**Running Header:** *Malagasy fruit bat morphology*

**Title:** Seasonal morphological shifts track resource availability for endemic Malagasy fruit bats

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***Abstract here (no header)***

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The Old World Fruit Bat family Pteropodidae, known colloquially as the ‘flying foxes,’ makes up one of the most endangered groups of mammals on Earth, with some 35% of species currently extinct or threatened, a proportion almost three times higher than that reported for all other bat families combined (Species IUCN Red List Threat. n.d.). Fruit bats experience disproportionate rates of persecution, likely as a result of their propensity for small island endemism (Jones et al. 2009) and their large sizes, which make them targets for the bushmeat trade (Craig et al. 1994; Brooke 2002; Oleksy et al. 2003; Jenkins and Racey 2008; Kamins et al. 2011; Openshaw et al. 2016; Peel et al. 2017): wingspans can reach up to two meters in the case of *Pteropus vampyrus,* the world’s largest bat (Corbet and Hill 1992). The diverse ecosystem services offered by pteropodids have been reviewed before: these bats play important roles in the pollination and seed dispersal of numerous plant species across the Old World, particularly in island ecosystems often depauperate in other frugivores (McConkey and Drake 2006; Kunz et al. 2011).

Madagascar is one such island ecosystem recognized for its unusually depauperate frugivorous fauna (Dewar and Richard 2007). Primates (lemurs), rather than birds, are considered the primary seed dispersers on the island (Langrand n.d.; Wright et al. 2011), in contrast to otherwise comparable tropical ecosystems in the New World (Terborgh 1983, 1986). In addition to lemurs, Madagascar is home to three endemic species of frugivorous bats from the family Pteropodidae, *Pteropus rufus, Eidolon dupreanum,* and *Rousettus madagascariensis,* all of which have been shown to pollinate flowers and disperse seeds from both native Malagasy and exotic plants (Bollen and Elsacker 2002; Andriafidison et al. 2006; Long and Racey 2007; Picot et al. 2007; Andrianaivoarivelo et al. 2011; Oleksy et al. 2015, 2017). To date, the relative contributions of fruit bats vs. frugivorous lemurs to community assembly have yet to be rigorously quantified in a specific Malagasy ecosystem. Importantly, *E. dupreanum* may be the only extant pollinator of the endangered, endemic Malagasy baobab, *Adansonia suarezensis* (Andriafidison et al. 2006).

Despite their value, Madagascar’s fruit bats are heavily persecuted. All three species are consumed across the island as a source of human food (Oleksy et al. 2003; Jenkins and Racey 2008; Cardiff et al. 2009; Randrianandrianina et al. 2010; Golden et al. 2014; Fernández-Llamazares et al. 2018; Brook et al. 2019a), and *P. rufus,* the largest and most heavily hunted, is sometimes targeted in response to its largely inaccurate characterization as a predator of human fruit crops (Raharimihaja et al. 2016). Respectively, *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis* are currently IUCN Red-listed as ‘Vulnerable,’ ‘Vulnerable,’ and ‘Near-Threatened’ species (Species IUCN Red List Threat. n.d.), though recent population viability analyses suggest that *P. rufus*, in particular, may be experiencing more severe population declines than have been previously reported (Brook et al. 2019a). Globally, anti-bat sentiments have been on the rise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Rocha et al. 2020); though no specific instances of COVID-related persecution have yet been documented for the Malagasy fruit bats, all three species are known to host potentially zoonotic pathogens (Iehlé et al. 2007; Razafindratsimandresy et al. 2009; Reynes et al. 2011a; Wilkinson et al. 2012a; Brook et al. 2015; Razanajatovo et al. 2015; Brook et al. 2019b; Ranaivoson et al. 2019), posing risks that negative public reactions may arise in the future.

All three Malagasy fruit bats are known to reproduce seasonally in largely synchronous birth pulses (MacKinnon et al. 2003; Brook et al. 2019a), and previous work suggests that roost population sizes and survival rates vary across the year for these three species, as well (Brook et al. 2019a; Noroalintseheno Lalarivoniaina et al. 2019). Temporal fluctuations in nutritional status may alter bat immune responses, thus influencing pathogen dynamics (Brook et al. 2019b), as well as modulate bats’ vulnerability to seasonally variable hunting pressures (Brook et al. 2019a). We sought to expand existing knowledge of seasonal variation in the reproductive calendar and nutritional status of all three Malagasy fruit bat species, in order to facilitate future conservation assessments. In particular, we aimed to (a) quantify life history traits needed for population modeling for these three species, (b) document seasonal variation in their morphometrics and body conditions, and (c) calculate juvenile growth rates throughout the post-reproductive period. Our work emphasizes the importance of longitudinal field studies in accurately describing the ecology of frugivorous bats.

**Materials and Methods**

*Study periods and sites—*Field studies were carried out between 2013 and 2020 in part with previously published work examining population viability (Brook et al. 2019a) and the dynamics of potentially zoonotic infections circulating in Malagasy fruit bats (Brook et al. 2015, 2019b; Ranaivoson et al. 2019). Bats were captured periodically throughout each year, with sampling spanning all months and all seasons (dry, wet, shoulder), interspersed with some gaps in temporal continuity. Captures took place in several regions of Madagascar: (1) Ankarana National Park in the northwest (-12.9S, 49.1E), (2) Makira Natural Park in the northeast (-15.1S, 49.6E), (3) Mahabo forest in the center-west (-20.5S, 44.7E), and (4) several sub-localities of the Moramanga District in the center-east, including: the fragmented forests of Ambakoana (-18.5, 48.2), Mangarivotra (-18.3S, 48.2E), Marotsipohy (-18.4S,48.1E), Marovitsika (-18.8S,48.1E), Lakato (-19.2S, 48.4E), and Mahialambo (-18.1S, 48.2E) , the special reserves of Angavokely (-18.9S, 47.8E) and Angavobe (-18.9S), 47.9E, and the new protected area of Maromizaha (-18.9S, 48.5E).

*Netting—*Mist nets were deployed from 6:00 p.m. to midnight and from 3:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. around roosting or feeding sites of *P. rufus*, *E. dupreanum* and *R. madagascariensis* and monitored continuously. Captured bats were placed in individual clean cloth bags while awaiting processing for infectious disease studies, as has been previously described (Brook et al. 2015, 2019b; Ranaivoson et al. 2019). For each sampling session, we conducted between 1 and 10 nights of netting, ending sessions early when 30 individuals of each species present at the site were captured. Upon capture, all bats were weighed (in grams) with a Pesola scale attached to the cloth bag and forearm, tibia, and ear were measured with a caliper or tape measure (in mm). Bats were classed by sex and age (juvenile vs. adult) and, for females, reproductive class (non-reproductive, pregnant, lactating). For females captured roughly within the period of possible gestation for each species, abdominal palpitation was used to determine whether or not females were pregnant. All raw data used in this study are accessible in our open-access GitHub repository at: github.com/brooklabteam/Mada-Bat-Morphology.

This study was carried out ﻿in strict accordance with research permits obtained from the Madagascar Ministry of Forest and the Environment (permit numbers 251/13, 166/14, 075/15, 258/16, 170/18, 019/18, 170/18, 007/19, 14/20) and under guidelines posted by the American Veterinary Medical Association. All field protocols employed were pre-approved by the Princeton University and UC Berkeley Institutes for Animal Care and Use Committees (respectively, IACUC Protocol #1926 and ACUC Protocol # AUP-2017-10-10393), and every effort was made to minimize discomfort to animals.

*Literature review—*To place our Malagasy bats in a broader context, we compiled information from the literature concerning the morphology of other bats in the family Pteropodidae. From the ‘Bat Species of the World’ database (NB and Cirranello 2020), we compiled a list of some 201 previously described pteropodid species, then searched GoogleScholar and Web of Science for any records documenting the mass, forearm, tibia, and ear length of each species. We only collected records that were sex-specific, and where possible, we documented the sample size from which those records were derived, if reported as an average. In cases where no sample size was reported, we assumed that sample size to be one individual. All raw data and references are accessible in our open-access GitHub repository at: github.com/brooklabteam/Mada-Bat-Morphology.

1. *Statistical analysis—*Data analysis was performed using R v.4.0.3 (R Core Team, 2020). All raw data and corresponding code for these analyses can be access in our open-access GitHub repository at: github.com/brooklabteam/Mada-Bat-Morphology. Additional details of statistical output are compiled in various supplementary tables in Appendix 1.

First, we aimed to define the seasonal limits of the reproductive calendar for each of the three Malagasy fruit bat species. To this end, we restricted our analyses to our most complete cross-species time series from roost sites in the District of Moramanga, Madagascar and queried the data subset for the following metrics, unique for each species: (a) the earliest calendar day on which a pregnant female was observed, (b) the earliest calendar day on which a juvenile was observed, and (c) the latest calendar day on which a lactating female was observed. Metrics (a) and (b) corresponded to the date limits of gestation for each species, while metrics (b) and (c) corresponded to the date limits of lactation for each species. Because fruit bats of many species are known to delay embryonic implantation and fetal development for months after fertilization (Mutere 1967; Heideman 1988; Heideman and Powell 1998; Meenakumari and Krishna 2005), we assumed that abdominal palpitation to determine reproductive status in the field would likely miss early-stage pregnancies in the three Malagasy species. To this end, we additionally searched the literature for records of gestation length in closely-related pteropodids to compare against our records of observed gestation in Malagasy species.

We next sought to document morphological variation in adult *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis,* as compared with other bats in family Pteropodidae. To this end, we calculated the sex-specific median and interquartile range of reported measurements of mean tibia and ear length (in mm) for adult pteropodids globally by species, as well as the range of values recorded for individuals within our dataset. We additionally compared sex-specific forearm length and mass at a species-level for pteropodids surveyed in the literature against the range reported in individuals for all three species recorded from our own field data. Assuming variation and error for measures of both forearm length and mass, we fit a type-2 exponential regression model using the standard major axis method (SMA) in the R package lmodel2 (Legendre 2014), to the resulting data to describe the correlation of mass with forearm length, both at a mean species-level for pteropodids globally and within our own dataset, separated by sex (Appendix 1).

Next, we explored seasonal variation in the regression of body mass per forearm across our three Malagasy species by calculating the residual of each individual’s observed mass in the data against that predicted from the exponential regression. This generated the equivalent of a body mass index metric for bats: individuals with positive mass:forearm residuals corresponded to those with higher masses than predicted by body size (broadly indicative of better nutritional conditions), while individuals with negative mass:forearm residuals corresponded to those with lower masses than predicted by body size (broadly indicative of poorer nutritional conditions). To assess seasonal variation in body condition, as represented by the mass:forearm residual, we last fit a generalized additive model (GAM), using the mgcv package in R (Wood 2001), to the seasonal time series of mass:forearm residual, separately across each discrete species-sex subset of the data. We modeled mass:forearm residual as the response variable predicted by day of year as a cyclic cubic (“cc”) spline, with the number of smoothing knots (“k”) fixed at seven, as recommended by the package author (Wood 2001). Cyclic cubic splines can be used to capture annual seasonality, as the seasonal smoother on January 1 is modeled as a continuation of the from December 31.

Finally, we explored juvenile growth rates for forearm, tibia and ear across all three Malagasy fruit bat species. To this end, we calculated the age in days since birth of each juvenile bat in our dataset, setting “day 0” equal to the first date of an observed juvenile in the dataset for each species, as described above. We then fit another GAM to the resulting correlation of forearm length, tibia length and ear length with age in days, across all three species. We modeled the morphological metric (forearm, tibia, or ear length) as the response variable against the smoothing predictor of age in days, using a thinplate smoothing spline (“tp”) with the number of smoothing knots fixed at seven. After fitting each model, we then calculated the age-varying derivative of each fitted curved using the ‘gratia’ package in R, in order to facilitate comparison of growth rates across different species and morphological features.

**Results**

*Field captures—* In total, 2160 fruit bats were captured and processed between August 2013 and March 2020 (**Fig. 1A**). The majority of bats (n=1700) were captured in roost sites located in the District of Moramanga in central-eastern Madagascar (*P. rufus* n=317; *E. dupreanum* n=732; *R. madagascariensis* n=653), followed by Ankarana National Park in the northwest (n=380; *E. dupreanum* n= 172; *R. madagascariensis* n =208), Makira Natural Park in the northeast (n=47; *P. rufus* n=8; *R. madagascariensis* n=32), and Mahabo forest in the center-west (n= 33; *P. rufus* n=19; *R. madagascariensis* n=32).

*Fruit bat reproductive calendars—*Longitudinal data collected in the District of Moramanga allowed us define the seasonal limits of a single annual reproduction event for all three fruit bat species (**Fig. 1B**). We calculated the earliest calendar day on which a pregnant female was observed, respectively, for *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis*, as July 7, August 3, and September 11; the earliest calendar day on which a juvenile was observed as September 29, November 16, and December 12; and the latest calendar day on which a lactating female was observed as January 21, February 2, and February 19 (**Table S1**)*.* These dates allowed us to define the approximate duration of the observed gestation and lactation period for each species (observed gestation: *P. rufus* = ~80 days*, E. dupreanum=* ~105 days*,* and *R. madagascariensis =* ~90 days; observed lactation: *P. rufus* = ~115 days*, E. dupreanum=* ~80 days*,* and *R. madagascariensis =* ~60 days). Because gestation was observed through abdominal palpitation in the field, we presumed that early stage pregnancies for all three species might not be visible. To account for this, we compared our observed gestation period for all three fruit bat species against that which has been previously described for closely-related species: *Pteropus alecto, Pteropus policephalus,* and *Pteropus scapulatus* (sister species to *P. rufus*) demonstrate a ~180 day gestation period on the Australian continent (McIlwee and Martin 2002), while *Eidolon helvum* (sister species to *E. dupreanum*)and *Rousettus aegyptiacus* (sister species to *R. madagascariensis*) both demonstrate gestation periods of ~120 days on the African continent (Odukoya et al. 2008; Barclay and Jacobs 2011). Extension of the gestation period for the three Malagasy species back in time from the birth pulse to match those recorded for sister species elsewhere would place the mating period for *P. rufus* in the month of April, for *E. dupreanum* in the month of July, and for *R. madagascariensis* in the month of August. These estimates of mating period are consistent with previous reporting for *P. rufus* (Long and Racey 2007) and *R. madagascariensis* (Noroalintseheno Lalarivoniaina et al. 2019); to our knowledge, no previous records of the reproductive calendar for *E. dupreanum* have been published.

In sum, we observed the longest gestation and lactation period for *P. rufus,* which births first of the three Malagasy fruit bat species, followed by *E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis,* in order of decreasing body size. Despite differences in the timing and duration of gestation, however, lactating mothers for all three species weaned pups around the same time of the year

(~late January – February), at the onset of peak fruit abundance in the hot-wet season in the District of Moramanga.

*Morphological patterns—*After searching the literature, we successfully compiled mass records from 103 pteropodid species for females and 106 species for males; forearm records from 146 species for females and 140 species for males; tibia records from 64 species for females and 64 species for males; and ear length records from 101 species for females and 99 species for males. We compared these against morphological patterns witnessed in our own longitudinally-collected field data.

For Malagasy fruit bats, we observed large differences in morphology across species but few significant differences by sex. The Malagasy fruit bat species ranked in size, from largest to smallest: *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis,* with the size ranges of each species roughly spanning the range in ear length, tibia length, and forearm length as the mean values for all non-Malagasy pteropdid bats surveyed across the literature (**Fig. 2A-C**). Specific morphological ranges for tibia length and forearm length matched the size distributions of the three species, scaling downward from *P. rufus* to *E. dupreanum* to *R. madagascariensis.* For ear lengths, *P. rufus* and *E. dupreanum* distributions were largely overlapping, while *R. madagascariensis* were smaller (species-specifc interquartile ranges for each morphological trait are summarized in **Table S2**). Length distributions for most traits were not significantly different by sex, except in the case of forearm lengths for *P. rufus* and tibia and forearm lengths for *R. madagascariensis,* which were all significantly larger in females than in males (*Welch’s 2-sample t-test p<0.001;* Table S2). The larger literature-derived species-level means roughly approximated the range spanned from the *R. madagascariensis* minimum to the *P. rufus* maximum for tibia, ear, and forearm length, with the median falling in between that of *R. madagascariensis* and *E. dupreanum* across all three metrics.

We additionally computed a type-2 exponential regression of the correlation of increasing body mass with forearm length across a joint dataset incorporating all three Malagasy species and another across the literature-derived dataset, both separated by sex. All four exponential regressions demonstrated a good fit to the data with *R2* values > .95 and roughly comparable slopes, indicating 20-30 fold increases in bat mass (in grams) corresponding to every 10-fold increase in forearm length (in mm) across all species and sexes (Fig 2C; **Table S3**).

*Seasonality of mass:forearm relationships—*Restricting our analyses to the Madagascar field data only, we next explored seasonal variation in the mass:forearm relationships realized in Fig. 2C, fitting disparate species- and sex-specific GAMs to the residual of the observed mass:forearm from the modeled prediction. GAMs indicated a significant seasonal smoothing predictor of mass:forearm residual for both male and female subsets of the *P. rufus* and *E. dupreanum* data and for the female subset of the *R. madagascariensis* data (*p-value<0.001;* **Table S4**). Only male *R. madagascariensis* demonstrated no seasonal variation in mass:forearm residual. Finally, we plotted the GAM-predicted mass for each species and sex across, respectively, the reproductive and nutritional calendars for female and male fruit bats of the three Malagasy species (**Fig. 3**). As expected, we observed a seasonal peak in adult female mass:forearm which overlapped the staggered period of observed gestation for each species from Fig. 1, followed by a deficit overlapping the corresponding, species-specific lactation period. We also observed a less extrememt mass deficit which overlapped the resource-poor winter for male *P. rufus* and *E. dupreanum* but occurred earlier in the season for *E. dupreanum* than for *P. rufus.*

*Juvenile growth rates—*In our final analysis, we compared juvenile growth rates in forearm, tibia, and ear length across all three Malagasy fruit bat species. GAMs fitted to the response variable of each morphological trait demonstrated highly significant smoothing predictors of days since birth across all three metrics and all three species (**Fig. 4; Table S5**). Quantification of the derivative of each fitted GAM across the range of observed days since birth allowed us to compare growth rates across traits and species: in general, we observed the largest slopes, corresponding to the fastest growth rates for forearm lengths, then tibia lengths, and finally, ear lengths of all three species. *P. rufus,* the largest of the three species, grew at the fastest rate (largest slope in growth curve) for all three morphological traits, followed by *E. dupreanum* and then *R. madagascariensis.* Despite faster growth rates, *P. rufus* juveniles demonstrated the most protracted development phase, approaching adult size (10-day average slope for forearm growth <.1) approximately six months (180 days), as compared to two months (53 days) for *E. dupreanum* and 2.5 months (81 days) for *R. madagascariensis.* Species- and metric-specific growth rates from our fitted GAMs across the first year of life are summarized in **Table S6**; all raw values are available on our open-access GitHub repository.

**Discussion**

Here, we explore spatial-temporal and seasonal variation in morphological features for three endemic Malagasy bats in the Old World Fruit Bat family, Pteropodidae: *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis*. Broadly, we aimed to (a) quantify life history traits needed for population modeling for these three species (in particular, the timing of the annual birth pulse), (b) document seasonal variation in their morphometrics and body conditions (in particular, the mass:forearm residual, a measure of fat mass and body condition), and (c) calculate juvenile growth rates for forearm, tibia, and ear length in the first year after birth. Our work confirms that *P. rufus, E. dupreanum,* and *R. madagascariensis* birth in a single annual, species-specific pulse in Madagascar, which is temporally staggered across the three species. In the District of Moramanga in Madagascar’s center-east where we conducted the bulk of our field studies, the *P. rufus* birth pulse occurred firstin the months of September/October, followed by *E. dupreanum* in November, and *R. madagascariensis* in December. It is possible that the timing of this birth pulse may vary latitudinally based on climatic differences across the island (e.g. occurring earlier in warmer climates or later in cooler regions), though our birth pulse projections align well with previous records of the mating season for *P. rufus* in southeastern Madagascar (Long and Racey 2007) and *R. madagascariensis* in northwestern Madagascar (Noroalintseheno Lalarivoniaina et al. 2019); to our knowledge, no previous records defining the reproductive calendar for *E. dupreanum* have been published (Shi et al. 2014). Nonetheless, climate-related variation in birth pulse timing is well-described for populations of *Eidolon helvum,* which range across the entirety of the African continent (Peel et al. 2013, 2017). Documentation of the timing of this birth pulse for Malagasy fruit bats is important for understanding their vulnerability to seasonally-varying population pressures: previous work describes how seasonal variation in hunting pressure for Malagasy lemurs poses elevated risks to species when directly overlapping their annual birth pulse (Brook et al. 2018). Fruit bats are legally hunted during the Malagasy winter ﻿(1 May – 1 September), which overlaps the gestation period observed here for all three species, but most significantly for *P. rufus,* a species already known to be experiencing severe population declines due to anthropogenic threats (Golden et al. 2014; Brook et al. 2019a). Critically, the Malagasy fruit bat lactation periods are varied in duration such that, despite staggered birth pulses, juvenile weaning occurs largely coincidentally at the onset of the peak fruiting season in the hot-wet Malagasy summer, a pattern recapitulated across numerous species of frugivorous lemur, as well (Wright et al. 2005).

In addition to its importance for conservation efforts to quantify fruit bat population viability, defining the temporal limits of each fruit bat species-specific birth pulse is essential to understanding the mechanisms which underpin the maintenance and persistence of numerous infectious agents that these bats host (Iehlé et al. 2007; Razafindratsimandresy et al. 2009; Reynes et al. 2011b; Wilkinson et al. 2012b; Brook et al. 2015, 2019b; Ranaivoson et al. 2019). Isolated *E. helvum* populations on islands off the west coast of Africa have been shown to support circulation of potentially zoonotic henipaviruses at population sizes well below the established critical community size (CCS) for closely-related paramyxoviruses in other systems (Bartlett 1957, 1960; Swinton et al. 1998; Peel et al. 2012). Some work has suggested that seasonally-staggered births allowing for a protracted introduction of juvenile susceptibles into the host population could play a role in pathogen persistence in these systems (Peel et al. 2013, 2014; Hayman 2015). In Madagascar, seasonally-staggered birth pulses across the three fruit bat species could support the persistence of multi-species pathogens, such as bat-borne coronaviruses, which frequently transmit and recombine amongst bats of different species that co-roost in the same caves (Hu et al. 2017). Among Malagasy pteropodids, *E. dupreanum* and *R. madagascariensis* are known to share cave roosts, sometimes with insectivorous bats, while *P. rufus* inhabits single-species arboreal roosts (MacKinnon et al. 2003). Previous work suggests that sympatric cave-roosting likely plays a role in pathogen-sharing of diverse paramyxoviruses among Malagasy bats (Mélade et al. 2016), but considerable evidence also supports a largely single-host-species-to-single-pathogen relationship for many other bat-borne infections, including those described in Madagascar (Ng et al. 2015; Lagadec et al. 2016; Brook et al. 2019b; Joffrin et al. 2019). It is likely that diverse inter- and intra-species dynamics underpin the population-level persistence of different pathogen types.

Because the dynamics of pathogen shedding and zoonotic spillover have been linked to the reproductive and nutritional calendar across several bat-virus systems (Plowright et al. 2008; Amman et al. 2012; Schmidt et al. 2017; Brook et al. 2019b), documentation of seasonal variation in bat body condition and nutrition also has important implications for understanding immunity and pathogen maintenance. We here highlight significant seasonal variation in body condition, largely modulated by reproduction for female fruit bats and corresponding more closely to the nutritional calendar for males, though variations in he to the seasonal

the impact of seasonal variation in body condition and the protracted gestation period observed for *P. rufus* on immunity and viral shedding will be particularly important. In addition, mass deficits in male bats

pathogen emergenc certain pathogens may be maintainhosted as longterm persistent infections

Other work suggests

Here, we define the

Defined repro calendar for three species

* + Do longer lactation periods in P. rufus correspond to protracted viral shedding periods?
  + Would be great to understand hormonal effect of delayed implantation vs. embryonic development on immunity
* Male mass deficit not exact for ‘winter’ for males – would be great to know more about these bats’ diets
* Morphological measurements not reported as sex-specific but appears not to matter
* Few longitudinal samples – particularly important for mass
* Add in E. dupreanum growth rates might be lower than reported – we are likely missing pups that birth earlier and are unobserved in our dataset

In particular, we aimed to (a) quantify life history traits needed for population modeling for these three species, (b) document seasonal variation in their morphometrics and body conditions, and (c) calculate juvenile growth rates throughout the post-reproductive period. Our work emphasizes the importance of longitudinal field studies in accurately describing the ecology of frugivorous bats.

The reproduction activities of the three species are well spread across the year (from April to February). For *P. rufus*, the gestation begins at the end of the wet season and the parturition begins on late dry season.  For both *E. dupreanum* and *R. madagascariensis*, gestation period begins at the mid of dry season and the parturition occurs at the onset of wet season. The weaning time is at mid wet season, that should coincide to the peak of fruit abundance.

The morphometrics analyses shown that there is no strong dimorphism found among both sex of Malagasy fruit bats. But we found that the forearm length and the body mass are highly correlated for both male (r-square: 0.959) and female (r-square: 0.958). This trait is also found for non-Malagasy bats.

Season affected bats in different way when we plotted the residual value of body mass by forearm. For both sex of *E. dupreanum*, the we noticed that their body mass are lower than expected. For male, the declining was really pronounced during the wet season (F=4.576, p<0.0001). For the female the lower body mass was noted at the end of wet season (F=2.578, p=0.001). Concerning *P. rufus* species, all body mass is greater than expected. For male there was a strong variation of body mass over the year and the lowest is found during the dry season (F=6.816, p<0.0001) and no significant change found for female. All body mass also was greater than expected for *R. madagascariensis* and no significant change found for both sex.

**Acknowledgements**

**Literature Cited**

**Figure Legends**

**Appendices**