

VOLUME 6, NO. 2 Summer 1988

Sorry, no PDF
available

More Trouble for Pacific Islands Flying Foxes

A recent issue of *Pacific Islands Monthly* carried a brief article with potentially far-reaching consequences for flying foxes in Papua New Guinea. Claiming that flying foxes were in "plague proportions" there, Papua New Guinea's Continental Airlines sales agent, Peter Barter, suggested that the bats could be frozen and flown to Guam, where they are considered a great delicacy.

In response to a letter from BCI, Barter wrote that since the article appeared he had received hundreds of offers to supply him with flying foxes for export. He also stated that since Continental Airlines was not in the business of supplying or exporting commodities, he had referred the matter to the Papua New Guinea Department of Agriculture and the Guam Department of Agriculture. Even though Continental Airlines may not be in the business of exporting bats themselves, BCI has since learned that they are the major airline carrier used by those who do export flying foxes in the Pacific.

Last year, nine species of Pacific Island flying foxes were added to Appendix II of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), including one from New Guinea, the Big-eared flying fox (*Pteropus macrotis*). Coming under CITES jurisdiction regulates international trade of endangered species. Last year's inclusion was the first time any flying foxes had been added (BATS, Spring 1988). Unfortunately, inclusion is not a guarantee of protection; enforcement is often a problem since species are difficult to distinguish.

Large flying foxes are in major decline throughout much of their distribution. On Guam, market hunting has already driven one species to extinction, and the other is seriously endangered. Now, new markets are being sought because populations that were being exploited on several other Pacific Islands have been devastated by unregulated commercial exportation. Last year, commercial interests in Guam tried to import flying foxes from the Philippines, claiming that they were an abundant pest there. In contrast, Dr. Larry Heaney, a leading authority on Philippine bats, reported that several flying foxes were extinct or endangered and in need of immediate protection there.

No evidence has been provided in support of the claim that flying foxes occur in plague proportions in New Guinea. They can appear abundant even when they are endangered or on the verge of extinction. The large colonies characteristic of many species can lead to the impression that they are more common than they really are, especially when no effort is made to distinguish between species. In some cases an entire species of flying fox is represented by just one or a few colonies, contributing to their high vulnerability.

Pollination and seed dispersal activities of flying foxes are vital to the regeneration and maintenance of tropical forests, and products from bat-dependent plants often play a significant role in local and national economies (BATS, Spring 1988). Further unregulated commercial exploitation could seriously endanger populations even where they are now abundant, as has been the case wherever this activity has been permitted.

Papua New Guinea has a responsible conservation program and letters of encouragement

can have a strong effect. These should be sent to: The Secretary, Conservator of Fauna, Department of Environment & Conservation, P.O. Box 6601, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.
Letters of protest should be sent to: Bruce Hicks, Vice President of Corporate Communications, Continental Airlines, P.O. Box 4607, Houston, TX 77210.



Flying foxes are considered a delicacy in many parts of the Pacific, but unregulated hunting is leading to their decline nearly everywhere.

PHOTO BY MERLIN D. TUTTLE

All articles in this issue:

- ▶ [On the Cover](#)
- ▶ [Long-nosed Bats Proposed for Endangered Status](#)
- ▶ [Sounds of Silence](#)
- ▶ [The Sacred Flying Fox of India](#)
- ▶ [Endangered Species Recovery Team Reports Gains and Losses](#)
- ▶ [More Trouble for Pacific Islands Flying Foxes](#)
- ▶ [Cave Resources Protection Act Needs Your Help](#)
- ▶ [Bats Falsely Blamed in Rabies Death](#)
- ▶ [Support Urgently Needed for National Park Proposal](#)
- ▶ [North American Bat Research Conference](#)
- ▶ [REVIEW](#)
- ▶ [LETTERS](#)
- ▶ [Haber Gift Leads to Unprecedented Growth](#)
- ▶ [THE ONE STEP](#)
- ▶ [The New Yorker Sparks Interest in Bats](#)