

RESEARCH NOTE

INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL BELIEFS ON CONTACT WITH BATS IN THAILAND

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Abstract. Religious and cultural beliefs may influence how people interact with wild animals. In this study, we aimed to assess the association between beliefs and how people interact with bats at a selected study site in Ang Thong Province, Thailand, in order to obtain in-depth information on cultural, region, and beliefs related to people behaviors contacting with bats. Results of this study would be useful in planning communication intervention in order to reduce the risk of contracting bat-borne diseases in the area. Study subjects were those who reported contacting with bats in the area during scoping visit and the study subjects must have lived in the study area for at least one year. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with study subjects to determine the history of interaction with Lyle's flying foxes in the trees around the Buddhist temple and wrinkle-lipped bats living in the monks' and villagers' houses. The study was conducted during May-July 2017. A total of 20 subjects were included in the study (10 males and 10 females). The mean age (range) was 44 (20-75) years old. The FGD revealed the villagers believed the bats to be disciples of statue of the Buddha. They believed killing the bats living in the temple would result in a curse but killing bats not associated with the temple was not considered wrong. The results of the study show religion beliefs of our study subjects affected with behaviors toward bats in the study areas and may result in an increased risk for exposure to bat-borne pathogens. Further studies are needed to determine the prevalence of these beliefs and actions and to determine it is associated with diseases among residents living in the study area. Further studies are also needed to determine how these beliefs and behaviors can be modified within the culture and religion of the study area.

Keywords: bat, belief, contact, religion, Thailand

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