

## Project Update: August 2017

Thanks to the RSG for the second booster grant that aims to monitor the bats of Mt Hoyo Forest Reserve and also assist the reserve to build sustainable conservation programs by having its own management plan.

After many missed opportunities to reach the site (security is the main concern for the newly erected Ituri Province that is one of the hot provinces in the country where rebel groups are very active), we could travel again and work safely in the site.



The second trip took place from 8<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 2017. It aimed to get to the east of the Reserve in the savannah part to make sure we cover the reserve entirely. Before heading to this part that is one of the most difficult and where many rebel groups occur, we needed to have meetings with local chiefs and other stakeholders and be accompanied by peoples they appoint so that we do not get in trouble during the work.

Figure 1. Bats caught in harp trap.

This time, we could not work with the students because they were doing exams, but Sam Okameli who worked with us during the previous work has been given a position at the university and was available to assist us during this work. Since he is from the area, he and the Environment Officer were very important in dealing with local chiefs.

### Activities

Sample bats using mist nets and the harp trap in order to assess the bat diversity in this savannah part. This list will supplement the existing lists from previous records and monitoring.

### Methods

To collect the bats, mist nets were set with a harp trap. Nets were set far from cave entrances while the harp trap was set at the cave entrance. The mist nets were opened at 18.00 and closed at 22.00. The opening at dawn (04.30 to 05.30) depended on the number of individuals captured at night. Some nets were set near the villages since it was during fruiting time to catch species foraging on the mango fruit trees or building dwellers.

Bats were identified using Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa (Stuart and Stuart, 2007) and Monadjem et al. (2010).

## Results

Six hundred and fifty five individuals were captured during our trapping session, of which 615 were released after identification. But according a count at cave entry after sun set, the number of bats getting off the cave is larger, could be more than 10,000 (three peoples were posted to do it).

Of the animals captured, the most numerous species was *Rousetus aegyptiacus*, represented by more than half of the individuals captured, followed by *Hyposideros gigas*. The species *Chaerophon pumilius* was captured near buildings. Reports from local villagers (a nurse at the Health Centre), they roost in the roof of the buildings and the site we were trapping was in the direction they fly when leaving the building.

Table 1. List of bat species recorded

No	Scientific name	observation
1	<i>Rousetus aegyptiacus</i>	Egyptian rousette
2	<i>Lissonycteris lanosus</i>	Angolan soft furred fruit bat
3	<i>Hypsignatus monstrosus</i>	Hammer-headed fruit bat
4	<i>Epomops franqueti</i>	Franquet's epauletted fruit bat
5	<i>Hipposideros ruber</i>	Noack's leaf-nosed bat
6	<i>Hipposideros cafer</i>	Sundevall's leaf-nosed bat
7	<i>Hipposideros gigas</i>	Giant leaf-nosed bat
8	<i>Rhinolophus ruwenzori</i>	Ruppel's horseshoe bat
9	<i>Rhinolophus alcyone</i>	Halcyon horseshoe bat
10	<i>Miniopterus inflatus</i>	Greater long-fingered bat
11	<i>Chaerophon pumilius</i>	Little free-tailed bat

The species were more abundant. This seems to be linked to the addition of the harp trap set at the cave entry while the traditional nets could not capture more individuals due to the strategy they used when exiting from the caves.

The hammer-headed fruit bat was not captured but we could hear its call at night feeding on mangoes. Since it is a canopy species, it is impossible to capture it using the type of net we used.

## Threats

We investigated the eastern part of the reserve where we have never been and where the rangers have less access for many reasons:

- No fund for patrolling.
- Low number of rangers at the site to cover a larger reserve.
- Security concerns. This part is where many armed groups are located and they have bad relationship with the reserve and most of the actions are sabotage-like to discourage the rangers to keep doing their work.

In this part, there is much poaching happening. We met many peoples in the reserve for poaching. Peoples hunt bats from caves for food. This seems the serious problem as the bats are a delicacy for the peoples surrounding the reserve. This is confirmed by the presence of bats in local markets. In a recent message transmitting the report of our work to ICCN, we reminded the prerogative of the institution and their

obligation to work with the provincial government to establish the basis for a sustainable management of the reserve and also look for funds for the rangers in order to cover it entirely for their activities.

The reserve is left over by the ICCN authorities in that there is no partner accompanying them in this hard time. While most of the ICCN sites have many partners, Mt Hoyo, with its rich biodiversity, has none. Opportunities such as our project is among the rare they have to assist have patrol ration and also provide a bonus to those that participated in the field work. Many rangers are not paid by the state. Which makes their work difficult. The Provincial Minister has sent letters to the Director General of ICCN on many matters, but he has not replied; we hope he will take time to work this out and reply to ease the process of implicating local peoples in the management and also for making the Management Plan for the reserve.



Left: The research team at the cave entry. Right: Bats in the harp trap before identification and being released.



Left: The team (Jacques Mwanga - right) loading the car for the trip (from Bunia). Right: A horse shoe bat after identification.



Left: Empty cave where bats have left after a flood. Right: A bat being released (fixing it on a branch).



Left: A bat on the branch (after released) before flying. Right: The assistant (Sam) removing bats from the net.