

Engaging Local Communities to Protect Bats through Conservation Education Activities in a Transboundary Biodiversity Corridor

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A key step in any bat conservation strategy includes engaging local communities to protect species in the region. Bats are potentially effective ambassadors for elementary school enrichment activities. The problem lies with availability of materials, which are spread across many sources, challenging educators to find what is available. We addressed this problem by collating available materials, making them accessible on the web, while also finding better ways to engage students. We evaluated: (1) how effectively existing bat conservation materials address essential knowledge and skills needed by educators, and (2) which interactive activities (venues) are more readily obtainable: videos, hands-on, or role-drama. A network of people with knowledge of bat educational materials were contacted, starting with key actors in Bat Conservation International, and snowballing to others who were recommended. Educational materials were collated (n = 24), sorted within venue categories, and scored for essential skills and knowledge. All materials were assembled in an electronic binder, and posted online for easy access through the Biodiversity Stewardship Lab website. The materials gathered consisted of 55% videos, 38% hands-on, and 5% role-drama/stories. The subject matter included: 27% Arts, 25% Science, 16% Language Arts, 22% Social Sciences, 5% Mathematics, and 5% Performance. Since most activities were passive video or individual hands-on, we recommend more interactive role-drama adaptations of stories. Although existing materials address a variety of essential skills and knowledge used by educators, the effectiveness of role drama in engaging students of high priority bat conservation regions needs to be further investigated.