

FACT SHEET:

Palauan Fruit Bat – Olik

Omsodel a Olik el Charm

Fruit bats live all over Palau in places where there is dense forest, like in the Rock Islands, Babeldaob and in Koror. They live in the upper branches of forest trees and eat wild fruits, flowers, and nectar. The Palauan *olik* is a sub-species that is different



from fruit bats in other places such as Yap and Guam. It's called an "endemic" species, which means it doesn't occur anywhere else. They eat the flowers and fruit of 67 different plants. Fruit bats do most things upside down, including eating, sleeping and even having their babies.

Bats and the FOREST

Forests in Palau are very rich in plant species. In fact, along with Yap, Palau has the most species of plants in Micronesia. Fruit bats play a vital role helping Palau's forest grow, stay healthy and maintain its unique diversity. While they feed on flowers growing on trees, bats pollinate them, allowing the tree to form seeds and reproduce itself. After fruitbats have eaten fruit, the seeds go through their stomachs and are dropped in other places, helping to transport plant seeds from one place to another. This helps areas of forest disturbed by fire or typhoons to grow back.

Hunting Bats

During the 1970s and 1980s many Palauan bats were exported to Guam. Fruit bat numbers in Palau were falling and the species may have been in danger of extinction. In 1994 it became illegal to export bats from Palau. This has given Palauan bats a chance to recover their numbers. As long as we hunt fruit bats only in small numbers for our own use, the species will survive into the future.

Hunting fruit bat is not actually illegal under Palauan law, but it is illegal to export them to Guam and other countries that have signed CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Hunting in Palau has made fruit bats vulnerable to extinction, and the latest survey showed that the number of bat colonies is shrinking and the colonies seem to have fewer bats in them.

THE FUTURE

As the Compact Road opens up Babeldaob to development, forests will be under increasing threat of destruction for secondary roads, golf courses, resorts and farming. Disturbed and fragmented forests are more vulnerable to fire and weed invasion. When forests are burnt down or infested with weeds, they offer less food and shelter to fruit bats, which could eventually lead to their extinction. Like most other native Palauan animals, fruit bats need large areas of undisturbed forest to survive.

Bats are just one of the many reasons why it is important to protect the forests.

