
Rousette Fruit Bat (or Egyptian fruit bat)

Rousettus aegyptiacus

Soft and furry, the Rousette fruit bat is about the size of a robin without its tail. It has a long snout that makes it look similar to a dog. The bat is brownish-gray with darker wings. Rousette fruit bats at the Minnesota Zoo form a breeding colony, just like a giant family.

What They Eat

Fruit bats and the plants they visit depend on each other. The plants provide fruit, juice, and nectar that nourish the bats. The bats spread the plants' pollen and seeds, helping them reproduce another generation. A two-way relationship like this is called "symbiosis."

Fruits of many kinds, including figs, apples, and dates are favored foods of the fruit bat, along with nectar and the occasional leaf.

Where They Live

Rousette fruit bats are widespread. They thrive in a variety of habitats, as long as there is fruit and shelter to be found. Rousette fruit bats are found in scattered parts of eastern and western Africa and southwestern Asia. They are not limited to one particular type of habitat, but can be found in many areas where fruiting plants and shelters such as caves or old buildings are readily available.

What They Do

Rousette fruit bats sleep during the day and forage for fruit at night. When they are not flying about, they hang out in tight groups in large colonies in dark and sheltered places. Broad flaps of skin stretched from wrists to hind legs make it possible for these mammals to fly when they flap their arms. Superb hearing and tongues that can make clicking noises allow them to find their way in the dark by listening to how echoes of their own sounds bounce off objects around them. A good sense of smell helps them find fruit. Sleeping during the day, Rousette fruit bats find protection from predators in crevices of ancient ruins, modern buildings, caves, and other dark, hidden places. At night they emerge to fly and forage for fruit, sometimes up to 25 miles from their roost.

Rousette fruit bats tend to breed once or twice a year. Usually, after a 16-17 week gestation, a single infant is born – though occasionally these bats will have twins. Infants weigh less than an ounce. The mother cares for the young until they are old enough to fly and find their own food at about 3 months of age. Rousette fruit bats live 8 to 10 years in the wild and can survive twice that long in captivity.

How They're Doing

Because Rousette fruit bats depend on plants for food, healthy habitat is important to them. Although farmers occasionally kill them to protect crops, Rousette fruit bats are widespread and appear to be plentiful. Adapted to a variety of habitats and spread across two continents, Rousette fruit bats are not considered endangered or threatened. Some people are concerned that farming and political instability could adversely affect some bat populations. Efforts to protect a variety of plant species and native habitats around the world will help this animal thrive.

Interesting Facts:

- Minnesota has seven native species of bats, all of which eat insects instead of fruit.
- Fruit bats are sometimes called "flying foxes" because of their long snouts.
- Rousette fruit bats give birth while hanging upside down.
- If you listen carefully, you may hear the sound of the fruit bats communicating with each other with clicks – perhaps even screams!
- Animals that eat fruit are called "frugivores."

- Most fruiting plants in the world depend on bats such as the rousette fruit bat to spread their pollen so they can reproduce.
- Like people, cats, and cows, bats are mammals. They have fur, give birth to young (instead of laying eggs), and feed their young milk from their bodies.
- The huge African baobab tree depends on fruit bats for pollination.
- A rousette fruit bat colony found in Africa sheltered an estimated 40,000-50,000 individuals.
- Rousette fruit bats use echolocation to find their way around in the dark - they emit clicking sounds and listen to how they bounce back off objects. Although this is common in insect-eating bats, few other fruit bats use echolocation.
- People, cats, raptors, snakes, and weasel-like animals eat fruit bats.