



The first major bat-education program in Ukraine used an array of colorful posters, leaflets and pocket calendars to challenge long-standing misperceptions of bats as “devilish, nocturnal” animals that threaten public health. With support from BCI’s Global Grassroots Conservation Fund, a team from Kharkov National University focused on urgent threats in and around Kharkov, the third-largest city in the nation.

The students and Professor Alexander V. Naglov also conducted educational programs for children at Young Naturalists clubs in and around Kharkov, especially in areas with at-risk bat habitats.

Public attitudes about bats in northeastern Ukraine and nearby Russian territories never recovered from the tragic rabies death 20 years ago of a child bitten by a bat. Although this is the only bat-related rabies fatality ever documented throughout the region, public health and veterinary officials promptly added bats to their catalog of most-dangerous animals.

Bats remain on that list today, and public officials still equate them with danger in official leaflets, meetings and television interviews. As a result, many Ukrainians view bats with revulsion and fear. That was the challenge facing the university students.

The team designed and printed educational posters, leaflets and pocket calendars aimed at raising awareness and knowledge among managers of government forests and vacation residents of “summer-cottage villages” in especially scenic rural areas. In distributing the materials, they conducted frequent educational sessions.

They also attacked the unusual problem of urban bats frequently becoming fatally trapped in windows at the Kharkov National University. Kharkov hosts Europe’s largest population of common noctule bats, and most spend the winters hibernating in wall crevices of university buildings. But during the fall and spring migrations, the team had discovered, groups of up to 100 bats often attempt to fly through windows at the university. Because of the windows’ design, many of the bats become trapped between the frames, where they often die.

Posters aimed at the university bats describe why the windows are deadly for bats, what people can do to prevent them from being trapped and why we should care. They also explain what students should do to safely help the bats escape. “The university is a center of education and culture,” the poster states, “and should not become a cemetery for wildlife.”

This unprecedented bat-conservation effort directly reached several thousand people, and thousands more saw educational posters, leaflets and calendars. Naglov and his crew report that their bat-conservation efforts are only beginning, and the educational resources they developed with BCI’s support should serve them well in the future.

BCI members can read the full report of this pioneering bat-conservation effort in Ukraine in the Spring 2009 issue of BATS magazine.

This important project was made possible by Anton Schindler, in loving memory of his wife, Valerie. You can help grow bat conservation around the world by donating to BCI’s Global Grassroots Conservation Fund at:

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