

May 2010, Volume 8, Number 5
Night of the Bat “ and Batman



The city of Austin, Texas – hometown of Bat Conservation International and summer home of the world’s largest urban bat colony – is going all-out for its first annual Night of the Bat celebration on Sunday, June 6.

The guests of honor are the 1.5 million Mexican free-tailed bats that live under the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge in downtown Austin and stage a dramatic emergence each summer evening for their nightly insect hunt. But those beloved bats will have a lot of competition for the public’s attention. The free festivities include a rock concert; an appearance by Adam West, TV’s original Batman, and a replica Batmobile; an aerial dance performance; and public-education programs by BCI staff and volunteers.

Mayor Lee Leffingwell noted that the family-friendly celebration comes two months after the Austin City Council endorsed his proposal to make the Mexican free-tailed bat the city’s official animal.

That’s not exactly how the city reacted when the bats first moved into new crevices on the bottom of the remodeled bridge in the early 1980s. A representative newspaper headline of the time proclaimed: “Mass fear in the air as bats invade Austin.” Many residents demanded that the bridge bats be eradicated.

Then BCI moved its headquarters to Austin from Wisconsin in 1986. BCI’s staff and founder, Merlin Tuttle, worked tirelessly educating Austinites about the many benefits of those bats. Things changed. Now more than 125,000 people visit the bridge each year to watch the bat flights and Austin bills itself as the Bat Capital of America.

For that successful effort, Bat Conservation International is being honored with a proclamation at the Night of the Bat.

This will be a full day of celebrating the bridge bats of Austin with a varied schedule. An assortment of games and fun learning activities will be available for kids. Food and other vendors will donate a portion of their proceeds to BCI. “*Batman: the Movie*” will be screened at the Paramount Theatre. The Band of Heathens will perform before the bats emerge, while the Blue Lapid Light aerial dance troupe will perform afterwards. A demonstration of bat-house building is planned, along with a VIP “Batini” contest to select Austin’s official cocktail.

Bats don’t often get acclaim like this.

If you’d like to help BCI’s education efforts for Night of the Bat, there’s still time to volunteer at www.batcon.org. Look under the “Get Involved” tab for “Volunteer at BCI.”

All articles in this issue:

► [Tragic Leaps for WNS](#)

This year’s flood of tragic news about White-nose Syndrome became a deluge in May. The WNS fungus was confirmed on another ...

► [Night of the Bat “ and Batman](#)

The city of Austin, Texas â€“ hometown of Bat Conservation International and summer home of the worldâ€™s largest urban bat ...

► [Bats in the News](#)

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