

African Bat Conservation – Coronavirus Statement

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As efforts here in Malawi are being enforced to prevent further spread of the novel human coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and associated Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). African Bat Conservation would like to provide some facts* on COVID-19 and bats.

1. Bats do not spread Corona Virus it is being transmitted from humans to other humans.

2. There is no evidence that bats directly infected humans with SARS-CoV-2.

Currently, we do not know exactly how the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen jumped from animal to human. Research released on January 23rd, 2020 on bioRxiv.org by Chinese researchers at Wuhan Institute of Virology shows that that SARS-CoV-2 pathogen shares 96% of its genome with SARS-like coronaviruses (Zhou et al. 2020). Bats, specifically Rhinolophid (Horseshoe) bats in China, are the natural wildlife reservoirs for SARS-like coronaviruses, even though another “intermediate” species could have been involved with direct transmission to people (Lam et al. 2020). Many animals carry coronaviruses and are potential sources of infection.

3. Killing of bats will not have any effects on the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

There have been numerous reports that communities and governmental authorities in several regions of the world have been culling bats in a misplaced effort to combat the disease. However, **culling of bats and their criticism during this pandemic are wrong.** Exterminating bat roosts won't do anything to reduce the risk and we cannot try to eliminate the risk by exterminating wild animals.

4. Bats provide enormous benefits including pollination, seed dispersal and agricultural insect pest control, worth billions of dollars annually. Killing of bats would adversely affect the conservation status of bat populations and their associated benefits for humans.

5. Bats carrying coronaviruses and undisturbed by people are not a threat to human health.

Studies have shown that a number of bat species, especially in the tropics, are reservoirs for viruses and other pathogens that may cause emerging infectious diseases in people, such as Nipah virus, SARS and Ebola. However, these viruses have emerged largely due to human activities that alter the environment and bring bats, people, and livestock into closer contact. This may happen where people are increasingly encroaching on bat habitat, for example through deforestation or where bats are hunted and eaten.

There are some 1,400 bat species living in the wild around the world. Many have adapted to urban environments, and have been living in backyard gardens, roofs, urban parks and even roosting under bridges, without posing the slightest threat to their human neighbours.

The Chief Executive of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), explained that: "**The most urgent action needed to combat SARS-CoV-2 is to stop its transmission, which is from humans to humans. In the longer term, we need to examine and stop specific human practices and uses of wild animals, and the widespread destruction of natural habitats, in order to prevent another such terrible event in the future.**"

*These facts are based on those prepared by [Bat Conservation International](#), [Bat Conservation Trust](#), the Secretariats of the [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals](#) (CMS), the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats ([EUROBATS](#)), the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds ([AEWA](#)) and the [EcoHealth Alliance](#).

References:

Lam T, Shum M, Zhu H, Tong Y, Ni X, Liao Y. et al. Identification of 2019-nCoV related coronaviruses in Malayan pangolins in southern China. BIORXIV. 2020 doi: 10.1101/2020.02.13.945485.

Zhou P, Yang XL, Wang XG, Hu B, Zhang L, Zhang W, A pneumonia outbreak associated with a new coronavirus of probable bat origin. Nature. 2020.