



Juliana Herrera, Fellow

Photo: Juliana Herrera

# Mentor Program Builds Capacity for Conservation Success

**BCI and USFWS partner on MENTOR-Bat Program**

*By Fiona Tapp*



This spring, BCI and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are partnering to welcome a cohort of participants to the MENTOR-Bat Program, which aims to address significant threats to bat populations and their habitats.

Leveraging the USFWS MENTOR Model, the program brings trans-disciplinary teams of three Fellows and one Mentor from Cameroon, Indonesia, and Colombia. This 18-month commitment, starting in April 2024 and concluding in September 2025, combines experiential learning, direct mentorship, virtual learning, and participation in existing bat conservation networks. The program is unique in its focus on strengthening the capacity for relating bat conservation and One Health initiatives. One Health is an approach focusing on the interconnections between people, plants, animals, and the environment, and it focuses on a collaborative and trans-disciplinary approach for optimal health outcomes.

“The main objective of the MENTOR-Bat program is to strengthen technical and leadership capacity in early-career conservation leaders of Cameroon, Colombia, and Indonesia so they can promote healthy environments where bats and people can coexist sustainably.”

—Luz de Wit

The program targets critical issues such as managing human-bat interactions in caves, reducing threats to bats, outreach and engagement with local communities, and promoting the health of bats and their habitats. By advancing One Health priorities, MENTOR-Bat seeks to develop practical solutions that protect vulnerable bat populations.

“The main objective of the MENTOR-Bat program is to strengthen technical and leadership capacity in early-career conservation leaders of Cameroon, Colombia, and Indonesia so they can promote healthy environments where bats and people can coexist sustainably,” says Luz de Wit, Ph.D., who is BCI’s MENTOR-Bat Program Coordinator. “It creates new links between the nodes that make up the vast network of scientists and conservation leaders focused on protecting bats, their habitats, and the people who interact with and benefit from bats.”



Aicha Djame, Fellow



Ana María Sánchez Zapata, Fellow



Cyrille Mbu'u Mbanwi, Fellow



Daisy Alejandra Gomez Ruiz, Mentor



Ellena Yutsi, Fellow



Fauzan Rizky, Fellow

The program is designed to have a lasting impact on the participants’ careers and the broader field of bat conservation. “We expect the MENTOR-Bat team to become experts on developing evidence-based conservation projects and on communicating strategies and findings to a variety of audiences, from policymakers to the scientific community, and funders to communities who experience high levels of contact with bats and rely on ecosystem services provided by bats,” de Wit says.

### **The next generation of bat conservationists**

The participants were selected through a competitive process. Candidates were selected based on their academic and professional expertise, technical and soft skills, and interest in bat conservation and One Health initiatives.



Gabriela Peña Bello, Fellow



Maria Suharti, Fellow



Monique Ndame, Fellow



Patrick Jules Atagana, Mentor



Sigit Wiantoro, Mentor

The MENTOR-Bat Fellows will benefit from academic and field-based training, which combines online and in-person workshops to gain experience in several topics, including local and global bat conservation, environmental economics, field methods, adaptive management, and science communication and outreach training.

“MENTOR-Bat’s transdisciplinary team of conservationists—with backgrounds in veterinary science, virology, public health, caves and culture, and bat research—will add new capacity to bat conservation to creatively address threats and implement One Health solutions for the well-being of humans, bats, and ecosystems,” says Daphne Carlson (DVM, PhD), who is the Head of the USFWS Division of International Conservation.

The expected outcomes of the MENTOR-Bat Program include an “increased capacity and knowledge to reduce direct threats to bats in ways that benefit bat, human, and environmental health,” says de Wit. These aims will be achieved through academic and field-based training and robust mentoring, which ultimately will help advance global, national, and local bat conservation.



**Learn more** about MENTOR-Bat at [batcon.org/mentor](https://batcon.org/mentor).