



In much of the Philippines, bats are reviled as crop pests and feared as witches and demonic messengers. Many are killed out of fear or hunted to become a delicacy known as bat *adobo*. Farmers insist bats gather at night to eat their coconuts and drink tuba, the native coconut wine collected in bamboo stalks. In the Philippines, as in many other parts of the world, generations of superstition and misinformation too often overwhelm any appreciation of bats' great environmental and economic importance. It is little wonder that bats face a precarious future there.

But, armed with a BCI Global Grassroots Conservation Fund grant, the Soil and Water Conservation Foundation (SWCF) in the Philippines is going into the villages to replace mythology with facts and soften attitudes toward bats. The well-publicized effort uses an integrated program of biodiversity research and public education.

Until now, biodiversity research in the nation's 7,100 islands has been anemic at best, and little is known about the state of the country's flora and fauna. But it is clear that rapid population growth already had cost the archipelago more than 90 percent of its original forest cover.

SWCF's research team surveyed the flora and fauna, particularly bats, in Bohol Province. The foundation trained local college students and farmers to capture, identify and release bats, and this team documented 26 species – more than a third of the approximately 70 bat species identified in the Philippines.

The research results were incorporated into a bat-conservation education campaign used throughout the province. We – and bats – also received considerable favorable attention in Philippine newspapers and radio stations. Students and farmers were trained to conduct the sessions using PowerPoint presentations and entertaining activities designed to be more like camp than class. The sessions include BCI's popular video, *The Secret World of Bats*, dubbed in Visayan, the local dialect. Working with local officials, teams of two or three people visited high schools and villages in 36 municipalities.

The project also developed six bat-conservation classroom modules, complete with activities, worksheets and lesson plans. These were distributed to the roughly 100 high schools in the participating municipalities. Teachers were trained to introduce the modules to their schools and prepare other teachers to integrate them into science, English and math classes.

These educational programs have proved popular and effective, and they should continue paying dividends for bat conservation and for the area's environmental health for generations to come.

Julie Cerqueira, of Milford, Massachusetts, is a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines. With a degree in biology and environmental policy from Worcester Polytechnic Institute of Massachusetts, she began the bat-conservation program and worked extensively with volunteer students.

[Members](#) of Bat Conservation International can read the whole story of this impressive program in the Fall issue of

BATS magazine.

BCI's Global Grassroots Conservation Fund provide small grants of up to \$5,000 (and usually less than \$3,000) to support important bat-conservation programs by local groups around the world. Your contributions can help ensure that this fund continues to have an impact. Please contact Development Director Emily Young at development@batcon.org.

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