

Article

Punta Gorda, Toledo District, Belize

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A Great Bat Discovery!

Ya'axché Conservation Trust made a great discovery during an on-going bat survey to record the range of bats found across southern Belize.

Ya'axché Research Coordinator, Olatz Gartzia and bat specialist, Tom Foxley, found a bat with a face full of wrinkles name *Centurio senex* in Bladen Nature Reserve on February 20th 2015. Its name translates into *Centurio* meaning 'a hundred' and *senex* 'old man'. Obviously the biologist naming this bat thought it looked like a hundred year old man.

The wrinkle faced bat, besides possessing a face full of skin folds, has the greatest known bite force of any bat, in relation to its head size. A strong bite gives this bat the ability to consume hard fruits when other resources are limited. A study found that it achieves its hard bite partly due to an exceptionally short and wide skull.

Males have larger and more numerous skin folds on their face and may be linked to attracting a partner – the more wrinkles they have, the more attractive they are. Another interesting characteristic is a large, retractable skin fold on its neck, which can be extended to cover part of its face. Researchers still don't understand the exact function of this mask.

Although it is widely distributed, many researchers point out that it is a rare species and is difficult to find in large numbers at any given location and warn this species is vulnerable to habitat change. Owing to its rarity little is known about its feeding, roosting or reproductive behaviour.

In addition to its impressive look and great biting force, the wrinkle-faced bat is a unique animal that transports plant seeds to different locations, contributing to the natural regeneration of Belizean forests, a very important task bats carry out for us every night!

END

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché): Ya'axché is an award winning Belizean organisation which aims to maintain a healthy environment with empowered communities by fostering sustainable livelihoods, protected area management, biodiversity conservation and environmental education within the Maya Golden Landscape.

Maya Golden Landscape: Ya'axché works in a 770,000-acre area – the Maya Golden Landscape (MGL). The MGL is hailed as a site of significant global biodiversity importance, providing protection to a myriad of rare and endangered species, such as the harpy eagle, Baird's tapir, and all five cat species endemic to the region. This includes the Bladen Nature Reserve – the most biodiverse protected area in Belize - and the Golden Stream Corridor Preserve. The MGL plays a vital role in maintaining clean breathing air, medicinal plants, food, and water quality for communities in Toledo and for the World Heritage Belize Barrier Reef.

Centurio senex: *Centurio* meaning 'a hundred' and *senex* 'old man'

IUCN Red List: The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is widely recognized as the most comprehensive, objective global approach for evaluating the conservation status of plant and animal species. Due to *C. senex*'s wide distribution this species is not classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List, however many researchers point out that it is a rare species and is difficult to find in large numbers at any given location (Santos-Moreno *et al.*, 2009)

The wrinkle-face bat was found in Bladen Nature Reserve on February 20th 2015.



The wrinkled faced bat is distinguished by its naked face with notorious skin folds, as seen in this female (Photo: T. Foxley/O. Gartzia)