

The Lubee Bat Conservancy

FEBRUARY 2013 WINNER - 2,028 VOTES

While many consider this Gator Country, wildlife specialists may also recognize Gainesville as the international center for bat research, conservation and education.

The Lubee Bat Conservancy, a nonprofit facility that houses and studies more than 200 bats at a time, has won the \$1,000 prize for being the February charity of the month.

With 2,028 “likes” on Facebook, Lubee rounded up social media support for its environmental mission. Anthony Mason, 26, has worked with the bats for a year and a half now and nominated the center for the award.

The Lubee Bat Conservancy has set the international standard for bat husbandry, Mason said. It is a member of the international Association of Zoos and Aquariums and helped write its guidelines for proper bat care. Other zoos follow in Lubee’s footsteps.



Anthony Mason

The conservancy houses fruit bats, whose populations are hurting from habitat loss and hunting. The bats’ key roles, pollinating plants and dispersing seeds, are particularly important in areas of deforestation. During long flights, dropping seeds across open areas can help regenerate forests.

The conservancy works to revive these crucial at-risk species by focusing heavily on educational programs — not only for other researchers studying bats, but for young students, the local community, and communities abroad.

Last year, Lubee was able to reach out to 11,500 people in the area, said Brian Pope, the conservancy’s director.

Lubee also works to maintain genetic diversity among captive-bred bat populations, carefully tracking and planning mating. Although it is unlikely the bats will ever be released into the wild, Mason said, it is still important to have viable populations.

Although the conservancy is beginning to study Florida bats as well, the majority of Lubee’s fruit bats are from outside North America, such as the rainforests



PHOTO BY AMANDA WILLIAMSON

Tasha King, head bat keeper, feeds mango Juicy Juice to Kuri, a spectacled flying fox.

of South America or Asia. Lubee gives grants to local researchers and conservationists who then study these bats in the wild.

While the Conservancy is not a zoo, the center does allow pre-scheduled tours, usually on Thursdays. It also hosts the annual Florida Bat Festival the last Saturday of October, which last year attracted around 3,600 visitors.

Mason, the social media manager for

the conservancy, won the \$300 individual prize for his nomination but gave the money to Lubee instead. ■

Learn more at www.facebook.com/LubeeBatConservancy.

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