

Revision of the Genus *Melonycteris* (Pteropodidae: Mammalia)

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ABSTRACT. The genus *Melonycteris* consists of three species: *M. melanops* Dobson, 1877, *M. woodfordi* (Thomas, 1887), and *M. fardoulisi* n.sp. *Melonycteris melanops* is monotypic and widespread in the Bismarck Archipelago. It is orange in colour, and is unique in the genus in retaining a claw on digit two of the wing and in having P¹ and M₃ reduced. *Melonycteris woodfordi* is an orange-coloured species also, which is found in the northern and eastern Solomon Islands, and consists of two subspecies (the smaller *M. w. woodfordi*, found on the islands from Buka to Ysabel, and the larger *M. w. aurantius* on the Nggela Group). *Melonycteris w. aurantius* is unique in the genus in that females are usually larger than males, while in *M. w. woodfordi* the sexes are similar in size. *Melonycteris fardoulisi* n.sp. is a predominantly brownish species in which the sexes differ in colour and where males are markedly larger than females. It is distributed in the western and southern islands of the main Solomons chain, and includes four subspecies (*M. f. fardoulisi* n.subsp. from Makira, *M. f. maccoyi* n.subsp. from Malaita, *M. f. schouteni* n.subsp. from Guadalcanal and *M. f. mengermani* n.subsp. from Western Province). The subspecies differ in size, colour and degree of sexual dimorphism.

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Species of the genus *Melonycteris* are endemic to the Bismarck Archipelago and Solomon Islands, Melanesia. They are brightly-coloured bats, often having profuse pink spotting on their black wing membranes. The dorsal fur can be bright orange, and white 'epaulettes' may be present. They are members of the subfamily Macroglossinae and are nectar feeders, Kress (1985) demonstrating that on Guadalcanal at least the blossoms of *Heliconia solomonensis* are visited. The first of these distinct bats to be described was *Melonycteris melanops* Dobson, 1877 (syn. *Pteropus* (*Cheiropteruges*) *alboscaphulatus* Ramsay, 1877). This species is now

known to occur on many islands of the Bismarck Archipelago (Fig.1). In 1887 Thomas described a new genus and species, *Nesonycteris woodfordi*, from Alu Island (the type locality) and nearby Fauro Island in the Shortland Group, northern Solomons. Pohle (1953) recognised the close similarity between species of *Nesonycteris* and *Melonycteris*, and suggested that *Nesonycteris* should be placed in synonymy with *Melonycteris*, the older and thus correct generic name. All subsequent workers have accepted this synonymy.

A third species of *Melonycteris*, *M. aurantius* was