



‘Yayi Tamut Ponpik Olung (Tapon Dinam)’: a traditional practice of bat hunting

The state of Arunachal Pradesh is ethnically diverse and is home to 26 major tribes and over 100 subtribes. The Panyang (Tosung) clan of the Adi tribe holds an annual bat-hunting festival to regulate the population with due attention to their conservation. The festival highlights the tribe’s connection with nature and their commitment to preserving it.

Bats are mammals of order Chiroptera and they are the only existing mammal that is capable of true and sustained flight. They typically roost in caves, buildings, and trees. There are around 1,400 species of bats, among which most are insectivores, while a few are frugivores and nectarivores. A few are also reported as sanguivores, i.e., vampire bats. They play a significant role in the ecosystem by pollinating and seed-dispersing ((Soliman & Imam 2022). Bats are also significant in the field of traditional healing practices and medicines globally (Jugli et al. 2020). In India, the use of bats for medical purposes can be traced from the Ayurvedic literature (Lavekar 2008).



220th Ponpik-Adi Bat festival.



Men carrying the net to the cave. © NEIAFMR, Pasighat.

Recently, an interesting case study on the traditional bat hunting festival was observed at Upper Siang, Arunachal Pradesh among the Panyang (Tosung) clan of Adi tribe.

The Panyang (Tosung) clan of Pongging village, Upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh organizes an annual bat harvest festival as part of their traditional practices. According to their report, the



goal of bat conservation and infestation control, clan reunion, and for consumption. All clan members, including the sons-in-law, are required to participate to get to know one another and uphold peace and harmony within the clan. Bats are caught by hand, killed with bamboo poles, and collected in bamboo bags. After their hunt is complete, they distribute the bats equally to all clan members, whereas the women and children begin cooking the bats in their respective cleaned parts of the forest for a feast for their family members.



The clan member believes that the practice of eating bats protects them from various diseases and help in maintain good health. It has been also reported that over the years, there has been no outbreak of diseases from consuming bats, and despite all of the bites and scratches from the bats while catching them; they do not get any type of infections, pain, or skin-related issues. They believe it is beneficial to asthmatic patients and helps babies with bedwetting issues. Therefore, scientific investigation is required to validate their practice and the purported medicinal values of bats. Further research on traditional and indigenous practices is required so that we

Equal distribution of bats to the clan members. © NEIAFMR, Pasighat.

practice has been passed down from generation to generation for 220 years. The villagers are always in close contact with their forest and surroundings therefore they believe that the conservation of bats or wild animals is necessary and they have implemented local laws which prevent any type of harm to the forest they live in. In other words, they protect the forest that surrounds the cave, and no

hunting or human activity is permitted throughout the year, except during their bat-hunting festival. They even planted fruit trees such as Uriyam *Bischofia javanica* Blume and Lopsi/ Belam *Spondias pinnata* (L.f.) Kurz for the bats to feed on. The Panyang (Tosung) clan rears the bats for an entire year without disturbing their environment or habitat. They only hunt them on 06 January every year with the primary



can document and preserve age-old practices.

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Acknowledgements: Authors acknowledge the clan members for allowing us to attend, document and publish their age old practice. Authors would also like to acknowledge and thank Ministry of Ayush, Govt. Of India for providing financial support.



Bats tied together for distribution. © NEIAFMR, Pasighat.

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A clan member with his share of bats. © NEIAFMR, Pasighat.

Citation: Rochill, I., D. Talom, Imlikumba, A. Bawri, J. Pegu & R. Teron (2024). 'Yayi Tamut Ponpik Olung (Tapon Dinam)': a traditional practice of bat hunting. *Small Mammal Mail* #449, In: *Zoo's Print* 39(5): 06–08.



Clan members having a feast at hunting site. © NEIAFMR, Pasighat.