



**The genome sizes of megabats (Chiroptera: Pteropodidae)
are remarkably constrained**

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21 **The genome sizes of megabats (Chiroptera: Pteropodidae) are remarkably constrained**
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26
27 Jillian D.L. Smith and T. Ryan Gregory*

28
29
30 Department of Integrative Biology
31 University of Guelph
32 Guelph, Ontario
33 N1G 2W1 Canada
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* Correspondence:

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Email: rgregory@uoguelph.ca
Phone: 1-519-824-4120, x58053
Fax: 1-519-767-1656

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Running title: Genome sizes in megabats

Abstract

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It has long been recognized that bats and birds contain less DNA in their genomes than their non-flying relatives. It has been suggested that this relates to the high metabolic demands of powered flight, a notion that is supported by the fact that pterosaurs also appear to have exhibited small genomes. Given the long-standing interest in this question, it is surprising that almost no data have been presented regarding genome size diversity among megabats (family Pteropodidae). The present study provides genome size estimates for 43 species of megabats in an effort to fill this gap and to test the hypothesis that all bats, and not just microbats, possess small genomes. Intriguingly, megabats appear to be even more constrained in terms of genome size than the members of other bat families.

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity in genome size (DNA content per haploid nucleus) among eukaryotes has been a subject of study since the late 1940s. However, growth in interest in this topic has been particularly marked over the past decade, prompted by several factors: 1) the rise of large-scale comparative genomics, for which genome size data have practical importance (e.g., Gregory 2005a), 2) the identification of relationships between genome size and key biological parameters such as cell size, cell division rate, and related organism-level traits (e.g., Bennett and Leitch 2005; Gregory 2005b), 3) the launch of online databases now containing genome size estimates for more than 10,000 species (Gregory *et al.* 2007), and 4) the advent and/or refinement of efficient technologies for genome quantification.

Various mechanisms capable of increasing and/or decreasing genome size are now recognized, ranging in scale from small-scale replication slippage to whole genome duplication. In particular, the spread and loss of transposable elements – sequences that (at least initially) behave as parasites of the host genome – are increasingly understood to be a dominant mode of genome size change in animals and plants (e.g., Kidwell and Lisch 2001; Lynch and Conery 2003; Gregory 2005a). In combination, these processes have generated a more than 7,000-fold range in genome size among animals (Gregory 2008). Not surprisingly, much of the foregoing discussion of genome size evolution has focused on the enormous differences that occur among taxa. On the other hand, there is an increasing focus on groups that are diverse both taxonomically and ecologically but which exhibit only a limited range in genome size. As a notable example, amphibians (~5,000 species) range in genome size by 120-fold, whereas birds (~10,000 species) differ only about 2-fold (Gregory 2008).

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3 One hypothesis that has been the subject of much recent discussion is that groups of
4 vertebrates with especially high metabolic demands – in particular, those that have evolved
5 powered flight – are constrained at the genome level due to the links between genome size, cell
6 size, and metabolic rate (Hughes and Hughes 1995; Gregory 2002; Organ and Shedlock 2008).
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8 It has recently been shown, for example, that wing loading (an index of flight ability) is
9 correlated with genome size among perching birds (Andrews *et al.* 2009). Studies of fossil cell
10 sizes have also indicated that, as with feathers and bipedal locomotion, theropod dinosaurs
11 already exhibited some reduction in genome size prior to the evolution of birds (Organ *et al.*
12 2007). Likewise, it was recently reported that pterosaurs had smaller genomes than their non-
13 flighted relatives (Organ and Shedlock 2008).
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27 In keeping with this pattern, it has been recognized for several decades that bats possess
28 genome sizes much smaller than the average for mammals (e.g., Bachmann 1972; Capanna and
29 Manfredi Romanini 1971, 1973; Burton *et al.* 1989; Redi *et al.* 2005). Unfortunately, all but one
30 of the >60 species of bats that have been assessed thus far are “microbats” (Gregory 2008). The
31 only “megabat” studied, the flying fox *Pteropus giganteus*, also exhibits a small haploid genome
32 size (2.2pg; Manfredi Romanini *et al.* 1975), but it is not possible to draw conclusions on the
33 basis of so few data. The almost total lack of data from megabats therefore represents a glaring
34 omission in the current animal genome size dataset.
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46 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

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48 This study marks the first major survey of megabat genome size diversity and the single
49 largest study of bats conducted to date. In total, 215 samples from 144 individuals in 43 species
50 were obtained from The Lubee Bat Conservancy (Gainesville, Florida), Dr. John Bickham at
51 Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana), and the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto, Ontario).
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3 Samples contributed by the Lubee Bat Conservancy consisted of air-dried blood smears taken
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5 from captive bats during routine veterinary care. Samples from Purdue University and the Royal
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7 Ontario Museum were prepared from frozen kidney and/or liver tissues stored at -80°C .
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10 Genome size estimates were conducted by Feulgen image analysis densitometry
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12 following best practice methods as described in detail by Hardie *et al.* (2002). A minimum of 50
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14 nuclei was measured per sample and integrated optical densities were converted to genome size
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16 in picograms ($1\text{pg} = 978\text{Mb}$) using two standards: *Sus scrofa domesticus* (2.91 pg) and *Bos*
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18 *taurus* (3.56 pg). The standards used in calculating genome size were of the same tissue type as
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20 the relevant sample.
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24 Body mass data were taken from Smith *et al.* (2003) and Nowak (1994). The relationship
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26 between genome size and body mass was tested using Pearson correlations on log-transformed
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28 data. While the current species-level phylogeny for the family Pteropodidae remains poorly
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30 resolved, phylogenetically independent contrasts (PICs) (Felsenstein 1985) were attempted using
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32 the supertree presented by Jones *et al.* (2002) and Bininda-Emonds *et al.* (2007). These were
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34 conducted using the PDAP module (Midford *et al.* 2002) in Mesquite v2.5 (Maddison and
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36 Maddison 2008), with one degree of freedom subtracted for each branch in a polytomy.
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40 41 **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION** 42

43 Genome size estimates for 43 species of megabats are presented in Table 1. These
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45 ranged from 1.86pg in the straw-coloured fruit bat *Eidolon* sp. to 2.51pg in Lyle's flying fox
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47 *Pteropus lylei*, all of which are well below the mammalian average of 3.5pg (Gregory 2008).
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49 The data for megabats were normally distributed around a mean of $2.20\text{pg} \pm 0.02\text{SE}$ (Shapiro-
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51 Wilk test, $W = 0.98$, $p > 0.80$). Interestingly, megabats appear to be even more strongly
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3 constrained to small genome sizes than other bats in terms of both mean values (2.20pg vs.
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5 2.58pg; *t*-test, $p < 0.0001$; figure 1) and variance (F-test, $F_{61,42} = 6.72$, $p < 0.0001$).
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8 The results of this study raise three important questions: 1) Why are all bat genome sizes
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10 small relative to other mammals? 2) Why are megabat genome sizes smaller than those of
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12 microbats? 3) Why do species of megabats differ (albeit modestly) in genome size from one
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14 another as they do?
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17 An answer to the first question is coming into clearer focus thanks to recent studies of all
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19 three groups of vertebrates that independently evolved powered flight. Overall, the patterns now
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21 documented in pterosaurs, birds, and both major bat groups support the notion that some
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23 factor(s) – most likely including high metabolic rate – has imposed a limit on genome size in
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25 each lineage (Organ and Shedlock 2008; Andrews *et al.* 2009). It has recently been
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27 hypothesized that genome sizes began shrinking prior to the evolution of flight in all three
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29 groups (Organ and Shedlock 2008), which seems plausible. However, this may be difficult to test
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31 in bats (cf. dinosaurs/birds and pterosaurs; Organ *et al.* 2007; Organ and Shedlock 2008) as data
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33 from non-volant bat ancestors will be difficult to acquire due to a paucity of pre-flight fossils in
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35 the lineage.
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40 The question of why megabat genome sizes are smaller and less variable than those of
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42 microbats is intriguing, particularly in the light of the recent discovery that megabats experienced
43
44 an extinction of the LINE-1 transposable element early in their ancestry (Cantrell *et al.* 2008).
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46 This element constitutes 15-20% of the human genome and is thought to be the most common
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48 LINE element in mammals. A lineage-specific loss of LINE-1 transposition could explain why
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50 megabats experienced a more severe reduction of genome size (or deviated less from an initially
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52 small ancestral genome) than other bats. This may have been accentuated by additional
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3 limitations on the duplication of SINEs and processed pseudogenes, both of which appear to be
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5 dependent on LINEs (Cantrell *et al.* 2008).
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8 A loss of LINE-1 activity alone would not explain why more DNA was lost from
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10 megabat genomes than in other bats, but two mutually compatible explanations can be offered in
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12 this regard: natural selection operating at the organism level for reduced genome size and/or
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14 fixation of deletion mutations in inactive elements by drift. At the least, a megabat-specific loss
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16 of LINE-1 activity means that even if selection is involved, it is not necessary to assume stronger
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18 selective pressures favouring small genome size in megabats than in microbats.
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22 The question regarding the small amount of variation that does exist among megabats
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24 also remains an open one. Again, this could be explained in part by differential selection
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26 pressures for small genome size, differences in the strength of upward mutation pressure,
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28 historical patterns in which small ancestral genomes tend to remain small (Oliver *et al.* 2007),
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30 and/or neutral loss of DNA as influenced by features such as population size (Lynch and Conery
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32 2003). As a test of the latter, Organ and Shedlock (2008) compared genome size and body size
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34 (taken as an inverse proxy for population size) across diverse vertebrates and found no
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36 relationship. In the present study, genome size was positively correlated with body size using
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38 Pearson correlations ($r = 0.48$, $p = 0.003$, $n = 36$); this was not significant using phylogenetically
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40 independent contrasts ($p > 0.7$), but probably reflects the limited resolution of the available tree.
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42 Assuming that body size is linked strongly to population size, the neutral hypothesis (Lynch and
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44 Conery 2003) cannot be ruled out when considering patterns within megabats. Of course, body
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46 size is also associated with an array of physiological and ecological parameters that could be
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48 relevant in influencing selection on genome size. Moreover, megabats are much larger than
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50 microbats in terms of body mass, but their genome sizes differ in the opposite direction.
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3 Overall, it is clear that flying vertebrates are of particular interest in studies of genome
4 size evolution. The data reported here for megabats help to close a significant gap in the dataset
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6 for these groups, but they also raise additional questions that should be addressed in future
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8 studies. Indeed, a full understanding of the factors that influence genome size not only must
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10 account for the enormous variability observed across many groups, but also for the remarkably
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12 limited ranges observed within some of the most diverse vertebrate taxa.
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23 for access to samples.
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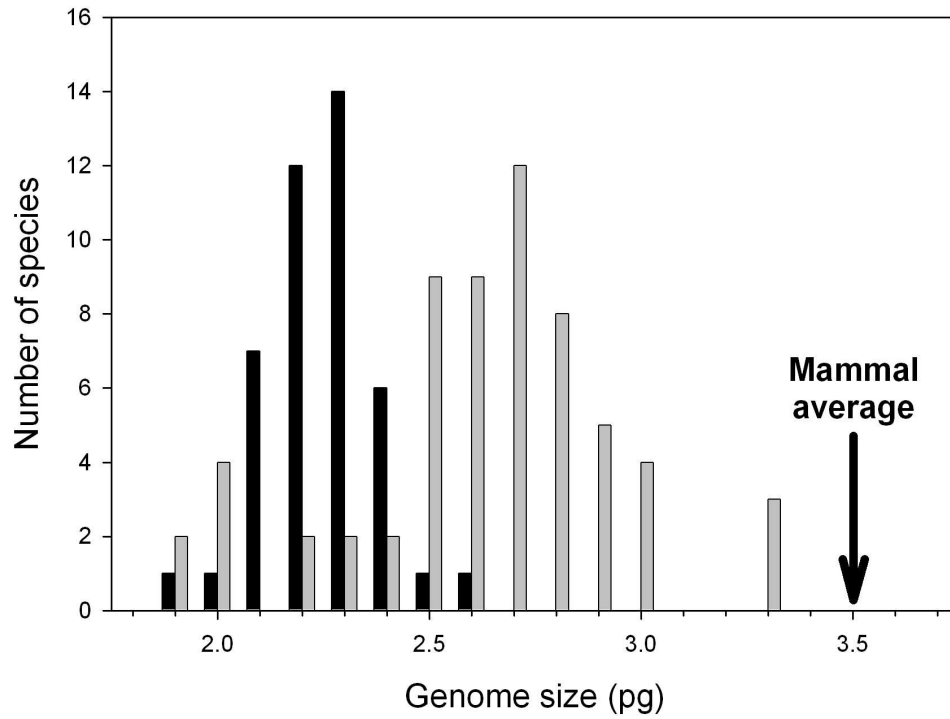
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3 **Figure legend**
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5 **Figure 1.** Summary of genome size diversity in 43 species of megabats of the family
6 Pteropodidae (black bars; present study) and 62 species from six families of microbats (gray
7 bars; Gregory 2008).
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Table 1. Haploid genome size estimates for 43 species of megabats (family Pteropodidae). Information regarding the number and sex of specimens (F = female, M = male, U = unknown), tissue type (KC = kidney cells, LK = leukocytes, LV = liver), and sources of specimens is also included. Taxonomy and common names follow Wilson and Reeder (2005). Note: 1pg = 978Mb.

Genus	Species	Common Name	GS (pg)	SE	n (F/M/U)	Tissue Type	Tissue Source
<i>Aethalops</i>	<i>alecto</i>	Pygmy Fruit Bat	2.15	0.03	1F, 4M	LV	1
<i>Balionycteris</i>	<i>maculata</i>	Spotted-winged Fruit Bat	2.07	0.04	3F, 1M	LV	1
<i>Chironax</i>	<i>melanocephalus</i>	Black-capped Fruit Bat	2.10		1M	KC, LV	1
<i>Cynopterus</i>	<i>brachyotis</i>	Lesser Short-nosed Fruit Bat	2.14	0.03	3F, 5M	KC, LK, LV	1, 2
<i>Cynopterus</i>	<i>horsfieldii</i>	Horsfield's Fruit Bat	2.28	0.11	2F	LV	1
<i>Cynopterus</i>	<i>sphinx</i>	Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat	2.27	0.04	2F, 2M	KC, LV	1
<i>Dobsonia</i>	<i>moluccensis</i>	Moluccan Naked-backed Fruit Bat	2.23		1M	LV	3
<i>Dyacopterus</i>	<i>spadiceus</i>	Dyak Fruit Bat	2.27		1F	LV	1
<i>Eidolon</i>	<i>helvum</i>	African Straw-coloured Fruit Bat	2.03	0.03	3F, 2M	LK, LV	2, 3
<i>Eidolon</i>	sp.	Straw-colored Fruit Bat	1.86		1U	KC	3
<i>Eonycteris</i>	<i>spelaea</i>	Lesser Dawn Bat	2.23	0.02	3F, 3M	LV	1, 3
<i>Epomophorus</i>	<i>gambianus</i>	Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat	2.04		1M	KC	3
<i>Epomophorus</i>	sp.	Epauletted Fruit Bat	2.18		1F	KC	3
<i>Epomops</i>	sp.	Epauletted Fruit Bat	2.18	0.01	2U	KC, LV	3
<i>Hypsignathus</i>	<i>monstrosus</i>	Hammer-headed Fruit Bat	2.42		1M	LV	3
<i>Lissonycteris</i>	<i>angolensis</i>	Angolan Soft-furred Fruit Bat	2.30	0.03	2F, 2M	LV	3
<i>Macroglossus</i>	<i>minimus</i>	Dagger-toothed Long-nosed Fruit Bat	2.00	0.03	2F, 3M	KC, LV	1
<i>Macroglossus</i>	<i>sobrinus</i>	Greater Long-nosed Fruit Bat	2.15	0.03	1F, 4M	LV	1
<i>Megaerops</i>	<i>ecaudatus</i>	Temminck's Tailless Fruit Bat	2.20		1F	LV	1
<i>Megaerops</i>	<i>kusnotoi</i>	Javan Tailless Fruit Bat	2.03		1F	KC	1
<i>Megaerops</i>	<i>niphanae</i>	Ratanaworabhan's Fruit Bat	2.26	0.03	3F, 2M	LV	1
<i>Megaloglossus</i>	<i>woermanni</i>	Woermann's Long-tongued Fruit Bat	2.18	0.02	2F, 1M, 1U	KC, LV	1, 3
<i>Melonycteris</i>	sp.	Fruit Bat	2.27		1M	LV	3

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5	<i>Micropteropus</i>	<i>pusillus</i>	Peters's Lesser Epauletted Fruit Bat	2.23	0.03	2F, 2M	LV	3
6	<i>Myonycteris</i>	sp.	Collared Fruit Bat	2.19		1U	KC	3
7	<i>Nanonycteris</i>	<i>veldkampii</i>	Veldkamp's Dwarf Epauletted Fruit Bat	2.27	0.04	3F, 2M, 1U	LV	1, 3
8	<i>Penthetor</i>	<i>lucasi</i>	Lucas's Short-nosed Fruit Bat	2.23	0.02	2F, 3M	LV	1
9	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>conspicillatus</i>	Spectacled Flying Fox	2.34		1F	LK	2
10	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>giganteus</i>	Indian Flying Fox	2.18	0.02	2M, 1U	KC, LK	2, 3
11	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>hypomelanus</i>	Variable Flying Fox	2.33	0.03	3F, 2M	LK	2
12	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>lylei</i>	Lyle's Flying Fox	2.51	0.02	3F, 2M	KC, LV	1
13	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>neohibernicus</i>	Great Flying Fox	2.21		1F	LV	3
14	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>poliocephalus</i>	Gray-headed Flying Fox	2.32	0.03	2F, 2M	LK	2
15	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>pumilus</i>	Little Golden-mantled Flying Fox	2.32	0.03	2F, 2M	LK	2
16	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>rodricensis</i>	Rodrigues Flying Fox	2.23	0.10	2M	LK	2
17	<i>Pteropus</i>	<i>vampyrus</i>	Large Flying Fox	2.37	0.02	3F, 3M	KC, LK	2, 1
18	<i>Rousettus</i>	<i>aegyptiacus</i>	Egyptian Rousette	2.11	0.02	6F, 3M	LK, LV	1, 2, 3
19	<i>Rousettus</i>	<i>amplexicaudatus</i>	Geoffroy's Rousette	2.29	0.04	4F, 1M	LV	1
20	<i>Rousettus</i>	<i>lanosus</i>	Long-haired Rousette	2.20	0.03	1F, 1M	LV	3
21	<i>Rousettus</i>	<i>leschenaultii</i>	Leschenault's Rousette	2.20	0.05	4F	LV	1
22	<i>Scotonycteris</i>	<i>zenkeri</i>	Zenker's Fruit Bat	2.14	0.02	2M, 2U	KC, LV	1, 3
23	<i>Sphaerias</i>	<i>blanfordi</i>	Blanford's Fruit Bat	2.08	0.06	1F, 2M	LV	1
24	<i>Syconycteris</i>	sp.	Blossom Bat	2.07		1M	LV	3
25								
26								
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28	Sources of tissues: 1) Royal Ontario Museum, 2) Lube Bat Conservancy, 3) Dr. John Bickham, Purdue University							
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