

Project Update: December 2011

I have so far conducted echolocation call surveys, roost counts and detailed interview surveys with local stakeholders. At present, the findings of the project may be summarised as follows:

1. A total of 13 bat species from 5 families has been recorded. Six of these have been identified from echolocation calls and need further confirmation.
2. 15-20 roosting sites of both fruit bats and insectivorous bats have been recorded and bat abundance has been estimated from a few of these. Some species records are potential range extensions e.g. *Miniopterus* sp.
3. Bat foraging activity and species richness are higher in natural forest and fruit plantations areas as compared to monocultures of rubber.
4. Initial data suggest that presence of streams and roads positively influence both bat activity and species richness.
5. Interestingly, a number of interview respondent's perceived declines in bat numbers after increase in area under rubber plantations. Respondents had some appreciation of fruit bats and their importance, while they were largely unaware of insectivorous bats.
6. Interviews helped identify priority topics for conservation outreach. They also identified local hunting for food and medicines as an emergent threat. Preparation of materials for awareness programmes focusing on these issues is currently underway.

However, the above results need more empirical support. For this reason, and due to certain unavoidable recent circumstances, I have not been able to communicate an interim report earlier. The main issue is that field work plans have been severely affected over the last 2 months. The reasons for this are:

1. Security concerns regarding field work at night, especially for female researchers (cases of hooliganism, drunkenness, and anti-social elements). This problem has led to high risk and inaccessibility to certain sites leading to gaps in uniform field effort and time dedicated to surveys across the study area.
2. Unpredictable weather conditions (heavy, irregular rains).
3. Unavailability of field assistants over the last 2 months, due to older assistants leaving without prior notice.

I am doing my best to continue the work from January 2012. However, it seems difficult, given the above issues, to finish adequate field work in the time period earlier planned.