

## BATS- We may not see them, but we need them!

Posted By anita  
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Here is a post from Jaclyn Lopez, our local representative from the Center For Biological Diversity.

This is an outstanding environmental advocacy group, they quietly get a lot accomplished – and it is nice to have them in Florida.

### A high-flying Halloween icon worth saving

By Jaclyn Lopez

Since the days when the roaring harvest bonfires of October attracted hordes of bugs followed by legions of bats hunting them down in a dazzling aerial circus, the furry flying mammals have served as the unofficial mascots of the Halloween season.

In Florida, home to so many uniquely subtropical species, we're lucky to have over a dozen species of bats. But one species outshines them all — the Florida bonneted bat, which like its distant cousin the vampire bat, has a flare for the dramatic.

With a wingspan pushing two feet, stubby tail, and relatively small body, the bonneted bat is designed for hawk-like hunting. An insect predator that soars across the Everglades and open spaces, it hunts using echolocation, calling into the night and listening for the echoes. If you're lucky enough to be near one you may be able to hear its high-pitched call which, unlike that of most bats, is audible to humans with good hearing.

So-named for the broad, rounded ears that reach like a hood above their eyes, Florida bonneted bats now number fewer than 300, making them one of the rarest animals on the planet.

Fortunately, earlier this month, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it is proposing Endangered Species Act protection for the bonneted bat, a designation that if finalized, will help prevent the bat's extinction.

The Florida bonneted bat was all but presumed extinct until the fall of 1988 when a pregnant female was discovered on the seventh-floor balcony of a Coral Gables office building. Prior to that, the last sighting had been in 1978 when a male with a harem of seven females was discovered in a woodpecker cavity in a tree — a tree that shortly thereafter was removed for the construction of I-75.

The remaining bonneted bats roost along cliff crevices, in tree cavities, on buildings, and in bat houses from the coastal areas of Broward and Miami-Dade counties to as far north as Indian River and Okeechobee counties.

Bonneted bats are hardly alone among U.S. bat populations in their struggle to survive. In just six years, a fungal bat contagion of epidemic proportions called white nose syndrome has spread to 19 states and wiped out nearly 7 million bats.

Thanks to Florida's balmy weather that allows bats to stay active year-round, and due to efforts to contain the disease which can be spread by cavers, bats in Florida are not currently threatened by the disease which can wipe out an entire hibernating bat colony in one season.

Still, like so many declining species here, the Florida bonneted bat faces multiple threats, including widespread exposure to pesticides. Bats are efficient hunters, sometimes consuming two-thirds their body-weight in a single night. But in providing this valuable ecosystem service, the bat is unknowingly consuming its chemical competitor — insecticides.

Yet, with federal protection, there's every reason to believe we can still prevent this extraordinary animal from disappearing forever. Since being passed into law in 1973, the Endangered Species Act has prevented the extinction of 99 percent of the more than 1,400 plants and animals placed under its care. Studies by the Center for Biological Diversity in recent years have highlighted the encouraging recovery trajectories of many of those species, including two famous Florida survivors — the bald eagle and American alligator.

That's great news for the Florida bonneted bat, but it still has a long road to recovery.

It's a journey we can't get started on soon enough.