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# Who really benefits from the worsening human-wildlife conflict and mass-culling of an endangered island flying fox on Mauritius?

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## Abstract

Island flying foxes (genus *Pteropus*) are among the most endangered bats worldwide and face many threats including conflict arising over them consuming commercial fruits. Mauritius provided a severe example of such conflict when it mass-culled the last surviving of its three originally present native *Pteropus* species despite it being already threatened with extinction. The situation provides a rare opportunity to explore possible solutions to a type of threat that is growing worldwide. We surveyed the approaches and arguments used by the principal stakeholders involved both in favor and against mass-culling as the preferred strategy in this human-wildlife conflict and assessed their respective strengths and weaknesses as well as their efficacy in reaching their intended objectives. Although the mass-culling of 2015 and 2016 failed to improve fruit growers profits, government ordered a third mass-cull in 2018 targeting 20% of the already halved population despite the International Union for Conservation of Nature worsening the Red List category of the species from ‘Vulnerable’ to ‘Endangered’ a few months earlier. To justify its stance, authorities continue to discard best scientific evidence and reasoning to favor unreasonable claims. The human-wildlife conflict surrounding the flying fox continues to worsen despite appeals and efforts for dialogue from numerous conservation organizations over several years. The lack of intended results from previous mass-culling campaigns did not either bring Mauritius to reconsider its position on ordering mass-culls. Mauritius’ stance is consistent with first pitting planters against conservationists followed by taking decisions that superficially appear to support planters. Although this stance does not improve planters’ profits, it conveys an impression that boosting profits is government’s main concern, and helps rally at least short-term political support in the wake of forthcoming general elections. While conservationists should continue to foster research for innovative solutions and dialogue with politicians as well as education and sensitization of stakeholders to encourage solutions coming from the grass-roots, they should also acknowledge the limitations of these approaches and engage when necessary into more impactful strategies, including litigation. Currently, a case has been lodged in the supreme court of Mauritius against government’s decision to mass-cull the Endangered flying fox.

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