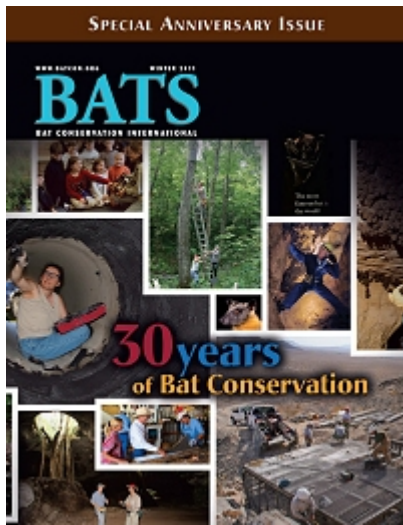


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BCI's Birthday

Bat Conservation International was born 30 years ago, on March 12, 1982. That's when Merlin Tuttle founded BCI in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as the world's first non-government organization devoted exclusively to bats. Back then, just about everyone "knew" that bats were loathsome, disease-ridden pests of no particular value. Bats were seldom studied, almost never considered in land-use planning and were frequent victims of senseless vandalism. Oh, and a lot of folks were convinced they often became entangled in human hair. Not surprisingly, bats were in decline almost everywhere.



How things have changed in three decades. Baseless fears and misinformation, while hardly banished, are far less prevalent in the United States, Europe and elsewhere. Bats are studied by top scientists and defended by dedicated conservationists. They figure frequently into environmental assessments for land use. Major bat colonies are protected in caves and mines across America by bat-friendly gates and other measures.

Organizations, government agencies, professional associations and alliances dedicated to bat research and conservation are at work in almost every U.S. state. Internationally, such organizations as Bat Conservation Trust of the United Kingdom, EUROBATS, Latin American Network for the Conservation of Bats, Chiroptera Conservation and Information Network for South Asia, Southeast Asian Bat Conservation and Research Unit cover much of the world.

And, of course, 2011-2012 is, by proclamation of the United Nations, the International Year of the Bat. Hundreds of exciting, educational events are taking place all over the world to celebrate bats and their value to ecosystems and human economies.

"Through vigorous education and outreach, professional-training workshops, on-the-ground conservation efforts and systematic scientific research, as well as a program of scholarships and grassroots conservation grants, BCI has had a major impact on both the protection of bats and the public's perception of them in the United States and much of the world," wrote renowned bat biologist Paul Racey of the United Kingdom. "BCI also played a key role in helping to create and/or nurture a number of current bat-conservation groups in many countries."

And yet, how much things remain the same. The challenges are often different from BCI's early days, but they are no less daunting.

"We are very proud of all that we have accomplished over these past three decades," said BCI Executive Director Nina Fascione. She succeeded Tuttle following his resignation in 2010, after 28 years at the organization's helm. "But many of the threats that have long plagued bats still remain, especially human ignorance and disappearing habitat. Bats also face heart-wrenching new threats in North America. And in much of the world, the idea of conserving bats is still almost unheard of."

The devastating disease called White-nose Syndrome has swept across eastern North America, killing more than 5.7 millions bats in the past six years.

On top of that, tens of thousands of bats are being killed each year by the spinning turbines of wind-energy sites. With wind facilities increasing rapidly around the United States and many parts of the world, this source of green

energy could have dire consequences for bats unless mitigation strategies developed by BCI and its partners are implemented.

In many parts of the world, old threats have grown worse. Deforestation destroys habitat at an alarming rate, subsistence and commercial hunting take frightful tolls on fruit bats, and improper tourism and guano mining threaten many cave bat populations.

"As we begin our fourth decade," Fascione said, "BCI and all who care about bats must renew and expand our commitment to work together to conserve bats and their habitats around the world."

BCI Members can read much more about Bat Conservation International's first 30 years in the Winter 2011 issue of BATS magazine, and in a special 30th Anniversary section of each issue in 2012.

All articles in this issue:

► [BCI's Birthday](#)

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► [A New Tool for Old Mines](#)

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