



Where I work Iroro Tanshi

“Many Nigerians consider bats to be pests or bad omens of some kind. But I see them as cute and amazingly diverse. Bats provide ecosystem services that many people don’t know about. For example, they eat the insects that destroy crops.

I spend a lot of time mapping bat populations and tracking their health. This picture was taken earlier this year at the Oban Forest Reserve in Cross River State in southern Nigeria. The reserve, which isn’t in great shape ecologically, lies on the border of Cross River National Park, one of the country’s last undisturbed forests.

We catch the bats using traps and release them as soon as we can. In the photo, I’m looking at the wings of a bat to identify its age. Juvenile bats have cartilage growth plates in their joints; these plates are visible through the skin as light and dark bands.

The bat pictured belongs to a common species. But my team and I found a small population of the much rarer short-tailed roundleaf bat (*Hipposideros curtus*) in the

nearby Afi mountains. It was only the third population of the species to be discovered in Nigeria. These bats are so rare that it took us nine years working in this region before we finally captured one last year.

The main threats to bat populations here are wildfire, deforestation, logging and agriculture. The southeast, where the Oban reserve is located, is of interest to mining companies. And meat from fruit bats is a popular source of protein in Nigeria; bats are sometimes hunted in their cave roosts, and might abandon a cave after they’ve been disturbed in such a way.

An important part of what I do is to educate the public about the ecological roles that bats have and to dispel myths about them. In the United States, there’s been a turnaround from people fearing bats to thinking they are cute and deserving protection. We need that energy here.”

Iroro Tanshi is co-founder of the Small Mammal Conservation Organization in Calabar, Nigeria. **Interview by Linda Nordling.** Interview edited for length and clarity.

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Etinosa Yvonne.