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Posted by [Guest Blogger](#) in [Voices for Wildlife](#) on December 1, 2016

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[Bats in the Moonlight](#) from [Becky Beamer](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Becky Beamer, Fulbright Scholar Zambia

By Becky Beamer

Kasanka National Park, Zambia — I prepare my camera equipment in the dark. My accommodations inside the park are at Wasa Lodge which runs entirely on solar power. Once the reserves have been depleted,

I depend on a headlamp to light the way. On the upside, there is coffee waiting for me as I make my way to the expedition vehicle, which pulls up at 3:30 in the morning. I'm only half awake, but I feel lucky. I'm the only media person invited to join a bat research expedition in Kasanka National Park, located in a remote area in Northern Zambia. It's a special place that hosts the largest migration of mammals on earth: 8–10 million straw-colored fruit bats (*Eidolon helvum*). Can you imagine what that looks like? Let me help you imagine the size of this migration with a photo:

This massive bat colony ravages the park's fruit trees. Trees that didn't withstand the invasion litter the landscape. And then in December, millions of bats just disappear. The fruit bat's behavior and reasons for their journey is unknown. Where are they coming from? Why do they all come together in Kasanka National Park? It's all a great natural mystery.



Becky Beamer

But I am not up this early to contemplate these questions. I want to observe the bats returning to their roost. I climb straight up into the air, over 15 meters, to a viewing platform in a tree. As I ascend, I'm thankful that I can't see the ground disappearing below me. I must be nearly silent. After setting up my camera, I wait ...



Becky Beamer

First, I see the outline of bats flying just over my head. It's not even daybreak. So, my camera can't capture the moment without using lights and disrupting the bats. Next, I hear a faint rustling around the trees. The bats are coming...

Within minutes, a fluttering sound transforms into a waterfall of wings that surround the platform. I spin in a circle looking at more bats than I can count or even imagine, coming from all directions. As the colony congeals into a one large mass at the forest canopy – the bats' squawking conversation is deafening. I frantically attempt to capture the moment on video. Finally, around 5:45am, I stop for a moment to catch my breath. Most of the returning bats have passed the platform and are settling into their daytime routine under the protection of the "bat forest".



Becky Beamer



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The experience is magical and a moment that is truly Zambian.

Thanks for joining me on my adventure. Coming up in my next post, I will break down the steps of “How to Catch a Bat”.



Becky Beamer is currently residing in Lusaka, Zambia as a journalism Fulbright Scholar. Her motto is : “Every adventure supplies new inspiration for artistic expression, content and process. With so many stories to tell, there’s no reason to stay in one place.”

See more of Becky Beamer’s work on her [website](#).

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