

# Straw-colored Fruit Bat

*Eidolon helvum*

Mammal

## Scientific Name

*Eidolon helvum*

## Other Names

None

## Range

Throughout equatorial and sub-Saharan Africa, from Senegal in the west to Ethiopia in the east, and south to South Africa. Also in the extreme southwest of the Arabian Peninsula and on several islands off the African coast, including Zanzibar and Pemba.

## Habitat

Moist and dry tropical forests, evergreen forest, riverine and coastal forests, mangroves, and dry savannas

## Description

A large bat ranging in color from pale yellow to dark brownish-grey, and a bright orange, yellow or brownish collar of longer hairs on the throat, which extends upwards onto the back of the neck.

## Average Size

Length: 5 – 8 in.

Wingspan: 29 – 38 in.

Weight: 250 g.

## Lifespan

In the wild: 15 – 20 years

In captivity: 20 – 22 years

## Diet

In the wild: Fruit, seeds, nectar, flowers, buds and young leaves

In captivity: Fruit and nectar

## Offspring

1 per year

## Gestation

9 months

## Sexual Maturity

18 months of age

## Predators

Owls, crows, buzzards and nocturnal carnivores

## Population Status

Vulnerable



## Behavior

Straw-colored Fruit Bats are found in huge colonies that can range from thousands to millions of individuals, with smaller clusters of up to 100 individuals formed within the larger colony. They are extremely communicative with one another and the constant noise levels in their colonies demonstrates how this bat relies on vocal communication. During daylight hours, the bats congregate in tall trees, caves and rocky outcroppings but remain alert and active. At night, the group alternates between periods of feeding and resting, foraging from sunset to sunrise. These bats display considerable roost-site fidelity, meaning that colonies typically use the same roosting sites repeatedly over time.

A strong but sometimes awkward flier, the Straw-colored Fruit Bat has long, pointed wings which are built for endurance rather than agility. This species of bat is thought to be an opportunistic feeder, sometimes migrating over large distances to exploit increases in regional food supplies. Each year, tens of millions of Straw-colored Fruit Bats descend on Zambia's Kasanka National Park during their roughly 2,000-mile migration, gathering in what is believed to be the largest concentration of mammals in the world. The bats' annual journey, which starts somewhere north of Congo and ends in Zambia, plays a crucial role in Africa's ecosystem. Each bat consumes up to two times its body weight in fruit every night, a feeding frenzy that may account for at least half of the annual seed dispersal throughout the entire continent's rain forests.

## Reproduction and Breeding

Mating in the wild for this species is seasonal, usually occurring from April to June. As in bears and some carnivores, the developing embryo undergoes a process known as delayed implantation, where the embryo implants in the uterus but remains dormant until its development resumes again around October. If weather and food resources are not stable enough for the female to successfully raise the offspring, the development of the embryo ceases. This process also allows mating and births to occur at the optimal time.

After mating, the females form a maternity colony consisting of clusters of pregnant females. The single young is born between February and May and is cared for by the female alone, who will carry the youngster on her body until it can fly on its own.



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### Conservation

The Straw-colored Fruit Bat is common, widespread and adaptable, although deforestation and hunting are beginning to cause significant declines in some areas of their range. For example, in West and Central Africa, the Straw-colored Fruit Bat is the most heavily harvested bat for the bushmeat trade. They are considered to be a pest in some regions as they chew into soft wood to obtain moisture, but their important role as a pollinator of flowering plants far outweighs this concern.

The Straw-colored Fruit Bat occurs in a number of protected areas, including a large roosting colony found in Kasanka National Park in Zambia, but only a small part of the migratory route to and from this park is protected. Bringing hunting to sustainable levels is a priority for this species, while the identification and protection of roosting sites and migratory patterns play a significant role in future conservation efforts.

### Amazing Facts

This is the second largest bat in Africa.

Like other fruit bats, the Straw-colored Fruit Bat does not use echolocation.

The Straw-colored Fruit Bat mashes fruit between its teeth, sucking out the juices and spitting out the rest as dry pellets.

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