

## **Present Day Fact File**

### **Fruitbats**

These bats are not at all what you might expect. They are called ‘flying foxes’ because of their pointed snouts and large eyes – and big sharp teeth. However, despite looking so fierce, they are in fact fruit eaters, and those teeth are specially adapted for breaking open the tough rinds of some rain forest fruits. Even more strangely, some of them have a feathery tongue and are specialised for drinking nectar from flowers and eating pollen.

Another difference between these bats and the bats you might be used to is the fact that they do not have any echolocation system and rely on their eyesight to see where they are going. It is thought that this is because their food – fruit – doesn’t tend to move around much, and so finding it doesn’t need a special sense. Fruitbats have large eyes to help them navigate in the near-dark; many of these species are nocturnal just like their cousins.

### **Flying fertilizers**

The fruit bat family includes most of the largest bats in the world, including the very largest which has a wingspan of over five foot! Fruitbats mostly nest as a huge group in trees, and when they all take off at once to go out looking for food, they block out all the light. There can be millions of individuals in one colony, and they are very important to fruit trees in the rainforest as pollinators and for distributing seeds over a wide area. Studies have shown that they are one of the best distributors of seeds, often flying over 30 miles in a night to find food, and many trees have seeds that have co-evolved to the point that they will not germinate unless they have been digested by a bat first!

### **Batty babies**

Early in the year, the colony suddenly fills with females carrying pups with them. These tiny baby bats are born during the night while their mothers cling upside-down to branches in the trees. They are helped by their mother who licks them clean, and they spend anything between a few weeks and a few months clinging to her with their hind feet, wing claws and specially adapted baby teeth, shaped like hooks. Their mother even takes them out at night when she goes to find food; this is an important learning time for the baby as it helps them to identify the right trees to eat from.