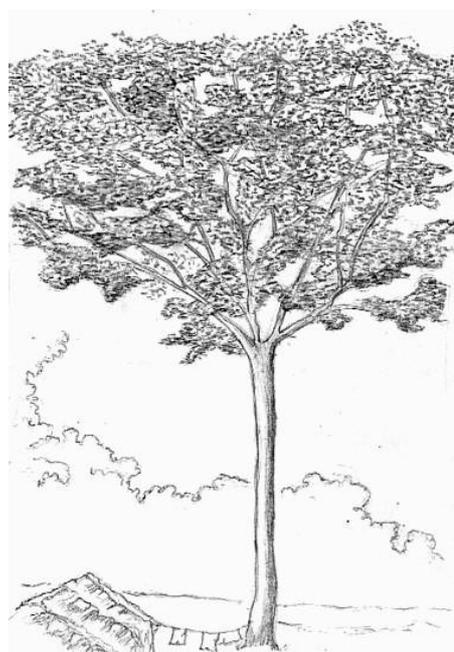


## Lingering fate of bats

With a new presidential palace being built on the grounds of Accra Zoo every-one is talking about the plight of the zoo animals - bar one. Despite their crucial role bats are still being marginalised.

Amasaba Abdul-Yakeen Aluizah



Thanks to Mary Louise Crosby who drew this Iroko tree especially for this article

D. A. R Taylor, Bright O. Kamakam and M. R. Wagner's paper on *the role of the fruit bat, Eidulum helvum, in seed dispersal, survival, and germination in Milicia excelsa, a tropical west African hard wood*, confirmed that bats, especially the brown bats which feed on fruits are involved in seed dispersal, and inadvertently ensure the survival and germination of *odum (Milicia excelsa)*, an expensive tropical hard wood which every timber merchant would smile at. (*Ed: It's popular as a teak substitute*)

But despite this the bat is still marginalised in this community, the only time it gains prominence, it is

associated with negativity; a nuisance that compete to harvest fruits on commercial farms and domestic ones, drop its guano on pedestrians, make noise at hospital staff and patients, as well dirtying the walls of luxuriant buildings. Aviation experts complain of their numbers, predicting a potential danger to flying aircraft. Some of them claim columns of flying bats entering engines of planes could cause engine failure leading to disaster.

Established in 1961, Accra Zoo is still located at its original site, the flagstaff house in Accra. This used to be the backyard garden for the first president of the Ghana Dr. Kwame Nkrumah where he entertained his guests. Now, ironically, the Zoo is being relocated because of the building of a new presidential palace. The zoo, which adjoins the uncompleted palace, is viewed as a security threat, hence the evacuation.

Minister of Lands and Forestry **Professor Dominic Fobi**, said before the construction of the new zoo in another site in the city at the Achimota forest, the animals are to be taken to temporary or permanent shelter at the Kumasi zoo. The staff of the zoo is equally well catered for. The media speaks about all this, but no one mentions the bats and trees on which they roost. The trees will be hewn down to pave way for the construction of the magnificent human structure, the zoo as a sanctuary will also be gone, hence the bats will have to look for new safe abodes, which should be protected against inhabitants of a sprawling city with an insatiable taste for bat meat.

The bats will rise up one day hearing the buzzing sound of earth moving machines, and alas their sanctuary will be slowly replaced with plush human settlements. If luck smiles at them, there will be some few ornamental trees planted within this palace on which they can still perch to continue to add milieu of the palace. Natural beings as they are, they will surely share the trees with the non-bat creatures, making the surroundings more beautiful for the foreign guests of the president.



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