



The **FREE-TAIL FLYER** BAT CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

A PUBLICATION BY AND FOR THE MEXICAN FREE-TAILED BATS OF CONGRESS AVENUE BRIDGE, AUSTIN, TEXAS

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL MIGRATION!

Well, we made it back home — all 750,000 of us. Mexico's a great place to spend the winter, but there's nothing like Austin in the spring and summer: the music, the lake, the wildflowers, friendly, laid-back folks. And the food — all those fat and sassy insects just waiting for us to fill the skies and feast on tons of bugs every night! No slackers here. No wonder we've become such celebrities that the city erected a statue in our honor, just like it did for Stevie Ray Vaughan, that human who played such a haunting blues guitar.

But life wasn't always so sweet. We Mexican free-tailed bats have lived in Austin for many generations, but by the late 1970s, so many people were moving into Central Texas that we were crowded out of our old homes. Then a miracle occurred. When the humans renovated the Congress Avenue Bridge in 1980, they created little one-inch-wide crevices on the bottom. Those crevices were just about perfect for bat roosts. Who would have guessed? We moved in by the hundreds of thousands.

But we'd hardly gotten settled when disaster threatened. Many humans, it seems, have no idea what we're like. For some silly reason, they were scared to death of us. A newspaper headline summed it up: "Mass fear in the air as bats invade Austin." The story claimed we were attacking humans. (Get real!) People demanded that the city

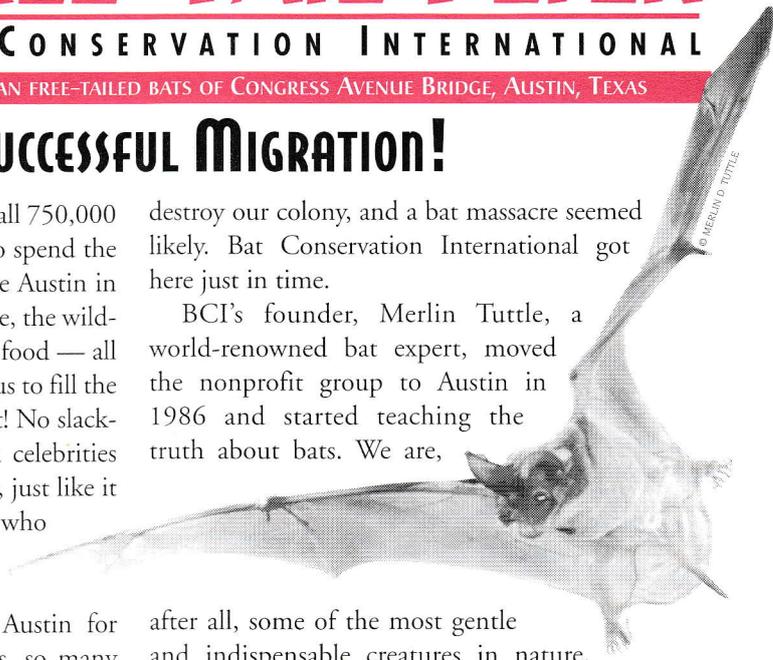
destroy our colony, and a bat massacre seemed likely. Bat Conservation International got here just in time.

BCI's founder, Merlin Tuttle, a world-renowned bat expert, moved the nonprofit group to Austin in 1986 and started teaching the truth about bats. We are,

after all, some of the most gentle and indispensable creatures in nature.

We don't harm humans if we're left alone, and we eat 10,000 to 30,000 pounds of moths and beetles each night, many of them bugs that spoil backyard barbecues or damage farm crops. Besides, we're great fun to watch.

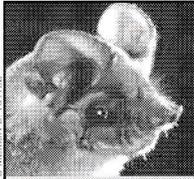
Before long, we bridge bats had gone from eek! to chic. Now we're the largest urban bat colony in North America. And Austin has taken to calling itself not only the Live Music Capital of the World, but also the Bat Capital of America. Why, Texas even declared us the Lone Star State's Official Flying Mammal. (OK, so there wasn't all that much competition; bats are the only mammals that know how to fly.) It's great to be back home!



Proud Partners for the Congress Avenue Bats

BAT CONSERVATION
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DEAR BATTY...

Dear Batty:

Why do people hate bats? We are gentle, clean, and intelligent, but people all over the world try to hurt us. Why doesn't anyone help us?

—*Bewildered*

Dear Bewildered:

People hurt bats because they think bats are going to hurt them. Movies and myths have made people believe that bats are dangerous. But some humans are our friends — the members of Bat Conservation International (BCI), for instance.

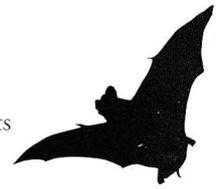
BCI teaches people throughout the world that bats are important and that **bats and people can get along famously**, as we do here in Austin. BCI's founder, Merlin Tuttle, and his staff work hard to protect us and our habitats.

BCI's Bats and Bridges program has convinced state highway departments around the United States to design bridges with built-in roosting crevices, like the comfy crevices engineers unintentionally left for us under our bridge here on Congress Avenue. BCI funds researchers worldwide so humans can learn more about us — because the more people know, the more they like us.

BCI even designs bat houses for us, then studies how we use them so they can make future houses more comfortable. These humans are really helping!

www.batcon.org/congress.html

WHY BATS NEED YOUR HELP



Except for the occasional hawk attack, we bats have it pretty good here in Austin. But in other parts of the world, "humans are still trying to get rid of us," says Colony Security Chief Batricia Highflier.

"Many of us live in large groups in a single roost, so one thoughtless act here or at our winter home in Mexico could jeopardize the entire colony." **We're still sometimes shotgunned, poisoned by pesticides, trapped in caves with the entrances dynamited shut, and even burned out by bonfires** set at the mouths of our roosting caves.

Now Chief Highflier is working with Bat Conservation International to spread the gentle truth about bats. In Mexico, where our colony spends the winter, BCI and Mexican conservationists are conducting a major educational campaign to change negative attitudes about bats.

LIFESTYLE: BRIDGE BABES

The most important event of the summer will soon be upon us: Just about every one of us is going to have a baby!

Yes, some **750,000 *Tadarida brasiliensis* bat pups are expected in June**, an event that will double the size of our colony to about 1.5 million bats! Each one of these little bundles of joy weighs an average of one-tenth of an ounce — less than a pecan.

You new mothers needn't worry about leaving your babies behind when you go out to eat. Take it from us old bats: The pups will crowd together (with up to 500 of them packed into a square foot of nursery space) and keep each other warm while you're gone. When you return, you'll have no trouble finding your pup among all the thousands of others because of its distinctive scent and call. It's just a natural bat instinct.

June will be a busy time in the nursery. Let's enjoy our pups while we can, because in just five short weeks those pink, hairless infants will learn to fly and start hunting insects on their own.

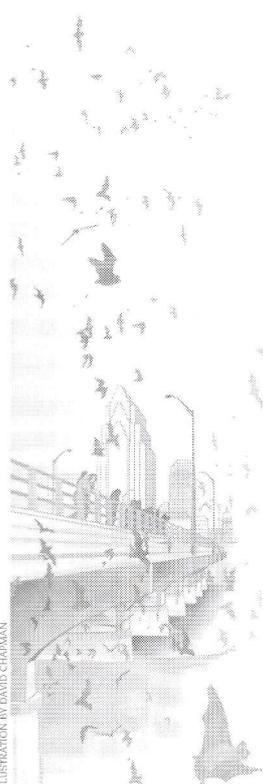


ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID CHAWANAN

LET'S BE CAREFUL OUT THERE

When hundreds of thousands of us come flapping out from under the bridge every evening, accidents can happen, especially when all our youngsters start testing their wings in July or August, so keep your sonar turned on.

When all of us are sending out those echolocation beeps, it makes for quite a din — although they're too high-pitched for humans to hear. But for all that, we're able to identify the echoes bouncing off of obstacles, other bats, and tasty insects and figure out what's in front us and where it's heading — even when it's too dark to see. And how else are we going to catch all those fast-flying insects? Don't forget that nursing mothers, which nearly all of us will be for several weeks this summer, have to eat almost our weight in insects every night to make enough milk for our hungry pups.

There's a reason that humans have called us the jet fighters of the bat world. We Mexican free-tails can fly to altitudes of 10,000 feet and hit 60 miles an hour or more with a good tail wind. So take care in the skies.

BATS STILL DINING OUT

Austin's famous for its food, and four-star feasts are the rule here. Tasty moths and beetles are plentiful this year, along with a gourmet selection of chinch bugs, stinkbugs, and leafhoppers. And don't overlook that free-tail favorite, the corn earworm moth (a.k.a. the cotton bollworm moth) over Central Texas farmlands. Farmers use pesticides to kill these moths, so maybe when they see how many we're eating, they won't need to use as many chemicals. Nothing ruins a good meal like that pesticide aftertaste!

See the World's Largest Bat Colony

If you're a BCI member, you and your family can visit the world's largest community of mammals, a gigantic bat colony right here in Central Texas! Join today and ask about opportunities to see some 20 million bats spiraling out of Bracken Cave in a spectacular emergence that lasts for hours. That's almost 13 times as many bats as live under the Congress Avenue Bridge.

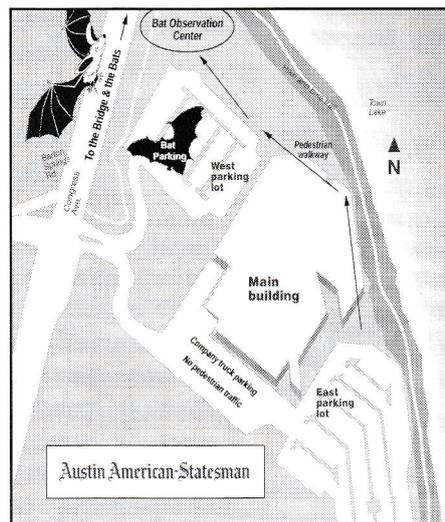
Check out our Bracken Cave Web site:
www.batcon.org/bracken.html

CAUTION

PLEASE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO HANDLE THE BATS

Bats are wild animals, and like all wild animals, they may bite if handled. However, bats pose little threat to people if left alone. Fewer than one-half of one percent of bats contract rabies (and even these typically bite only in self-defense, if touched). Any bat you can catch is more likely than others to be sick.

Leave it alone.



WHERE TO PARK

The *Austin American-Statesman* offers free parking for bat watchers **after 6 p.m.** in its west parking lot. To ensure the safety of visitors, the *Statesman* asks all pedestrians to follow designated routes to the Bat Observation Center and to stay clear of industrial areas.

THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

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Thanks to our generous Founders Circle sponsors for their continuous support of public programs and bat conservation. Other sponsors are recognized on BCI's Web page and other venues.

www.batcon.org

*The bats need your help!
Please call Carrie Robertson at
BCI for sponsorship opportunities:
(512) 327-9721
batbridge@batcon.org*

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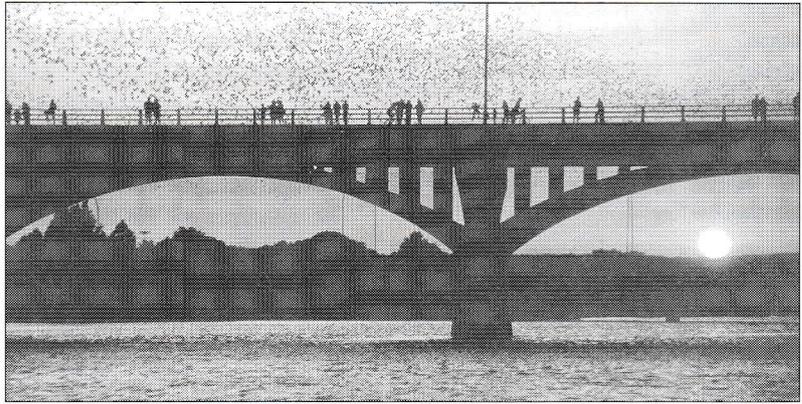
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unless noted otherwise.

To check the estimated emergence time

call the Bat Hotline at (512) 416-5700, category 3636. Please keep the bridge area clean by using trash receptacles. And please recycle this newsletter or pass it on to a friend.



FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT BATS

- Bats are not blind, do not get entangled in human hair, and rarely transmit disease to humans or other animals.
- By pollinating flowers and dispersing seeds, tropical bats are vital to the regeneration of rain forests.
- There are about 1,100 kinds of bats — almost a quarter of all mammal species. More than half of the 46 bat species in America are endangered or under consideration for endangered status.
- Only three of those 1,100 species are vampire bats, and all of them are found only in Latin America.
- Texas has 32 bat species, more than any other state.

To learn all about bats and how to keep them flying, visit Bat Conservation International online:

www.batcon.org

Bat Conservation International
P.O. Box 162603
Austin, Texas 78716
(512)327-9721
www.batcon.org



LET US EAT YOUR BUGS

If backyard bugs ruin your summer,
call us!

Austin Aerial Pest Control uses an all-natural approach to controlling insects — we eat them! That's right, our bat crew will feast on the bugs in your yard. And we'll do it for free! All we ask is that you give us a place to live. Just put up a bat house and be patient while we try to find it.

Unfortunately, many commercially available bat houses don't meet the needs of bats or lack adequate instructions. **Install a BCI-certified bat house** for your neighborhood bats.



SHOP OUR CATALOG ONLINE AT:

[www.batcon.org/catalog/
bathouses.htm](http://www.batcon.org/catalog/bathouses.htm)