

A Bats Time of Year



Halloween is a great time for bat education. Newspapers and television stations around the country look to bat stories to for a bit of seasonal spice, and usually, these days, the stories are mostly positive.

This year, the Sacramento Bee in California hit the motherlode. “By sheer coincidence,” the newspaper reported in a front-page story, “scholars and followers of bats get together each year right around Halloween. This year, the symposium has come to Sacramento for the first time in its 35-year history.”

The North American Symposium on Bat Research is the premier conference for bat people. “If you want to learn about bats, this is the place,” says Dharma Webber, founder of the California Native Bat Conservancy.

Bee Science Writer Edie Lau says the 300 people at the annual conference isn’t a large number as scientific conferences go, but “it’s the biggest yet for this group: Bat research is a relatively unpopulated field of science.” Bat Conservation International Founder Merlin Tuttle told her that bats “are by far the least-studied mammals on the planet. ... Bats remain victims of illogical fears probably because as animals of the night, they are hard to see and therefore hard to understand.”

Tuttle, she wrote, “is a photographer whose gorgeous photos of bats have been credited with charming the hearts of people who might otherwise fear the little furry creatures for no good reason.”

Then Lau got busy educating her readers. She notes that almost a quarter of all mammals in the world are bats, and they range in size from giant flying foxes with 6-foot wingspans to tiny bumblebee bats weighing less than a penny apiece. Only one bat species “out of more than 1,100” drinks the blood of mammals, bat researchers say, yet bats indiscriminately are painted as vampires.

In the United States, Arizona and Texas are the No. 1 and No. 2 bat states, with the greatest number of bat species in the country, Lau wrote. California has 24 species.

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