

On the identity of flying-foxes, genus *Pteropus* (Mammalia: Chiroptera), from islands in the Torres Strait, Australia

KRISTOFER M. HELGEN^{1,2}

¹ School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA 5005 Australia;
E-mail: kristofer.helgen@adelaide.edu.au

² South Australian Museum, North Terrace, Adelaide, SA 5000 Australia

Abstract

Five flying-fox species (*Pteropus scapulatus*, *P. alecto*, *P. conspicillatus*, *P. macrotis*, and *P. banakrisi*) have been reported from islands in the Torres Strait, situated between northern Australia and southern Papua New Guinea. However, vouchered specimens demonstrate that Torres Strait records of the Large-eared flying-fox (*Pteropus macrotis*) actually reflect misidentifications of the Little Red flying-fox (*P. scapulatus*), and that the type series of *Pteropus banakrisi* Richards & Hall, 2002 (a newly-described species supposedly endemic to Moa Island) consists only of subadult individuals of the Black flying-fox (*P. alecto*). Only three flying-fox species are therefore known from the strait. These re-identifications underscore the importance of voucher specimens in biological investigations and have important implications for bat conservation in Australia. *Pteropus macrotis* is removed from the list of mammal species known from Australia, and *banakrisi* is placed in the synonymy of *P. alecto*.

Key words: Australia, Mammalia, Chiroptera, flying-fox, *Pteropus*

INTRODUCTION

Global sea levels have risen precipitously since the end of the Last Glacial Maximum *circa* 19000 years ago, submerging low-lying coastal land areas worldwide (Yokoyama *et al.* 2000). The Torres Strait has since separated the northern tip of Queensland's Cape York Peninsula from the giant tropical island of New Guinea. Today most islands in the strait lie within the political boundaries of Australia.

The native Torres Strait vertebrate fauna essentially comprises a depauperate subset of species found both in southern New Guinea and tropical northern Australia (Schodde & Calaby, 1972), including species of four or five fruit-bat genera (Pteropodidae): tube-