

Latin America & Caribbean

Wings Across the Americas: BATS

Transcontinental migrations are truly extraordinary. Did you know that many bats migrate great distances each year like birds and butterflies? Along the way, bats keep forests and farms healthy and productive by hunting insect pests on plants. Their migratory routes need protection so bats can travel safely between their winter homes and the places where they give birth and raise their pups.

Bat Conservation International's "Wings Across the Americas" project will promote this protection by increasing public knowledge of migratory bats. We will be showcasing different species (including two endangered species) of bats in North, Central and South America. Our scientists will be completing on-the-ground projects in various countries, sharing their stories, presenting maps of migratory routes, showing what bats do in different countries and providing photos from the world of bats. As our scientists work in the field, our education team will be working on a website where students can follow the bats on their amazing journeys!

Nine of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots and approximately 30 percent of the world's bat species are found in Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Bats play vital roles in maintaining healthy ecosystems throughout the region, and many species provide direct benefits to people and economies. Bats are the primary pollinators of an incredible diversity of flowering plants, including wild bananas, balsa and agaves. They also disperse seeds that are critical to forest restoration throughout the tropics.



Bats are major predators of night-flying insects that damage farm crops, as well as native vegetation and forests.

In the Winter Garden area of Texas, Mexican free-tailed bats eat corn-earworm moths that they are estimated to save farmers millions of dollars from reduced pesticide applications, which reduces the infiltration of pesticides into our ground water. Multiply the ecological value of this single species throughout its range, and you can begin to appreciate the enormous value of bats.

But despite their great value, many bat populations have declined in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, where natural habitats are destroyed at an alarming rate. Major threats include deforestation, loss of major roosts in caves and mines, fragmentation of habitat corridors, and the widespread persecution of bats because of needless



Unfortunately, the threats to these bats are extraordinarily complex. Protecting a single roost has limited value for a species that moves seasonally over large distances and across international boundaries, where local levels of protection are often insufficient. Critical roosting and foraging resources may be limited or lost along these little-known migratory corridors.



Thousands of beneficial bats have been destroyed in caves from the fear of vampire bats and rabies.

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