

Urban Bat Conservation in Latin America



More than 360 species of bats live in Latin America. And because Latin America has the most biological diversity found anywhere on Earth, including half of the world's tropical forests, bats play an important role in keeping many of the ecosystems in balance. In fact, at least 800 Neotropical plants depend on bats for survival.

In Latin America, bats provide three main ecological services: eating insects, pollinating flowers, and spreading seeds. This keeps plants healthy and able to keep growing.

SAVING LATIN AMERICAN BATS

Two major conservation groups are working to protect bats in Latin America.

RELCOM, www.relcomlatinoamerica.net, is a network of bat conservation organizations in 22 countries.

RELCOM focuses on at least 24 bat species including six considered threatened and 18 that are critical to the area. The network focuses on these four areas:

- Preventing and reducing the loss of native habitat from human activities by ensuring that authorities implement and enforce the laws.
- Conducting environmental impact studies.
- Advising on the design of communication campaigns and education strategies.
- Researching artificial shelters to install in areas lacking sufficient shelter.

Tirimбина, www.tirimбина.org, is an educational, scientific and ecotourism destination in Costa Rica. The organization also supports research on tent-roosting bats that are affected by human-modified areas and it provides natural habitat patches between natural and degraded sites for seed dispersing bats to make it easier to find food.

THREATS

Despite being important to local environmental health, bats face a number of threats in Latin America:

Negative myths about bats are common, particularly about Vampire bats, causing unnecessary persecution. In urban areas, high rates of pollution and pesticide use hurt bats. Yet perhaps the greatest threat is the destruction of forests, which means fewer places for bats to live and less food to eat.



For more information about bats, visit www.batconservation.org
and www.fs.fed.us/global



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BAT CONSERVATION
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