

High school students travel to the Hagerman Valley to study bats

You may have seen them keeping cool down at Sligar's Thousand Springs Resort during the day, or more likely, prowling the area at night with headlamps and hi-tech bat detecting equipment. In early July a group of 8 high school science students came to town for several days to study bats in Hagerman Fossil Beds and the surrounding area. The team was organized through a collaboration between the National Park Service Upper Columbia Basin Network (UCBN) and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI). While OMSI has a long tradition of providing research opportunities for teenagers, this "tent and van" based research team was the first of its kind, and represents the first formal collaboration between OMSI and the UCBN. The team succeeded in making a significant contribution to the network's inventory and monitoring program in Hagerman Fossil Beds as well as Craters of the Moon National Monument near Arco, ID and John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in eastern Oregon.



Oregon Museum of Science and Industry bat research team students demonstrate the *Anabat* bat call recording equipment to Hagerman Fossil Beds manager Fran Gruchy on top of Malad Gorge in early July, 2004. Photo credit: Tom Rodhouse

Students, some of whom traveled from as far away as Texas and Illinois to participate, were trained in the various methods and background topics required to study bats in the Pacific Northwest. Students quickly became proficient at important research tasks, including the operation of mist nets, bat call recording equipment, and the identification of captured bats. Students enhanced their field activities with library investigation and made presentations on the life histories of each of the 12 bat species encountered during the program, as well as on other North American bats, and on larger issues of conservation biology. Students were also engaged by park service interpretive and resource management staff at each of the monuments and participated in discussions on other topics including geology and paleontology. Traveling from John Day Fossil Beds to Hagerman provided a great opportunity to see the evolution of mammalian fossils (including those of bats!) spanning about 50 million years. This provided a fantastic backdrop to the student's study of current mammalian fauna. Students concluded the program by assembling a [final report](#) that was submitted to each of the monuments, complete with computer-generated tables and maps.

Notable findings from the team's work include documentation of 8 species of bats in the Hagerman Valley, including the hoary bat, pallid bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, and western pipistrelle. The team couldn't find the elusive spotted bat along the rim of Malad Gorge, but they remain convinced that the rare black and white bat, found in desert areas with large cliffs and water, is sure to occur in the area. The students urge Hagerman Valley residents to watch for bats and to report any unusual looking bats or large concentrations of bats to the monument. They are also quick to point out that bats are important members of the ecosystem, consume lots of insects, and should be protected from unnecessary harassment. – Tom Rodhouse, NPS Upper Columbia Basin Network, Moscow, Idaho