



MAURITIAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

Fruit damage claims do not justify a cull of the Mauritius Fruit Bat

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation views with serious concern the decision announced on Thursday 08 December 2016 to authorise a cull of Mauritius Fruit Bats (*Pteropus niger*) for two weeks, especially that the numbers to be culled have not been specified. In addition, the cull is amidst the highly probable uplisting of the species from 'Vulnerable' to 'Endangered' reflecting the IUCN assessment that culling is a serious threat to the Mauritius Fruit Bat.

The justification for the cull is to protect fruit crops. Culling is not an effective method to achieve this objective. The matter has been extensively studied in Australia and the conclusion was that the only effective way of protecting fruit crops is to use nets. These need to be correctly installed. In addition, this year lychees are abundant and we have already noted cases of trees partially harvested or not harvested at all. Many more fruits may even be left on trees to rot. A cull in these circumstances makes no sense.

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has always recognised that bats cause damage to fruits but considerable fruit loss is caused by birds and rats, diseases and insect pests, as well as natural fruit fall. Improved fruit production volume and quantity can be achieved through other means e.g. better agricultural practices, harvesting of fruits at the correct timing, pruning of trees and above all, efficient netting which also prevents losses from birds.

The cull in 2015 brought local and international condemnation to Mauritius, at all levels, ranging from ordinary citizens to high flying scientists. At the IUCN World Congress in Hawaii in September 2016, Motion 15 entitled 'Protection of wild bats from culling programmes' was voted overwhelmingly by 94% of national and international NGOs, and by 97% of governments. The cull that has just been announced, is contrary to the otherwise good record of Mauritius in conservation, and has isolated Mauritius from the rest of the world in terms of sound conservation practice. We fear that decision could affect other parts of the Mauritian Economy, especially tourism.

The Government of Mauritius has recognized the value of exclusion of bats and birds from fruit trees via the netting scheme and this has encouraged many more fruit growers to install nets to protect their crops. We encourage their services in their programmes to promote other agricultural practices, such as pruning of trees and improved management of fruiting trees (watering, fertilization, control of insect pests and diseases). The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation will continue to work with all partners, including the Government of Mauritius and local fruit growers, to find and refine these solutions.

9th December 2016

