

Battling Extinction: can emphasising different features of native bats invoke support for their conservation?

Sarah Cull-Luketina¹

¹N/a

New Zealand native bats, the short-tailed and long-tailed bat are threatened with extinction in the next 40 years. This study was undertaken to find out which facts about native bat biology would prove most effective in garnering public support for their conservation, as a way to aid their long-term survival. Three short films were made in order to test whether emphasising different kinds of information would affect viewers' willingness to donate to and volunteer for bat conservation efforts. One hundred and twenty participants were recruited and each randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The audio narratives in the film conditions stressed bat (1) intelligence and similarities to humans; (2) usefulness to humans, or; (3) a control film (no such audio). The remaining group completed a survey without watching a film. Overall, the film emphasising bats' usefulness was more effective than the other videos in influencing willingness to donate and volunteer. Those participants who identified "cute" as the word they felt best represented bats were most likely to report liking bats. Surprisingly, whether or not people liked bats did not have a strong influence on whether they would donate to bat conservation. By contrast, those who found the films most interesting were more willing to donate to bat conservation efforts than their peers. Females exhibited more negative attitudes towards bats than males across all treatment conditions. The information gleaned from this exploratory pilot study could be of significant use to government groups, other NGOs and individuals who are attempting to raise awareness and funds for the protection of endangered bats.