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## A Webcast Full of Bats

What can drive a famous bat biologist absolutely giddy with excitement? Or leave an experienced environmental educator speechless in awe? Or make a seasoned wildlife videographer drop his jaw “ and his camera? The answer: Their first visit to watch millions of bats emerge from Bracken Bat Cave. All this “ and much more “ took place during the first-ever live webcast from the popular Central Texas cave on September 18.

The 93-minute webcast, part of an ambitious distance-learning program, gave educators around the United States and beyond some fascinating lessons about bats, along with an especially awesome emergence as countless Mexican free-tailed bats swirled up from the cave, located just outside San Antonio, Texas. Bat Conservation International owns and protects the cave, summer home for the world's largest bat colony.



*Sandy Frost of the U.S. Forest Service watches the Bracken Cave bats during a webinar.  
Photo © James Eggers, BCI*

BCI is also a founding partner in the BatsLIVE program, with the U.S. Forest Service (the primary funder) and the Prince William Network (PWN). PWN is part of the Prince William County (Virginia) Public Schools and manages the [BatsLIVE website](#). The webcast was the culmination of more than a year of planning by the founding partners, plus the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

The program, aimed primarily at environmental educators for schools, libraries, zoos, nature centers and museums, featured recorded messages from Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle. On-site presentations were made by Education Director James Eggers, Bracken Cave Coordinator Fran Hutchins, Habitat Protection Coordinator Jim Kennedy and Outreach Associate Dianne Odegard, all of BCI; Ann Froschauer, the Communications Lead for the WNS Interagency Organization, and Chelsea McKinney of the Fish & Wildlife Service; Dennis Krusac of the Forest Service; and Melody Wood of the San Antonio Zoo.

But the real stars, of course, were the bats of Bracken Cave. Webcast host Sandy Frost of the Forest Service summed up the evening by saying: "Thank you, thank you for the best experience of my life."

The Bracken webcast is the third in a continuing series conducted by BatsLIVE: A Distance Learning Adventure. The program's goal is to "raise the awareness, understanding and appreciation of bats and the unique karst and cave ecosystems that many bats rely on."

The next in the series is "Cave and Karst - The World Beneath our Feet" on October 11. BatsLIVE also provides basic information about bats, lesson plans for teachers, resources for land managers, as well as professional and informal educators, and advice on how to get involved in bat conservation and citizen science projects.

The entire Bracken webcast can be [viewed here](#).

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