**Pteropodidae**

**Fruit Bats**

**Epomops dobsonii**

Dobson’s epauletted fruit bat

**Genus: Epomops  Family: Pteropodidae**

**Description**

*Epomops dobsonii* is a large bat with a mass over 100 g in adult males. The pelage is greyish-brown. The wings are dark brown. Adult males are larger than females, and may be distinguished by a broader muzzle with a folded upper lip and the presence of shoulder epaulettes. These epaulettes are pockets containing long (18 mm in length), white fur that can be erected to display prominent white shoulder patches. At rest, these patches disappear as the fur is retracted into the pocket. Adult males also have dark grey-brown throats, while females have greyish throats. The ears have a patch of white fur at their base. The muzzle is dog-like and broader than that of similar-sized *Epomophorus* species.

**Distribution**

*Epomops dobsonii* is widespread in the northern parts of the region, where it has been recorded from central Angola and northern Botswana (Smithers 1971), west through Zambia, southern DRC and northern Malawi. In December 2016, ABC’s Urban Wildlife team caught one of these bats at one of their research sites. We believe this is the first record of one in Malawi since 1982, with only 3 previous records in the country. Certainly a first for Lilongwe!

**Ecology**

**Diet**

There is no information on the diet or foraging behaviour of this species.

**Reproduction**

In Zambia, immature individuals have been collected in September and November (Bergmans 1989).

**Roosting behaviour**

A single specimen was collected amidst a colony of *Epomophorus crypturus* hanging in a riparian tree (Smithers 1971). *Epomops dobsonii* is associated with miombo woodland throughout Angola and Zambia, although the single specimen from Botswana was collected in riverine woodland (Smithers 1971).

**Status**

Least concern
Eidolon helvum
African straw-coloured fruit bat

**Genus:** *Eidolon*  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**

*Eidolon helvum* is a very large fruit bat with a mass of around 170 g, making it the second-largest fruit bat on mainland Africa after *Hypsignathus monstrosus*. The pelage is typically pale yellow-brown to orange-brown with paler underparts. A distinct orange collar is present in most individuals that extends from the sides of the neck to the throat. The wings are dark brown and contrast strikingly with the pale underparts. There are no shoulder epaulettes and the ears do not have a patch of white fur at their base. The muzzle is dog-like and rather short and broad. A short tail is present.

**Distribution**

*Eidolon helvum* occurs widely in the region as a non-breeding migrant. There are numerous individual records from the central plateaus of South Africa and Namibia. The species has also been widely recorded in Zimbabwe, Zambia, southern DRC and Malawi. There are scattered records from western Angola.

**Ecology**

**Diet**

There is no information on the diet or foraging behaviour of this species in southern Africa, but elsewhere it feeds on fruits (both wild and cultivated) and on some flowers. In Malawi, the colonies studied by ABC have been observed feeding on the Masuku fruits from the indigenous *Uapaca* tree (*Uapaca kirkiana*) and a variety of ficus trees.

**Reproduction**

At present, only a single probable breeding colony is known from southern Africa at Marromeu, central Mozambique. However, the collection of females, both full term and carrying neonates from Chiniziwa, central, and Mutare, eastern Zimbabwe, confirm that this species breeds in southern Africa. Several hundred bats are present at the Marromeu colony throughout the year, including sexually active adults and subadults, suggesting that breeding is taking place. Breeding in Uganda occurs in April–June; the bats then migrate away until August and September when they start returning; births are recorded in December–February (Kingdon 1974).

**Roosting behaviour**

Little is known about its roosting behaviour in the region. Three seasonal colonies are present year on year in Malawi and are monitored annually by ABC, located in Lilongwe and Blantyre cities. Two very large colonies have been described from southern Africa: a probable breeding colony at Marromeu, Mozambique, that supports hundreds of bats and a massive colony at Kasanka National Park, Zambia, that sees an influx of 1.5 million non-breeding bats between November and January (Richter & Cumming 2008). Based on four bats from the Kasanka colony radio-tracked using satellite telemetry, largescale feeding and migratory movements were documented. Bats foraged at distances of up to 59 km from their roost (Richter & Cumming 2008). One migrating bat moved 370 km in one night, and one individual travelled a cumulative 2,518 km in 149 days. This Kasanka population depends critically on a functional network of roosting and foraging sites, and intact fruit-producing woodlands, throughout Zambia and the DRC.

**Status**

Least concern
Epomophorus crypturus
Peters’s epauletted fruit bat

**Genus:** *Epomophorus*  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**

*Epomophorus crypturus* is a large bat with a mass of about 100g. The fur is a light sandy-brown and the underparts are slightly paler. Adult males are much larger than the females and may be distinguished by the presence of shoulder epaulettes. These epaulettes are pockets containing long white fur that can be erected to display prominent white shoulder patches. At rest, these patches disappear as the fur is retracted back into the pocket. The ears have a patch of white fur at their base. The muzzle is dog-like.

**Distribution**

This species is widespread and abundant in the eastern parts of central and southern Africa.

**Ecology**

**Diet**

*Epomophorus crypturus* feeds on a wide variety of fruit and flowers, with figs apparently being favoured.

**Reproduction**

Pregnant females have been recorded throughout most of the year, with a peak in the presence of juveniles in September, suggesting that births mainly occur at the start of the wet season. One or rarely two young are born.

**Roosting behaviour**

They roost singly or in small groups in the dense foliage of a large, leafy tree.

**Status**

Least concern
Epomophorus labiatus
Little epauletted fruit bat

**Genus:** *Epomophorus*  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**

*Epomophorus labiatus* is a medium-sized bat with a light sandy-brown pelage. The underparts are slightly paler than the upper parts. Males have shoulder epaulettes which are pockets containing long, white fur that can be erected to display prominent white shoulder patches. At rest, these patches disappear as the fur is retracted back into the pocket. The ears have a white patch of fur at their base. The muzzle is dog-like.

**Distribution**

This species is widespread in Malawi and northeast Zambia. It has also been found in north-western Mozambique along the shores of Lake Malawi.

**Ecology**

**Diet**

No information on diet or foraging is available for southern Africa.

**Reproduction**

It is thought that this species breeds throughout the year.

**Roosting behaviour**

*E. labiatus* has been documented roosting in banana trees.

**Status**

Least concern
**Epomophorus wahlbergi**

Wahlberg epauletted fruit bat

**Genus:** Epomophorus  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**

*Epomophorus wahlbergi* is a large bat with a light sandy-brown pelage and the underparts are slightly paler than the upper parts. Males have shoulder epaulettes which are pockets containing long, white fur that can be erected to display prominent white shoulder patches. At rest, these patches disappear as the fur is retracted back into the pocket. The ears have a white patch of fur at their base. The muzzle is dog-like.

**Distribution**

*E. wahlbergi* is widespread and abundant in the eastern parts of the region, where it has been recorded from the Eastern Cape, through KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland to Mozambique, eastern Zimbabwe, Zambia and western Angola, but it is absent from Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and the western two-thirds of South Africa.

**Ecology**

**Diet**

This species feeds on fruit, nectar, pollen and flowers. Fruits include a variety of cultivated and indigenous tree species, however figs appear to be favoured.

**Reproduction**

Young are born throughout the year, but with peaks in the winter and summer months. Breeding males have particularly long epaulette hairs and will sing from traditional sites to attract females. One or sometimes two young are born at a time, after a gestation period of five to six months.

**Roosting behaviour**

*E. wahlbergi* roosts singly or in small groups in the dense foliage of a large, leafy tree.

**Status**

Least concern
Lissonycteris goliath
Harrison’s soft-furred fruit bat

**Genus:** *Lissonycteris*  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**
*Lissonycteris goliath* is a medium-sized fruit bat endemic to southern Africa with a variable pelage ranging from reddish-brown to grey-brown; the fur on the underparts is paler and shorter.

Adult males are similar in size to females, but have a broad frontal ruff extending from the sides of the neck across the throat and the upper chest. These hairs are long and arise from glands, giving the hairs a sticky feel.

**Distribution**
*Lissonycteris goliath* is endemic to southern Africa, originally believed to only occur in the highlands of eastern Zimbabwe and central Mozambique, until ABC’s discovery of a roost in the Shire highlands of Malawi.

**Habitat**
*L. goliath* is associated with forest edge habitats and has been netted in riparian locations.

**Ecology**

**Diet**
In Zimbabwe, *Lissonycteris goliath* has been observed to feed on Ficus spp.

**Reproduction**
No reproductive information is available.

**Roosting behaviour**
Bedside the roost that ABC discovered in southern Malawi, nothing else is known about its roosting habits in southern Africa, as all the specimens collected to date have been netted. The roost ABC discovered was in the roof of an old colonial building. The closely related *L. angolensis* roosts in hollow trees or at the entrance to caves.

**Status**
Vulnerable
**Rousettus aegyptiacus**

**Egyptian rousette**

**Genus:** *Rousettus*  **Family:** Pteropodidae

**Description**

*Rousettus aegyptiacus* is a large fruit bat with a slate-brown to dark brown upper body and paler underparts with a contrasting buffy or yellowish collar around the throat.

**Distribution**

The subspecies *leachii* is widespread in the eastern parts of the region, occurring from Cape Town in the extreme southwest of South Africa, east and north along the coast to KwaZulu-Natal. There is a gap in its distribution in Swaziland and southern Mozambique, with records re-appearing in northern South Africa, through Zimbabwe, northern Mozambique, southern Zambia, Malawi and the southern DRC. The subspecies *unicolor* occurs in western Angola.

It is suspected that *Rousettus aegyptiacus* may make migrations of hundreds of kilometres.

**Habitat**

This species is closely tied to savannah woodland, where it is closely associated with riparian location. It appears to forage in and around thickets and well-developed undergrowth vegetation, avoiding open areas.

**Ecology**

**Diet**

The species occurs in the moist, well-watered eastern parts of the region, but is absent from the dry west; this is possibly an indication of its reliance on fruiting trees.

The bulk of this species’ diet is thought to be *Ficus* spp. but the bats also regularly raid fruit orchards such as litchi which can damage the crop. Other fruits recorded in its diet include *Syzygium* spp., *Harpephyllum caffrum*, *Ekebergia capensis*, *Prunus africana* and *Diospyros senensis*.

Radio-tracked individuals flew about 24 km from their roosting cave to a feeding site, a journey that took 90 minutes.

**Reproduction**

In southern Africa, parturition generally occurs in the wet summer months. In Limpopo, South Africa (a summer rainfall region), mating and fertilisation take place in June-August and births occur in October–December.

In contrast, births are less seasonally restricted in the Western Cape (a winter rainfall region) and occur in October–February and June. In parts of East Africa, births occur twice per year.

One or, occasionally, two young are born after a 105–107- day gestation period, followed by a 6-week lactation period. The young start flying at 9–10 weeks.

**Roosting behaviour**

*Rousettus aegyptiacus* roosts gregariously in caves. The bats are totally dependent on the presence of caves and their distribution is influenced more by the availability of suitable roosting sites than vegetation associations. Roosting colonies may number over 5,000 individuals, e.g. in the Mission Rocks caves in the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. Numbers may also vary seasonally; at the Mission Rocks caves there may be fewer than 300 individuals in summer. Jacobsen and du Plessis (1976) observed the opposite pattern in caves in the Tzaneen area of Limpopo, South Africa, where numbers reached over 9,000 individuals at the Matlapitsi cave in March-April (late wet season) and declined to just over 3,000 individuals in June-August (winter). This suggests that some movement occurs between these two populations.

**Status**

Least concern
Reference