BATS: An Info Sheet

(Local names in Ghana: agutor, ampan, dankwasere)

Bats are flying mammals that are essential to the health of our natural world. There are more than 1,200 species of bats worldwide belonging to two major groups, the Megachiroptera (fruit and nectar eating) and the Microchiroptera (insect-eating). There are 13 species of Megachiroptera, and over 50 Microchiroptera in Ghana.

A fruit-eating bat

An insect-eating bat

Benefits of Bats

Bats work hard on tasks that are vital to healthy ecosystems and human economies. They work as pest controllers, pollinators, and seed dispersers.

Bats as pest controllers

Some bats feed on night-flying insects, including agricultural pests, and mosquitoes. These bats use echolocation to detect their prey. A single little brown bat can eat up to 1,000 mosquito-sized insects in a single hour.

Bats as pollinators

Most flowering plants cannot produce seeds and fruit without pollination – the process of moving pollen grains from the male part of the flower (the stamen) to the female part (the pistil). Bats which feed on the fruit or nectar of plants are vital pollinators of countless plants including agricultural plants that support local economies.

A nectar eating bat (note the pointed muzzle)

Bats as seed dispersers

Fruit-eating bats in the tropics disperse seeds that are critical to regenerating rainforests. Night-foraging fruit bats often cover large distances each night, across clearings and typically defecate in flight, scattering a lot of seeds over wide areas.

Seeds in a bat's posterior underside

Other benefits of bats

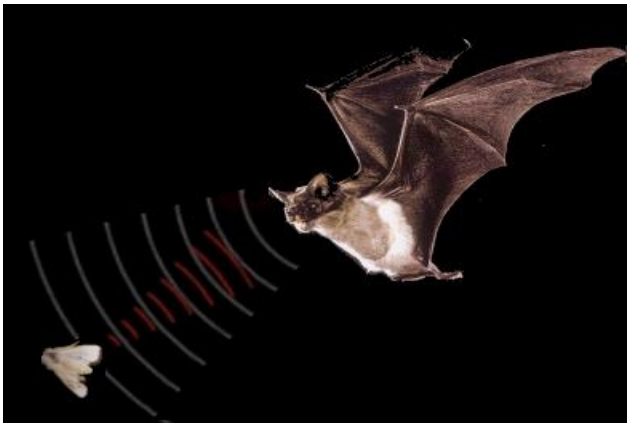
Bat droppings (called guano) are rich natural fertilizers. Scientists are developing technologies from bats' echolocation, and a treatment for stroke sufferers from an enzyme in the saliva of blood-sucking bats. Bats serve as bushmeat for humans.

Some Facts About Bats

- Bats are mammals like humans. They give birth to poorly developed young and nurse them from a pair of breasts.

A baby bat clings to its mother

- Bats live in different kinds of shelters including caves, tree branches and leaves, buildings, animal burrows, flowers, termite nests and even in large tropical spider webs.
- Insect-eating bats communicate and navigate with high- frequency sounds. These bats hunt insects and avoid collisions at night by sending out "echolocation" beeps and analyzing the echoes that come bouncing back.



(Source: www.batcon.org)

- Bats are not blind. Many have excellent vision.
- Bats usually are very loyal to their birthplaces and hibernation sites (site fidelity).
- Bats defecate through their rectums/anuses not by vomiting.

The straw-colored fruit bat (*Eidolon helvum*)

These are fruit bats that can be found in large colonies in trees and on cliffs in cities and villages. In Ghana, large colonies can be found in Accra (near 37 Military Hospital) and in the Kumasi Zoo.

A group of *Eidolon helvum* in their roost

From 1996 to 2008 (just 12 years), the species' conservation status on IUCN Red Data List changed from Lower Risk/Least Concern to Near Threatened. It is close to qualifying as Vulnerable.

The species is the main bushmeat bat species in Ghana. One local name for bats, *dankwasere*, (literally means laughing while lying in a soup) stems from the 'grinning' look of bats in soup.

The population on a popular refuge roost in Ghana, the island of Biobio on the Volta Lake, has disappeared since 2011 because of hunting.

Conservation action focused on the species is required, especially in rural areas. This is because of tree-roost limitations in cities; and the need to maintain many different populations, to support their ecological functions, and to sustain populations that serve as bushmeat sources.

Acknowledgements

This document was developed by Edem Ekpe with funding from the Rufford Small Grants, UK; and support from the Centre for Human and Environmental Security (CHES), Ghana (www.chesghana.org). Some information was culled from Bat Conservation International, BCI (www.batcon.org).