



MAURITIAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

Heightened risk of extinction for the Mauritius Fruit Bat as a result of a renewed cull

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation is extremely alarmed at the announcement of a renewal of bat culling in 2018, the third since 2015. The cull of 2018 aims to kill 13,000 bats from an estimated 65,000, i.e. 20% of the population.

The culls of 2015 and 2016, where over 38 000 bats were officially killed (not including probably 1000s more killed by members of the public in orchards, backyards and hunting as well as electrocution on power lines), has weakened the population and rendered the species less resilient to natural calamities. As a result of the 2015 and 2016 killings, the species has been uplisted to endangered in 2018 <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/18743/86475525>. We understand that a cull in 2018 will drive a re-evaluation of the species to Critically Endangered. The cull will above all cause a further loss of resilience of an already weakened population to natural factors such as cyclones.

Mauritius is under great development pressures, and is losing forest both in area and quality due to invasive alien species. The Mauritius Fruit Bat is a natural partner in maintaining flower pollination and fruit and seed dispersal across the island, and should have been provided further protection in order to save threatened Mauritian plants and forests. Instead, the bat is being killed by the tens of thousands. The cull of 2018, as well as 2015 and 2016, are unprecedented in the history of culling of native animals worldwide. There is no evidence worldwide that fruit bat culling reduces fruit loss see <https://bit.ly/2JE9364>.

The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation has conducted studies to show that many other factors affect fruit loss including birds, rats and monkeys. Bats are responsible for 20-25% of damage to lychees, the damage is greater on tall trees (> 6 m), and that correctly installed netting can reduce the damage to near zero. Netting will also remove damage from birds. We have also been a major partner in conducting multi stakeholder workshops on Mauritius. In 2017 we held a training workshop in Human-Wildlife Conflict <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=The%20Mauritian%20Wildlife%20Foundation%20brandon>, and a workshop on netting (<https://bit.ly/2ANsd70>) and in 2018 on scientific research strategy. These workshops were attended by fruit growers, exporters, government extension and conservation officers, animal welfare organisations, academic and experts from Mauritius and abroad (e.g. Australia, Thailand, UK, USA). These recommendations now need to be put into practice.

The cull goes against all commitments to international conventions adhered to by the Government of Mauritius e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity, Sustainable Development Goals, Aichi Targets, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan etc. It also goes against IUCN Resolution 019 of 2016 (<https://bit.ly/2OorVH6>), which has been supported by 94% of national and international NGOs and 97% of Governments. This Resolution 'URGES governments to not authorise or sanction culls of wild bat populations unless there is peer-reviewed evidence of the significant impact of bats on food security or public health, all non-lethal solutions have been exhausted, there is clear scientific evidence and opinion that a cull will resolve the issue and not threaten species survival, and any decision to authorise a cull is underpinned by rigorous scientific evidence regarding the population structure and dynamics of the species and understanding of the impact of the proposed cull.'

We appeal to the Government of Mauritius to put an end to the cull. We appreciate the issue is complex, that fruit bats affect people beyond eating their fruit and we will continue to work with all stakeholders, including farmers and the Government of Mauritius to find sustainable non-lethal solutions based on sound science and agricultural practice.

6th November 2018



Alliance for
Zero Extinction