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A New Direction for Bracken Bat Cave

Millions of Mexican free-tailed bats emerge each summer evening from Bracken Bat Cave, flying up from the cave mouth in a dense, swirling vortex. You can hear the soft flutter of countless flapping wings as the bats form twisting columns to soar over the Texas Hill Country for a night of hunting the insect-pests that bedevil farmers. Watching the bats emerge from Bracken Cave is an unforgettable experience that can instantly transform attitudes about bats.



Bats and visitors at Bracken Cave
Â© Bat Conservation
International

Bat Conservation International will be sharing that awe-inspiring educational experience more broadly than ever this summer while testing a new partnership with nearby Natural Bridge Caverns. The operators of Natural Bridge Caverns will conduct closely supervised tours to witness Bracken Cave emergences Wednesdays through Sundays through the summer.

BCI acquired the cave, summer home to the world's largest colony, in 1992 to secure it from the rapidly expanding suburbs of San Antonio. The organization now also owns and conserves 697 ruggedly beautiful acres that surround the cave.

From the beginning, the vision was to use Bracken Bat Cave as the centerpiece of a powerful educational experience to teach the public about bats and their benefits. The financial ability to do that, however, proved elusive. Visitors have been limited to BCI Members on special "Member Nights" and to occasional groups and organizations. Outreach to the general public was not possible.

BCI hopes to change that through this trial partnership. Natural Bridge Caverns has demonstrated its commitment to conservation and education about caves and ecosystems and is a longstanding supporter of BCI. This partnership will allow Bat Conservation International to gauge the public's interest in visiting the site and the educational results of those visits. The bats will be monitored closely to identify any negative impacts on the colony. The tours will be halted if there is any indication that the bats are being disturbed.

BCI Members, meanwhile, will no longer be limited to visiting the cave only on a handful of member nights. Some changes to members' Bracken Cave benefits are needed to help cover the costs of maintaining the Bracken property and of other critical conservation issues, including White-nose Syndrome.

BCI Members and guests are entitled to free or discounted tickets to view an emergence. BCI Members may make reservations by calling (512) 327-9721 during business hours. Nonmembers can receive your free or discounted admission by [joining](#) BCI's efforts to protect bats and their habitats. Those who do not wish to become a BCI Member may purchase tickets at brackenbatflight.com

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