AN OBSERVATION OF CAT PREDATION UPON AN EASTERN BLOSSOM BAT *Syconycteris australis*

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WITH a body weight of 15 - 19 g and a mean head-body length of just over 60 mm (Churchill 1998), the eastern blossom bat *Syconycteris australis* is one of the smallest members of the sub-order Megachiroptera. Within Australia *S. australis* is restricted in distribution to the east coast from Cape York in Queensland to near Forster on the mid-north coast of New South Wales (NSW) (Law 1994a). Habitat requirements include both rainforest and/or wet sclerophyll forest for roosting purposes and proximal areas of heathland for foraging (Law 1993). The species survives on a diet of nectar and pollen and is heavily dependent upon *Banksia integrifolia* inflorescences during the winter months (Law 1994b, 1996; Coburn 1995). Blossom bats are generally regarded as solitary and exhibit strong fidelity to their feeding areas (Law 1993), although movements of up to 30 km have been reported (Law 1996).

During August, 1996, a number of *S. australis* were captured by mist-netting as part of a long-term project monitoring the potential effects of urbanisation on this and other wildlife species at the Koala Beach (Searanch) residential estate near Pottsville (Lat: 28° 23'S; Long: 153° 33'E) in the Tweed Shire of north-eastern NSW. Individual *S. australis* captured during the course of the monitoring program were identified for recapture purposes by ear-notching (removal of a small amount of tissue from the leading edge of the ear) prior to being released at the point of capture. The presence of a substantive *S. australis* population at this site had been identified during earlier fauna survey work which resulted in 23 known individuals being captured over a two-month sampling period (Phillips *et al.* 1995).

At approximately 1930 hrs on the 15th September 1996, one of us (RJ) was contacted by a farmer whose domestic cat had brought in what was believed to be a juvenile flying-fox (*Pteropus* spp.); the animal was alive when first brought in by the cat but died shortly thereafter. Upon closer inspection, the animal was identified as an adult male (weight: 16 g) *S. australis*. The presence of a circular notch on the right ear further identified it as one of the animals which had been marked four weeks earlier at the Pottsville study site. The straight line distance between the original capture site and the predation event was 4.54 km.

The preceding observations highlight a number of issues, not the least of which is the potential benefit to be obtained by adopting mark-recapture protocols in field-based studies of free-ranging wildlife. Indeed, it is possible that this incident would have remained unreported were it not for the fact that the animal had been so clearly marked by researchers, and that observation of the ear-notch by RJ resulted in further enquiries being undertaken.

Observations of mortality, and especially predation events, are rarely reported for bats. Because of the preceding events, this note details not only movement data but also the first reported incidence of predation upon *S. australis* by a domestic cat. In NSW, *S. australis* is currently listed as a Vulnerable species for purposes of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act* 1995. In this regard, the need to be mindful of the potential for predation upon this species by domestic cats is reinforced by the observations we have reported, more so when residential developments are being planned.


Key words: predation, cat, eastern blossom bat, *Syconycteris australis*.

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considered in close proximity to likely *S. australis* feeding areas.

**REFERENCES**


