



Merlin Tuttle

HIDDEN HERO OF HISTORY

Listen to the story: <https://jonincharacter.com/merlin-tuttle/>

Merlin Tuttle is an accomplished **ecologist**, **conservationist**, **chiropterologist** (K-eye-rop-ter-ologist), writer, and wildlife photographer.

At the age of 17, Merlin Tuttle learned about a bat cave near his home in Tennessee. He convinced his father to take him to the cave and venture in alongside him. He started exploring a specific portion of the cave when he was suddenly surrounded by a swarm of gray bats!

Mr. Tuttle found that the bats were very gentle creatures, and he realized he was standing in their exit, so they were just swarming to try and leave the cave.

He grew curious about the bats and their behaviors, returning to the cave often with his parents, and observing them. One of the first things he noticed was that the bats would be gone for long stretches of time, disappearing during certain seasons. He concluded from his observations that they **MUST migrate**, despite reading books that said otherwise.

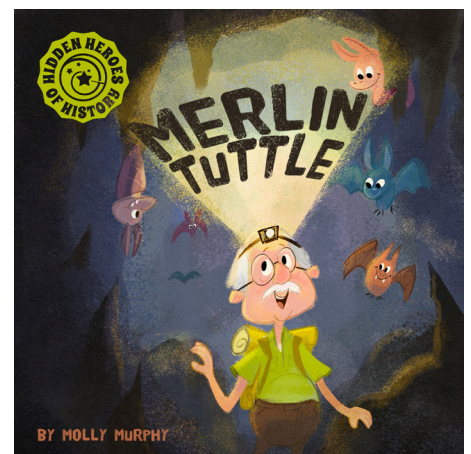
After documenting his findings in his own **field notes**, Mr. Tuttle's mother drove him to meet scientists from the Smithsonian's Division of Mammals in Washington, D.C. where they shared tools to help him observe the bats more closely. This was the beginning of his long career in bat research.

Mr. Tuttle started his study of gray bats when many thought this species, or type, of bat were on the path to becoming **extinct**.

Mr. Tuttle led the charge to protect them, learning about their needs, educating the public about their importance, why they should be valued, and even getting them listed as an endangered species by the government, which gave them additional protections. Because of Mr. Tuttle's work, the population of gray bats has grown by the millions!

Mr. Tuttle went on to create organizations like Bat Conservation International during a time when most people misunderstood the value of bats. He's traveled the world, sharing his stories. He paved the way for hundreds of research projects. He's written books on bats. He mentors students and aids various conservation efforts across the globe.

One of our favorite examples is of Mr. Tuttle saving the bats of the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas. Over one million bats, known as free-tailed bats, began living beneath the bridge, and many health officials and reporters were telling scary, negative stories about the harmless critters.





Mr. Tuttle went out and rallied the community, the news, and even those same health officials to share why the bats were a safe, and an extremely positive, presence for all Austin residents.

The bridge went from being spooky to spectacular, and is now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the state. His work at the bridge also jump-started his organization and many other like-minded organizations around the world.

It's also important to mention Mr. Tuttle's bat photography. Chances are, if you see a really excellent bat photo, it's the work of Mr. Tuttle. They're often used to teach, and have been seen in famous publications like National Geographic.

Merlin Tuttle is still doing his important work advocating for bats, our world's most amazing nocturnal pollinators.

Why are bats so important and why does Mr. Tuttle discovering his lifelong passion really matter?

Here are just a few reasons:

- Bats are **pollinators** which means that, like bees, they go from flower to flower in order to help them reproduce. And bats spread the seeds of different fruit so that more plants can grow and thrive.
- Over 300 species of fruit depend on bats to survive, like various peaches, mangoes, bananas, and guavas.
- Some bats eat insects, helping to keep populations in check and assisting our world's farmers. They help them grow more food without having to use harmful chemicals, since they come to eat the bugs that would normally damage the crops.
- Bats are an incredibly vital part of our ecosystems. And Mr. Tuttle has worked his whole life to share that knowledge with people around the world, making sure that bats survive and thrive.

Animals, like bats, can get a bad reputation that they simply don't deserve. It takes incredible heroes like Merlin Tuttle to show just how much each living thing matters in the world. He's someone who knows that something as small as, say, a little free-tailed bat, has so much to offer and has a very big impact on each of us.

Glossary

Ecologist - Ecology is the study of living things and their environment. So, ecologists examine how living things depend on one another for survival, and how they use natural resources like air, soil, and water to stay alive.

A **conservationist** is a person who does work to protect and preserve our environment and wildlife.

A **chiropterologist** is someone who studies bats. The word literally means "hand wing" because for bats, their wings are actually their hands.

Migration (or to migrate) is when a creature moves from one place to another based on the seasons.

Extinction (or to become extinct) means the total disappearance of a species on this earth.

Pollinator - an animal that causes plants to make fruit or seeds. They do this by moving pollen from one part of the flower of a plant to another part. This pollen then fertilizes the plant. Only fertilized plants can make fruit and/or seeds, and without them, the plants cannot reproduce.

Field Notes - Notes made by a scientist or researcher when they are working out in a natural environment instead of a laboratory. The notes include diagrams and sketches of what they observe.

Explore the Bat World

Go deeper into the world of Bats by:

- Looking at some of Merlin Tuttle's [awe-inspiring bat photography](#)
- Checking out Merlin Tuttle's [bat fun facts](#)
- Watching a 12-minute YouTube video "[The Importance of Bats](#)" hosted by Merlin Tuttle
- Making your backyard "[Bat Friendly](#)"
- Playing some [games and activities](#) from Bat Conservation International

Do Your Own Fieldwork

Merlin Tuttle's important work with nature's nocturnal wonders began with simple observation. Imagine that you are an explorer, seeking to understand and share the stories of all the little things that make up our natural world.

Start your own handy-dandy journal of field notes to keep track of your observations. The next time you walk through your neighborhood or favorite local park, make note of everything you experience using these prompts:

- When you look at the world around you more closely, what plants, animals, and insects do you see that you've never noticed before? What are they doing that surprises you? Why do you think they're doing those things?
- Find a comfy spot to sit and close your eyes for a few minutes. Listen to the sounds around you, then take notes on what you hear.
- Make some sketches of the plants, trees, and small creatures that cross your path.
- Do a little extra research! If you found a plant, insect, or animal that interested you, read more about how it contributes to our world.