AfriBats – a citizen-science project documenting bat distributions in Africa and surrounding islands

Aims: The bat fauna of Africa and surrounding islands boasts about 300 species, but the distributions of many species are poorly known. Despite the crucial role of bats as pollinators and seed dispersers of plants as well as predators of insects, one-fifth of the bat species in Africa are threatened, and populations are declining due to habitat loss, disturbance and destruction of roost sites, hunting for bushmeat, land use, and pesticides. AfriBats seeks to mobilize both amateur and professional knowledge through the iNaturalist platform at <www.inaturalist.org/projects/afribats>. These data will be used for scientific projects and informed conservation actions, which require robust data on the distributions of bat species.

Features

- Checklist: a list of all species known from the area of interest, with links to individual taxon pages.
- Taxon pages: individual pages summarizing information from various sources such as IUCN Red List status, distribution range (with observations superimposed), Wikipedia article.
- Journal: occasional updates, highlighting observations of particular significance (for instance substantial range extensions, first records for countries), and news on the general development of the project.

Functionality

- Get identifications support and feed-back from the AfriBats community. For instance, your observation initially identified to genus or family level can be refined by the community to species level.
- Identotron – a tool suggesting potential identifications, e.g. all species of a genus occurring in the region around the observation, which is based on IUCN range maps.
- Locate your observation with a mapping tool. You can also enter geographic coordinates if these are known, e.g. from a GPS.

- Add natural history data such as observation, measurements, sex, breeding information.
- Access your own pictures on Flickr, Picasa, and Facebook by linking your accounts, and chose pictures on these sites for your observations on AfriBats.
- Use apps for iPhone and Android smart phones.

Users can specify the copyright licence for their pictures, and if they decide to choose a Creative Commons-license, the pictures will be further shared with the Encyclopedia of Life (EoL). Eventually data will be also shared with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). If users are concerned about copyright infringement, they might want to add a copyright note on the picture before sharing it through iNaturalist.

Join the network now! You can sign up as a new user, or sign in with your Google-, Facebook-, Flickr-, Yahoo- or Twitter-accounts. Then chose “Add observation” under <www.inaturalist.org/projects/afribats>, upload one or several pictures for this observation from your hard drive, or select them from your Flickr-, Facebook- or Picasa-folders, locate the observation on the map (or enter coordinates), provide date of observation, and save the new contribution with your identification. You can provide additional data such as a general description of the observation or more structured data (habitat, count, sex, age, forearm length, body mass).

You can also support the project by telling your friends and colleagues about AfriBats, and by spreading the word on social media and networks.

The project is endorsed by the IUCN Bat Specialist Group and Bat Conservation International.

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