

## **Saving dawn bats from nets**

Bat researchers in Thailand recently came upon a gut-wrenching sight: well over 1,000 lifeless bats dangled from great nets placed in and around several fruit orchards. The bats, mostly nectar-eating dawn bats (*Eonycteris spelaea*), had become hopelessly entangled in the nets and simply left to die of thirst and starvation.



*A dawn bat snagged in a net.  
Courtesy of Pushpa Acharya*

Paul Racey of the United Kingdom, Co-chair of the IUCN Bat Specialist Group and a BCI Science Advisor, learned of this needless, gruesome slaughter and alerted BCI. We asked Harrison Institute Director Paul Bates, who has long studied Asian bats, to investigate.

The local researchers confirmed that within an area of less than four square miles (10 square kilometers), such nets were strung around three orchards to keep bats and other wildlife from the growing fruit. About 300 dead bats were found at the smallest of the orchards, and as many as 1,000 at the largest. The extent of this practice in Thailand is unknown, but conservationists fear it could spread rapidly “with dire consequences for these beneficial bats that pollinate a number of valuable plants.

Biologist Sara Bumrungsri of Thailand's Prince of Songkla University has developed a preliminary plan to meet this threat quickly through a combination of research to document alternative orchard-protection measures and education on cost-effective and less brutal techniques.

Bumrungsri's team will conduct cost-benefit analyses for deterrents such as fermented fish, lighting, nets that do not ensnare bats and other suggestions for keeping bats away from commercial fruit trees. Crews also plan to monitor fruit bats in the canopy of fruit trees with night-vision video cameras.

During the study, the team will work to educate fruit farmers about the ecological and economic importance of bats to their local economy. Research results will be disseminated at a community meeting for farmers and through television and newspaper outlets. BCI and other partners plan to include the study into educational materials aimed at protecting bats, explaining their benefits and helping farmers to coexist with bats.

*BCI is currently raising funds to help support this research-and-education effort to protect these bats. You can help save dawn bats in Thailand from a painful, senseless death by supporting this and other urgent bat-conservation efforts at BCI. Please donate at [www.batcon.org/donate](http://www.batcon.org/donate).*

### **All articles in this issue:**

#### ► [A New Direction for Bracken Bat Cave](#)

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#### ► [Saving dawn bats from nets](#)

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#### ► [Bats in the News](#)

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