

General Information

Bats are the only mammals native to the Mascarene Islands. Once there were three fruit bat species, one is now extinct, leaving one species each on Mauritius (*Pteropus niger*) and Rodrigues (*P. rodricensis*). Once widespread over Mauritius, the Mauritius Fruit Bat population has decreased considerably due to habitat loss, cyclones and illegal sport hunting. Although this bat became extinct on Reunion, where it was last recorded in 1790, the island has been recolonized by a handful of individuals over the last decade.

Due to lack of major cyclones for over a decade, the population of Mauritius Fruit Bat population has increased, thus shifting its IUCN status from Endangered to Vulnerable in 2014, which was also based on an assurance that culling would not be considered. The bat survey done by the National Parks and Conservation Service (NPCS) in 2015 was based on a disturbance count which is known to lead to double counting (i.e. bats are disturbed to take off, counted while flying, they move from the counted roost to another one which is later also counted). Mauritian Wildlife Foundation estimated that the population would be around 50,000 individuals.

In November 2015, the government introduced a new act, the Native Terrestrial Biodiversity And National Parks Act (repealing the previous Wildlife and National Park Act 1994). This legalised the culling of Mauritius Fruit Bats on the basis that they were considered as major pest to exotic fruit plantations. The Mauritian Wildlife Foundation along with IUCN's Bat Specialist Group and a host of bat protection organisations, including Bat Conservation International, had been providing scientific and management advice to the Government to convince them that the culling could have catastrophic effects on the bat population in Mauritius and was not an effective method to protect fruit crops. A cull began officially on the 7th of November 2015 and lasted until mid-December 2015. The process was not transparent and the numbers killed is subject to debate. In addition to the cull there were other causes of mortality, such as electrocution, entanglement in nets and illegal hunting.

In October 2016 a bat population estimate has been undertaken by the NPCS in collaboration with the Forestry Service and the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, using more accurate methods of counting: Evening Dispersal Counts and Direct counts. The figure arrived at was 62,500 ($\pm 7\%$) Mauritius Fruit Bats.

Regretfully a cull was announced on 8th December 2016 for a period of two weeks. The process was not transparent but appeared to focus culling in areas where fruit bats were causing the greatest impact on either backyard fruits (e.g. Reduit) or in orchards following requests from owners (a lot of orchards had taken up netting). The government reported that 7,380 bats were officially culled in 2016. These official cull figures from 2015 and 2016 do not take into account illegal hunting and persecution of bats and electrocution on powerlines. Taking into account all mortalities and that the Red List status was moved to Vulnerable based on an assurance that culling would not take place, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has

been re-assessing the Red List status of the Mauritius Fruit Bat to uplist from Vulnerable to Endangered, which will reflect a higher degree of threat of extinction.

In July 2018 the IUCN up-listed the Mauritius Fruit Bat on the Red List to Endangered as a direct result of the culling carried out in 2015 and 2016. Read MWF's statement "The Mauritius Fruit Bat uplisted as endangered by IUCN".

(Read also the IUCN SSC Position Statement on the Culling of the Mauritius Fruit Bat *Pteropus niger* 2018: <https://adobe.ly/2Y98HhK>)

On the 26th October 2018 the Government of Mauritius announced there would be cull of the Mauritius Fruit Bat with immediate effect. The population is estimated at 65,000 and a 20% cull is authorised which makes 13,000 bats.

(For more information please click here: <https://adobe.ly/2JEWgSL>)