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Roost Occupancy, Roost Site Selection and Diet of Straw-Coloured Fruit Bats (Pteropodidae: *Eidolon helvum*) in Western Kenya: The Need for Continued Public Education

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Abstract

Population fluctuations, roost site selection and diet of straw-coloured fruit bats, *Eidolon helvum* (Kerr, 1792) were studied for > one year in western Kenya. Total counts of bats at three identified roosts varied from 7,000 to 48,000 individuals. The bats moved between roosts within the same general area, probably reflecting seasonal variation in the availability of preferred foods and/or harassment and direct persecution at some roost sites by the rural community. Our study suggests that tree density and number of branches on trees were important factors in roost site selection for *E. helvum*, and the removal of roost trees has serious ramifications for their conservation in the region. Germination experiments and observations at roost sites indicated that *E. helvum* consumed fruits from 31 plant species of 16 families, potentially assisting in the dispersal of their seeds. Further monitoring is needed to provide a complete picture of the status and migration patterns of *E. helvum* in Kenya. Additionally, because the bats were viewed negatively and persecuted by roost tree clearance and direct eradication attempts, an education and community outreach programme in local schools and communities is proposed for the long-term conservation of viable populations of *E. helvum* in western Kenya.