



The identity of a flying-fox in Emperor Rudolf II's Bestiaire

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ABSTRACT. A previously unidentified painting of a flying-fox in the bound folios of illustrations made for Emperor Rudolf II c. 1610 is a *Pteropus niger* from Mauritius.

KEY-WORDS. Mammalia, Megachiroptera, *Pteropus niger*, Mauritius, Rudolf II, Prague.

The bound collection of paintings on parchment in two volumes made for Emperor Rudolf II (1552-1612) in Prague, Bohemia, around 1610 and known as the 'Museum' or 'Bestiaire' contains only a single bat among the 180 illustrated sheets. It is a flying-fox that Staudinger (1990), in the published edition, identified only as far as the genus *Pteropus* Erxleben, 1777. The male bat specimen is posed seen from the underside, showing a palish rusty-brown face with small but conspicuous ears, very dark breast and belly, and paler, rusty, peri-genital area; there is also a hint of pale fur on the animal's right shoulder. The wings are curiously folded concertina-fashion, suggesting, as Staudinger noted, that the long-bones had been removed. Staudinger's commentary gives no hint as to the origin of this specimen: the inventory of the Emperor's *kunstkammer* (collection of curiosities), compiled by Daniel Fröschl (1573-1613) during 1607-11 (Bauer & Haupt 1976) simply refers to it as 'a large Indian bat', 'India' in those days referring very generally to 'the Indies' – i.e. everywhere beyond Africa east of the Cape of Good Hope.

A few years earlier Charles de L'Écluse (1526-1609), known as Clusius, then in charge of the Leiden botanic garden in the Netherlands, published the first scientific description of a flying-fox, recently brought back from Mauritius by Dutch mariners, and which he examined in 1603 and illustrated with a crude woodcut (Clusius 1605). His Latin description fits the larger Mauritian endemic flying-fox, *Pteropus niger* (Kerr, 1792), and has always been recognized as such (for a full synonymy see Andersen 1912, Simmons 2005). As this was apparently the only flying-fox for which specimens were available in Europe at that time, and Emperor Rudolf was always seeking novelties, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the animal illustrated in the *Bestiaire* is also a *Pteropus niger*. The rusty-buff face, dark underparts and rusty peri-genital area are diagnostic for this species (Andersen 1912). In the field the striking bicoloured back pattern is a more obviously characteristic (Andersen 1912, ASC pers. obs.), but there is no clue to the dorsal pelage in the *Bestiaire* image. The small ears compared to other large *Pteropus* are also a feature of *niger* (Andersen 1912). Published illustrations of *Pteropus niger* are few, all photographs: the best I've found is in Heady (1997:250) – it is a side view (and printed

upside-down!), but shows the pale tuft on the shoulder, pale face and dark underparts. Staub (1993: 48) also shows the face, ears and chest adequately, but the rusty peri-genital area is only visible in the rather dark image in Probst (1997: 72).

The other *Pteropus* that the Dutch might have brought back from their early voyages are *P. vampyrus* Linnaeus, 1758 and *P. hypomelanus* Temminck, 1853 from the Greater Sunda islands and *P. giganteus* (Brünnich, 1782) from Ceylon. All have much more prominent ears. The larger two (*vampyrus* & *giganteus*) have dark faces, and in *vampyrus* the entire underparts are also dark. *Giganteus* and *hypomelanus* have palish buff to rusty underparts, and in *hypomelanus* the rusty-brown face roughly matches the belly colour, and the species is in any case much too small (descriptions & illustrations in Anderson 1912, Medway 1969, Payne & Francis 1985, Prater 1965, AC pers. obs. in Ceylon & Borneo; distributions from Mickleburgh et al. 1992).

The *Bestiaire* bat specimen presumably reached Prague via Holland with the other animals from Mauritius also illustrated in the volumes (Dodo *Raphus cucullatus* & Red Hen *Aphanapteryx bonasia*), details of whose arrival in Prague are equally lacking (Staudinger 1990). The bat remained in the collection until the whole was sold at auction in 1782, but its subsequent fate is unknown (Staudinger 1990).

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