

Picky eating potentially perilous for bats

Working in the Department of Ecology and Organismal Biology, Justin Boyles and Jonathan Storm examined the possibility of a link between dietary specialization and the risk of extinction for bats in Australia, Europe and North America.

Their study, published in the July 25 edition of the online, open-access journal PLoS ONE, indicates that “species of conservation concern often have a more specialized diet than common species,” said Boyles.

Additional analyses show that dietary breadth is not related to either geographic range size or wing structure, characteristics previously found to be associated with extinction risk in bats.

Previous research has shown that habitat loss, roost availability, and gregariousness influence the extinction risk of bats, but the Indiana State study suggests that dietary specialization may also play a role.

“The link between dietary specialization and extinction risk seems intuitive, so it is surprising that previous studies have failed to find this relationship,” said Storm.

Boyles and Storm propose that dietary specialization may be an important characteristic for conservation biologists to consider when evaluating the extinction risk of bat species. In addition, their study may help develop models for predicting a species’ risk of extinction. However, “similar studies are needed on additional bat families before we can fully understand the relationship between dietary breadth and extinction risk,” Boyles and Storm said.

Source: Public Library of Science

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