



# MAURITIAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

## Latest findings of a Study on the Mauritian Fruit Bat

Our pilot study confirms the important impact birds have on fruit

During the past decade, the population of the Mauritius Fruit Bat (chauve-souris de Maurice, *Pteropus niger*) has been increasing due to lack of the major cyclones which would naturally control the population. Seeing more bats, some fruit growers in Mauritius have been lobbying the Government to remove bats from the protected species list due to perceived impact on commercial fruit crops (litchi and mango). Although recent observations indicate that the bat population is not growing any further because of habitat and food limitations, bats are being blamed for all the losses incurred to mango and litchi production. Since no scientific data were available on the subject, in 2014 a pilot project was carried out by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation to investigate the actual impact bats and other animals such as birds may have on the fruit crop. Results suggest that the majority of fruit is lost from natural drop and wind and that the other losses of fruit are caused by bats but perhaps more importantly by birds. Bats prefer ripe fruit and as many fruits are not harvested, mostly at the top of tall trees, the bats will feed on these fruit that would otherwise go to waste. Our study shows that the claimed damage bats cause to the fruiting trees is largely exaggerated, especially that distinction between bat, bird and rat damage is usually not analyzed by the tree owner. Tree owners are aware of bird damage but their impact on fruits have been underestimated or ignored. This is why the solution of netting trees to exclude both bats and birds is ideal. Photo shows Red-whiskered Bulbuls (condé, *Pycnonotus jocosus*) predated on mango trees, proving that bats are not the only culprits. Project supported by the Save Our Species Fund <http://www.sospecies.org/> and University of Bristol.

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