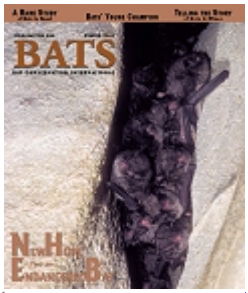

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Discovering the bats of Uganda

Bat conservation is taking hold in East Africa, and part of the reason is Robert M. Kityo, who, with the support of a Bat Conservation International student scholarship, recently earned a Ph.D. in biology from Mekerere University in Uganda. The scholarship supported Kityo's bat-diversity research in three Ugandan forest reserves and a national park, and it is leading to a host of important conservation spinoffs.

Kityo and colleagues in Kenya and Tanzania are producing a first-ever bat atlas for East Africa based on a growing database of bat-species distribution throughout the region. The atlas, which should prove a valuable tool for future monitoring and conservation planning, will be introduced at a biodiversity workshop next summer.

Kityo's fieldwork also produced the region's first reference collection of bat echolocation calls. He documented the calls of at least 15 species, correlated them with basic habitat preferences and is making the collection available as a tool for species identification.

Three university students who worked in the field with Kityo wound up focusing their undergraduate dissertations on bat ecology, raising the possibility that some might become bat biologists in the future.
Kityo's research examined the di-versity and habitat needs of Ugan--dan bats. Indi-viduals of 32 species were captured, identified and released, in-cluding three spe---cies that had not previously been re-ported in Uganda.
Kityo found that dense, cluttered for-ests at-tract many in-sect--eating bats, but support much smaller populations of fruit-eating bats, whose larger wingspans can be troublesome in the cluttered forests. His observations suggest that reducing clutter by selectively harvesting some trees while leaving others intact should increase the diversity of bat communities in the forest.

The researcher also confirmed that big, old-growth trees, with circumferences of at least 10 feet (3 meters), are critical for many species that roost in hollows. Conservation of such trees, which are no longer useful as commercial timber, is absolutely crucial to the survival of these bats.

You can help Bat Conservation International support student research around the world by donating to BCIâ€™s Student Scholarship Fund. Please contact the Development Department at (512) 327-9721 or development@batcon.org.