

Going bats in The Catlins: involving citizen scientists to monitor the distribution of Long-tailed Bats

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The Catlins Bat Project was set up in 2013. Initially the project involved establishing past and present distribution of bats in The Catlins. More advocacy for bat conservation in the region began in 2014, leading to volunteers from the community being recruited and trained to carry out annual transect surveys for the presence of Long-tailed Bats (*Chalinolobus tuberculatus*) along routes in five valleys in The Catlins. These routes have now been surveyed for two consecutive years, with the intention to continue annually. The data can provide a baseline and a guide to changes, positive or negative, in the use of the area by Long-tailed Bats. Volunteer involvement provides excellent opportunities for education about bats and bat conservation as well as developing pride and ownership for local conservation activities: volunteers effectively become citizen scientists. The methodology, based on the line-transect guidelines outlined by Colin O'Donnell & Jane Sedgeley (2001), is described and some results provided. The effectiveness of the Catlins Bat Project suggests that citizen-science surveying could be rolled out nationally to provide a sustainable, long term means of monitoring Long-tailed Bat populations across the country.