

PHILADELPHIA ZOO

3400 West Girard Avenue ■ Philadelphia, PA 19104-1196 ■ philadelphiazoo.org



Rodrigues Fruit Bat

Still not out of the woods...



The Rodrigues Fruit Bat, also known as the Rodrigues Flying Fox, is a critically endangered species found on the island of Rodrigues in the southern Indian Ocean. In the past, this island had been devastated by human activity and at least 15 species went extinct by the 1950s. In 1970 there were only about 100 of these bats left! Luckily, due to breeding and education efforts by the Philadelphia Zoo, the population has rebounded and it now at about 20,000 bats.

Although the Rodrigues Fruit Bat has made tremendous progress, climate change has presented new hurdles for them. Island species are particularly susceptible to climate change because they have very few options when presented with an environmental issue. Tropical cyclones can blow the bats away from their roosting sites and out to sea, destroying their habitats and leaving them without food or shelter.

Quick facts:

- Rodrigues fruit bats have excellent vision, just about as good as a house cat's.
- They are very social and many groups will live in the same large tree. Groups include one male and several females together.
- Young Rodrigues fruit bats often wrestle and chase each other, but only the females continue this as adults.
- On Rodrigues they are known as the "Golden Bat".
- This species of bat is listed as **Critically Endangered**.

At the Zoo:

Rare Animal Conservation Center

The Zoo's Rodrigues fruit bats live in a colony of 48 animals— thirty-one males and seventeen females. Because the bats are all very similar in appearance, each adult wears a colored band attached to a part of the wing called the “thumb.” This color-coding allows keepers to tell individuals apart.

About half of the bats in the colony were imported from the Gerald Durrell Endemic Wildlife Sanctuary in Mauritius on October 2, 2013. The remaining bats were all born here at Philadelphia Zoo; the youngest bat was born in January of 2017. All of the bats are off-exhibit right now while the keepers are making improvements to their home.

In 2013, two members of Philadelphia Zoo's conservation team traveled to Rodrigues, the principle island of the Republic of Mauritius, to accompany the bats on their long journey to the United States. They kept a blog to highlight their adventures overseas!



Natural History:

Rodrigues fruit bats are large members of a group of bats known as “megabats”. Most of these bats feed on fruit and nectar, are generally large, and lack the ability to use echolocation, instead relying on well-developed eyes. Rodrigues fruit bats, as known as “flying foxes” because of their canine-

like head, are important pollinators and seed dispersers on the tropical island of Rodrigues.



Longevity

In captivity, the average lifespan of this bat seems to be about 20 years. Their lifespan in the wild is currently unknown.

Behavior

The Rodrigues fruit bats are very social, roosting in large colonies in the tops of emergent trees (the tallest trees in the forest). They leave the roost at twilight to feed, and return to the roost around dawn. During the night, feeding bouts are interspersed with resting that usually takes place near the feeding site. They are not echolocators, but use their eyesight for travel and to search for food. Males will vocalize, nip, or strike with their wings to defend breeding, roosting, and feeding territories from other male bats.



Reproduction

They exhibit a harem-type of mating system. Dominant males maintain their territories around feeding and roosting sites, but females have been

observed mating with both territorial and non-territorial males.

Gestation lasts for approximately 150 days, after which a single pup is born. In the wild, pups are born between August and February, but in the Zoo births are not seasonal. At birth, the newborn weighs 1-1.5 ounces, and has well-developed claws to help it cling to its mother's abdomen. Pups are totally dependent on mothers until they are weaned at 70-100 days, and they remain in a close relationship with their mother for the first year.



Size

1.5-2 feet in wingspan

Weight

10-12 oz.



Diet

In the wild, these bats eat wild figs, guavas, bananas, breadfruits, mangoes, papayas, and other aromatic ripe fruits, and the flowers and leaves of many local and introduced plant species. In the Zoo, they eat fruit nectar fortified with vitamins and minerals, fresh fruits and vegetables.

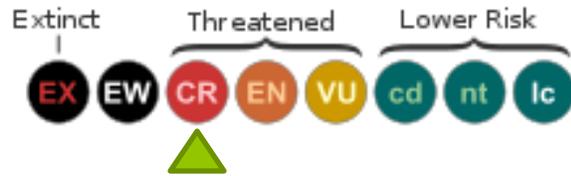
Geographic Range

These bats live solely on Rodrigues Island, in the Indian Ocean about 900 miles east of Madagascar.



Conservation Status

On the 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Rodrigues fruit bat is listed as Critically Endangered.



Conservation at a Glance

In the 1970's, the entire world population of Rodrigues fruit bats (named for the island that makes up their only native habitat) had dropped to less than 100. Today, the species is in rebound, thanks in part to The Rodrigues Environmental Educator Project, which works with school, community, government and business groups to encourage and support Rodrigues' unique plants and animals. The Educator Project was initiated in 1998 by The Philadelphia Zoo, and today is supported by a consortium of U.S. zoos, bat conservation organizations, and private donors.

