



Bat World Sanctuary Position Statement on using Live Bats for Education

It is the position of Bat World Sanctuary (BWS) that educating the public about the importance of bats can be accomplished without the use of live bats. Videos, photos, attractive taxidermies (created from bats that have died of natural causes), and web cams are of great use in educating the public.

If live bats are used for educational programs, these presentations must insure the safety of the bats as well as the public; they must convey that bats are wild animals that belong in the wild; and, above all, programs must not cause stress to the bat in any way whatsoever. Educational programs should also create respect and empathy for the individual bat being shown while inspiring conservation of the entire species.

The following must also be considered when engaging live bats for educational programs:

Bats Used for Exhibition

- Respect should be given to the fact that bats are nocturnal. As such, bats should only be involved in programs that take place in the early morning hours and should then be returned to their roosts so they can get adequate undisturbed rest.
- Bats should never be on display for over 15 minutes during a 24 hour period.
- Bats should never be forced to travel from city to city for program after program. Organizations that use bats in this manner likely put financial gain over the welfare of the bats in their care.
- The temperament of the bat being used for programs must be considered. Bats should always appear relaxed and readily accept food treats during a presentation.
- On the contrary, frightened bats should never be used for presentations. Not only is this bad for the welfare of the bat, handlers that force frightened bats into programs will look uncaring to the public.
- Bats should never be treated in any manner consistent with generally recognized treatment or care given to domestic pets. Petting, kissing or similar demonstrations of affection towards bats during public programs is highly inappropriate.
- Bats should never be used for entertainment or required to do tricks for the public.
- Bats must never be permitted to fly or otherwise be loose during public programs.

Transport Carriers and Display Cages

- Use a transport carrier, rather than the display cage, for transporting bats to and from facilities where presentations will take place.
- Carriers should be appropriately modified so that they can be secured in vehicles with a seat belt.
- Carriers should be padded on the inside and covered with a cloth on the outside.
- Neither transport carriers nor display cages containing bats should be handled by anyone other than the presenter.
- Display cages should have surfaces that allow bats to hang upside down. If a Plexiglas animal case is used, three of the four sides and the ceiling should be covered with nylon or plastic (not wire) screen to provide appropriate roosting surfaces. (Bats are unable to grip plastic surfaces and may slip and fall, causing wrist or wing injury.)

- Screened, wooden frame display cages should be “double screened” with nylon or plastic screen with no more than a 1/6" (4mm) mesh for small insectivorous bats. For larger bats such as flying foxes, 1/2" (13mm) plastic mesh should be used for the inner layer only. There should be a 1" (25mm) space between the two layers of screen. This space and the small mesh used for the outer layer will ensure that bats hanging close to the inside screen or mesh wall cannot be secretly touched from the outside by a curious individual.
- Display cages should be designed so that bats can remain somewhat hidden without being totally obscured from view. This may be accomplished with the use of either natural or artificial materials including fabrics, silk foliage, tree bark, or small tree branches that can be used to simulate natural habitat, depending on the species. These materials should be secured against cage walls and kept clean and free of odors, sharp areas, dirt, and parasites.

The Audience

- The public should never be allowed contact with the bats. A bat that has been touched by an unauthorized individual may be subject to euthanasia and rabies testing by local health authorities regardless of the nature of the contact or the period of time the bat has remained in captivity.
- The audience should be informed that the presenter has received the recommended pre-exposure rabies immunizations in order to work with mammalian wildlife.
- Photographs and information about local bat species will be of particular interest to your audience
- All displays should include a message on the importance of not approaching wild animals. Any literature to be distributed that addresses the benefits of bats should also include a warning to never touch bats.
- Presenters should remain next to the display cage while bats are being viewed by the audience. Close up viewing of the bat works best if allowed only at the conclusion of a presentation. Encourage the audience to file by for viewing and to leave about one foot of space between themselves and the bat's enclosure. In addition, they should be told to not lean towards or touch the enclosure. Children should be told to keep their hands in their pockets or behind their backs as they walk by.

Educating Children

North American bats are very small, possibly making them appear harmless to children (or adults) who might pick them up. Every year incidents are reported throughout the United States involving people (particularly children) who have inappropriately interacted with grounded bats. Although the majority of bats are not rabid, a certain percentage of those handled by the public will have contracted the rabies virus. Public hysteria following some incidents involving human/bat interactions has resulted in the destruction of entire bat colonies. For these reasons, the principal purpose of educational programs should be to instill respect for bats while also delivering accurate information in a manner that protects both bats and humans. A stern message regarding handling of bats and other wild animals should be leveled at children. These messages must be especially emphasized if presenters handle bats during presentations. It is also necessary to be redundant when delivering messages to children.

- Children should be told that grownups who handle wild animals must have “special shots”, training and licensing in order to work with wild animals. They should also be told that the bats participating in the presentation are tame and familiar with the handler, whereas bats in the wild are very different and will bite in self-defense if handled.

- When giving the bat a food reward during programs, explain to children that a bat uses its teeth to eat food in the wild, but will also use its teeth for protection against predators, including people who may try to touch it. A strong visible image can be created while the bat feeds by describing how it also uses its sharp teeth for protection.
- Children should be told that if a bat is found within reach, something must be wrong. Remind them to never touch the bat because it might be sick. Let them know that if they do touch the bat, it will probably bite them and that the bat will need to be killed so that it can be tested for rabies. If the bat has rabies, they will have to have a lot of shots that don't feel good and cost a lot of money.
- They should be told that touching the bat will prevent them from helping it. Explain that even if they touch the bat and it flies away, they will still have to get shots.

Finding a bat will probably be both exciting and frustrating for a child who has learned about that animal. Let them know that they can help the adult who comes by telling him or her to use a can, dustpan, or thick gloves (never bare hands) to scoot the bat into a box that can be covered. If no one had contact with the bat, they can tell the adult to call their state wildlife department, local animal control division, humane society, or wildlife rescue organization for further assistance in getting help for the bat. The first course of action should be to look for a bat rehabilitator on the batworld.org website as some organizations routinely euthanize animals if they are not invested with rehabilitators for the wild animals in their area.

- Children should be reminded that even though bats are small, they are wild animals. They should be told that it is against the law to keep them as pets and, in addition, they would not make good pets because they need special cages, food, temperatures, and sometimes the company of an entire colony of bats, or they will not survive. Also, bats sleep while they are awake and vice versa so it does not make for a good relationship.
- Relate a story about a child who found a bat, picked it up, was bitten, and had to receive shots. Then ask the children what they would have done differently if they had found the bat. Encourage and reinforce the proper answers (e.g., don't touch it, tell an adult, etc.).
- Show children how to make a bat rescue box from a shoe box with a soft cloth inside along with a shallow jar lid (such as a baby food jar lid) so they will have it on hand if they ever find a bat.