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Protection of wild bats from culling programmes

ACKNOWLEDGING that bats, over one fifth of terrestrial mammals, are among the most endangered species;

AWARE of alarming declines in bat populations globally, due to anthropogenic pressures such as habitat degradation, fragmentation and destruction, roost disturbance, climate change, bushmeat trade, disease and a history of persecution;

ACKNOWLEDGING that bats are long-lived mammals where females usually give birth to one young per year, reproductive rates are low and populations slow to recover from disturbance and declines;

RECOGNISING that bats have an essential role in the natural world, as insect predators and, through their seed dispersal and pollination services, are crucial to the regeneration of forests and to agriculture as a result of critical relationships with wild food crops such as cashew and durian;

FURTHER RECOGNISING that ecosystem services offered by bats are globally worth billions of US dollars annually, but are rarely evaluated or considered in natural capital accounts and policy decisions;

MINDFUL that bats remain an extremely misunderstood group of species, with many negative perceptions driving their persecution;

CONCERNED that misinformation about bats causing economic damage and transmitting diseases is exacerbating the human-bat conflict, and that lack of institutional and enforcement capacity (and willingness) are impacting bats in many regions;

ALARMED that due to perceived negative impacts on fruit harvests and human health, governments are legalising, condoning and implementing culling of bats, without a supporting scientific basis;

CONSCIOUS that culls of bats to mitigate disease may amplify the risk to human populations through increased contact rates of people with bats, changes in the dynamics of disease transmissions among bats, and stress-related increases in disease transmission;

DEEPLY CONCERNED that the loss or decline of bats has a negative impact on other species, and the critical ecosystem services they provide; and

RECOGNISING IUCN's interventions to avert government culling of wild bat populations;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Hawai'i, United States of America, 1-10 September 2016:

1. CALLS ON the Director General, the Species Survival Commission and the World Commission on Protected Areas, to provide technical and scientific support to governments and other agencies to ensure evidence-based approaches for the management of sustainable bat populations;
2. CALLS ON all IUCN State Members to allocate funding for the protection of bats and to provide incentives for conservation, adequate legislation and deterrent penalties to achieve this goal;
3. CALLS ON all IUCN Members to promote education about bats in order to dispel myths and human negativity towards bats and to foster understanding and co-habitation with people;
4. URGES governments to seek non-lethal solutions/mitigation measures to conflicts between humans and bats, as part of a strategy that combines scientific research on bat ecology and ecosystem services, as well as on life-history characteristics that support population models; and

5. URGES governments to not authorise or sanction culls of wild bat populations unless there is peer-reviewed evidence of the significant impact of bats on food security or public health, all non-lethal solutions have been exhausted, there is clear scientific evidence and opinion that a cull will resolve the issue and not threaten species survival, and any decision to authorise a cull is underpinned by rigorous scientific evidence regarding the population structure and dynamics of the species and understanding of the impact of the proposed cull.