new bat stamp

The U.S. Postal Service needed 155 years (and the encouragement of BCI Member Carol Adams of Medina, Texas) to finally put pictures of bats on postage stamps. The very first were introduced in 2002. Now, just five years later, there's a new U.S. stamp bearing the image of a lesser long-nosed bat pollinating a saguaro cactus.

The new stamp is included in the four-stamp Pollinator set issued during National Pollinator Week this past summer. The set, said Postmaster Yverne Pat Moore, provides "a special way to honor the beauty that is in our midst each day. The animals featured on the stamps are beautiful ambassadors of nature."

The set features four wildflowers and four pollinators. In addition to the lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris yerbabuenae*), two Morrison's bumblebees are paired with purple nightshade; a calliope hummingbird sips from a hummingbird trumpet blossom; and a Southern dogface butterfly visits prairie ironweed.

The 2002 American Bat Stamps featured four photographs by BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle. Adams, by the way, got that ball rolling by showing a BCI bat poster to a member of the Postal Service's Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee and declaring that bats "are wonderful, they have precious faces and they need the help."

For the Pollinator Stamps, artist Steve Buchanan created an intricate graphic that emphasizes the relationship between pollinators and plants and hints at the biodiversity that's required to continue that crucial relationship into the future.

Pollination is the basis for fruit and seed production. Human economies depend heavily upon pollinators and, the Postal Service notes, some animal pollinators appear to be declining.

The lesser long-nosed bat, found in southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico and in Mexico, is listed as endangered in the United States. It feeds on the fruit and nectar of night-blooming cacti such as saguaro and organ pipe, as well as that of many species of agave.

A young actor puts bats in the spotlight

Chandler Frantz takes time out now and then from his dual careers as a student and theater and television actor to teach classmates and others about the benefits of bats. His sophisticated PowerPoint presentations, like the one pictured here, are especially impressive when you consider Chandler is a very busy 9-year-old in the third grade at the Academy Hill School for the Bright, Curious and Gifted in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The youngster, meanwhile, is making a name for himself as an actor, a goal he set at age 4. He had a featured role this September in the pilot for the ABC series "Dirty Sexy Money" and was a lead in "All the Way Home" last fall (Off-Broadway). He has also appeared, and still appears, in TV commercials.

But he also makes time to celebrate bats. "I really appreciate bats because they help the Earth (including eating lots of insects) and once you get to know them, bats are cute and very interesting," Chandler explains.

He comes by his interest in bats naturally. His father, Stephen Frantz, was for many years a research scientist at the New York State Department of Health, where he worked tirelessly to correct misinformation about bats and rabies and to encourage humane exclusions from buildings. He's now Principal Officer of Global Environmental Options, LLC, a research and advisory organization concerned with ecologically sound pest management and related issues.

Frantz and BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle have worked together on these issues since 1982. The family took Chandler to see the famous bat colony at the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas, for the first time when he was just a year old.

Chandler said he develops his presentations with information from "my dad and his

papers, a little bit of computer work (Google searches), Merlin Tuttle's book, America's Neighborhood Bats, and talking with Merlin himself.

The effort seems to be paying off. Chandler says some of his friends have become fans of bats.

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