

First record of the Egyptian Fruit Bat, *Rousettus aegyptiacus*, from Syria

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Abstract. The Egyptian Fruit Bat, *Rousettus aegyptiacus*, was recorded in July 2004 in the Orontes River Valley in northern Syria, which is the first record for Syria. A roosting colony with 1000–1500 individuals was found in a cave, and notes on the breeding biology were made. Some external and cranial characters are described and illustrated.

Kurzfassung. Der Ägyptische Flughund, *Rousettus aegyptiacus*, wurde im Juli 2004 im Orontes-Tal im nördlichen Syrien erstmals für Syrien festgestellt. In einer Grotte wurde eine Kolonie mit 1000–1500 Tieren gefunden, und einige Beobachtungen zur Fortpflanzungsbiologie angestellt. Einige äussere Merkmale sowie Schädelmerkmale werden beschrieben und abgebildet.

Key words. Egyptian Fruit Bat, caves, Orontes River, small mammals, Syria, Middle East.

Introduction

Little is known about the bats of Syria despite its comparatively large area and varied habitats. So far only 9 species of bats have been reported (HARRISON & BATES 1991), and these do not include the Egyptian Fruit Bat, *Rousettus aegyptiacus* (E. Geoffroy, 1810) (NADER & KOCK 1983, WALTER & EBENAU 1997, BENDA et al. 1999). This is the largest bat in the Eastern Mediterranean, and has been recorded from several locations in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Palestine (ATALLAH 1977, QUMSIYEH 1996, AMR 2000, KARATAŞ et al. 2003). We record it here for the first time from Syria, with notes on its breeding biology.

Material and methods

In the course of studying the Chiroptera fauna of Syria, 56 specimens of the Egyptian Fruit Bat, *R. aegyptiacus*, were collected using insect nets, from a large-sized cave located on the western side of a mountainous cliff along the Orontes River Valley (35°55'N, 36°23'E), 3 km E Hamama, 25 km W Idleb. The cave was visited on 5th, 18th of July; 6th of September and on 11th of October 2004. The cave is prehistoric and was evidently used as a human dwelling in ancient times. It is known locally as “*Al-Manfa*”, implying its difficult access. The entrance is about 2.5 m high and 2 m wide, and then deep inside it becomes wider and higher. About 15 m from the entrance, the cave turns left, its height rises to about 5 m, and it extends more than 60 m, ending in a narrow opening of 0.5 m in diameter that in turn leads to a large hall; then a curved narrow tunnel of about 15 m leads to a narrow exit of 0.5 m. It is completely dark, with no visible light. Figs, Japanese date, plum (Kaki), apricot, loquat, pomegranate, different species of citrus and other fruit trees, providing ripe fruits all through the year, are located along the river valley. The cave is not frequented by the locals due to its bad smell and the difficult access.