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Hazard, Quentin C.K., Froidevaux, Jérémy S.P., Yoh, Natalie, Moore, Jonathan, Senawi, Juliana, Gibson, Luke and Palmeirim, Ana Filipa (2023) Foraging guild modulates insectivorous bat responses to habitat loss and insular fragmentation in peninsular Malaysia. Biological Conservation, 281. ISSN 0006-3207.

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Accepted refereed manuscript of: Hazard QCK, Froidevaux JSP, Yoh N, Moore J, Senawi J, Gibson L & Palmeirim AF (2023) Foraging guild modulates insectivorous bat responses to habitat loss and insular fragmentation in peninsular Malaysia. Biological Conservation, 281, Art. No.: 110017. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2023.110017
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- 1 Foraging guild modulates insectivorous bat responses to habitat loss and
- 2 insular fragmentation in peninsular Malaysia¹
- 3 **Keywords:** Passive acoustic monitoring; Habitat fragmentation; Hydroelectric dams;
- 4 Island Biogeography Theory; Land-bridge islands; Tropical forests

5 Highlights:

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- We assessed the diversity of insectivorous bats in dam-induced islands in Malaysia
- Species persistence was modulated by island size and habitat quality
- Forest foragers activity decreased with island isolation and degradation
- Edge foragers benefited from fragmentation, increasing in activity on smaller islands
- By creating multiple small, isolated, degraded islands, damming erodes bat diversity

Abstract

- 15 Despite mounting evidence on the ecological impacts of damming for biodiversity,
- 16 little is known regarding its consequences in the hyper-diverse Southeast Asian
- tropical forests. Here we assess the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation on the
- diversity and activity of insectivorous bats within the hydroelectric Kenyir Lake in
- 19 peninsular Malaysia. We surveyed bat assemblages on 26 islands and two mainland
- 20 continuous forest sites using passive acoustic monitoring. Echolocation calls were
- 21 classified into sonotypes, each corresponding to either one or multiple species, and
- 22 grouped into foraging guilds. We then examined bat overall assemblage (sonotype
- richness, activity, and composition), guild- and sonotype-specific activity. From 9360
- 24 hours of recordings, we identified 16 bat sonotypes, including 10 forest (2854 bat
- passes), three edge (13 703) and three open-space foragers (3651). Sonotype
- 26 richness increased towards denser canopy structures, as indicated by higher
- 27 Normalized Difference Vegetation Index values (NDVI). Sonotype composition varied
- 28 across the gradient of forest area. Forest foragers were positively affected by NDVI
- and negatively affected by distance to the closest neighbour, whereas edge foragers'

Abbreviations:

AICc: Akaike Information Criterion corrected for sample size

CF: Constant Frequency
CI: Confidence Interval
FM: Frequency Modulated

FMqCF: Frequency Modulated quasi-Constant Frequency

LF: Low Frequency LM: Linear Model

NDVI: Normalised Difference Vegetation Index NMDS: Non-Metric Multi-Dimensional Scaling

QCF: Quasi-constant Frequency

- 30 activity increased in smaller islands. Of the six sonotypes analysed, the activity of
- one forest sonotype increased with forest area, while that of one edge sonotype
- 32 decreased. Ensuring habitat quality within insular forest remnants, in addition to their
- 33 functional connectivity, maximises bat diversity, including the persistence of forest
- 34 foraging species. Future hydropower development should therefore avoid the
- 35 creation of a myriad of small, isolated, and habitat-degraded islands further
- 36 characterised by altered levels of bat diversity and guild-level activity.

conservation in the region (Coleman et al., 2019).

1. Introduction

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Humanity currently faces a need to reconcile human population growth, increasing energy demands, and the decarbonization of that energy. In this context, hydropower is an increasingly appealing option, representing 73% of the renewable energy produced in the world (The World Bank, 2016). Yet, river damming is also a major driver of habitat loss and insular fragmentation across lowland forests (Gibson et al., 2017). By flooding the lowland areas, dam construction often creates insular forest fragments matching the previous hilltops that become isolated within an inhospitable aquatic matrix (Jones et al., 2016). Although recent efforts have been made to understand the ecological consequences of hydropower (Palmeirim et al., 2022; Terborgh et al., 2009), few studies have targeted the Southeast Asian forests (Jones

et al., 2016). Such understanding is therefore considered a priority for biodiversity

Species diversity persisting in insular forest fragments is typically affected by fragment size and isolation, which limit species population size and colonisation rates respectively (McArthur & Wilson, 1967). Edge effects arising from insularisation, namely increased exposure to windthrows and floristic transition towards light-wooded fast-growing pioneer assemblages, affect habitat quality *within* insular fragments, thereby influencing remaining species diversity (Benchimol & Peres, 2015a). Likewise, further human disturbances, including logging and fires, affect forest structure and thus habitat quality. Altogether, habitat quality can be assessed using the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), distinguishing between forest with denser canopy (higher NDVI values) and sparser canopy (lower NDVI values) (Tovar, 2011).

Species responses to habitat loss and insular fragmentation may further vary between (Palmeirim et al., 2022) and within biological groups (Brändel et al., 2020; Meyer & Kalko, 2008), as influenced by particular species traits (Meyer et al., 2008; Palmeirim et al., 2021). For instance, the persistence of mid-sized mammal species on islands can be related to their swimming capacity (Benchimol & Peres, 2015b), while that of lizard species is dictated by their thermoregulation mode (Palmeirim et al., 2017). Yet, even persisting taxa show general decreases in abundance in insular forest fragments compared to surrounding mainland (e.g., bats: Gorresen & Willig (2004), birds: Yong et al. (2011,) and terrestrial and arboreal mammals: Benchimol & Peres (2021)). As such, while certain species able to use non-forest habitats might become overabundant (Moore et al., 2022), forest-dependent species become rarer or locally extinct (Palmeirim et al., 2018). Understanding the drivers of species response to forest insularisation - considering both environmental and intrinsic species characteristics – allows more efficient management actions to be proposed. which is not trivial given the expansion of the hydropower sector across lowland tropical forests (Couto & Olden, 2018).

Although habitat loss and insular fragmentation have been reported as important drivers of bat species' local extinction in the Neotropics (Colombo et al., 2022; Meyer & Kalko, 2008), little is known for Asia. In fact, the only study targeting such effects on insectivorous bats in this region highlighted the importance of island area especially for forest-dependent species in East China (López-Bosch et al., 2021). In addition, in a non-insular matrix setting in peninsular Malaysia, the diversity of insectivorous bats was impacted by forest area, with species-specific responses being modulated by their habitat affinity (Struebig et al., 2008). Insectivorous bats emit echolocation calls to navigate their surroundings and locate food (Schnitzler et al., 2003). The characteristics of the calls produced, e.g., call shape, are adapted to a species' foraging preferences (Denzinger & Schnitzler, 2013; Schnitzler & Kalko, 2001). For example, species adapted to foraging in the forest interior (forest foragers) use long constant frequency (CF) calls or very short, broadband, frequency modulated (FM) calls, adapted to particularly cluttered environments. Edge foragers use quasi-constant frequency (QCF) calls, or medium frequency calls (FMqCF) composed of an FM component followed by a short and quasi constant element (qCF), allowing them to locate and navigate between background features (medium frequency FM component), and to locate prey at an intermediate distance (qCF component). Open-space foragers use low frequency (LF) (<30 kHz) FMqCF calls with a narrow FM component and a long QCF component, enabling previdetection in vast empty spaces (Denzinger & Schnitzler, 2013; Schnitzler & Kalko, 2001). Within foraging guilds, bat calls are not species specific: the calls of several species have evolved in a convergent way to respond to analogous environmental pressures, resulting in very similar calls in species facing analogous ecological conditions and therefore preventing species-specific identification in certain instances (Gibb et al., 2019; Russo et al., 2017). To overcome this issue, bat calls are commonly classified into sonotypes, i.e., calls of similar shape and peak frequency (Roemer et al., 2021).

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Owing to the role of their foraging habitat in modulating their calls, bats of different foraging guilds are expected to respond antagonistically to habitat loss and fragmentation (Denzinger & Schnitzler, 2013; Schnitzler & Kalko, 2001). In the aftermath of damming, once continuous forests are lost to smaller insular forest patches harbouring a gradient of vegetation structures: while cluttered forest represent optimal conditions for supporting diverse assemblages of forest bats, the water matrix can pose a serious obstacle to this guild's mobility, thus acting as a morpho-ecological filter (Colombo et al., 2022). On the other hand, the newly created edges and adjacent open water surface might constitute high-quality habitat for edge and open-space foragers, as these vegetation structures are adapted to these guilds' morphological and acoustical adaptations (Denzinger & Schnitzler, 2013; Schnitzler & Kalko, 2001). In this sense, forest-dependent bats, which have been identified as being of conservation priority in SE Asia due to the general decline of forested areas in this region (Kingston, 2010), are expected to be restricted to continuous mainland forest and large, well-connected islands. Differentiating the response of these three guilds is therefore central to the implementation of adapted conservation measures. Notwithstanding, the study of insectivorous bats in Southeast Asia, especially forest and edge foragers, has been largely impaired by the ability of most insectivorous species to avoid live trapping methods, such as harp traps and mist nets (Kingston, 2013). With the increasing affordability of low-cost acoustic devices, insectivorous bat surveys are becoming more accessible and reliable, further allowing for high replication (Gibb et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2018).

Utilising such technological advances, here we provide the first assessment of the effects of habitat loss and insular fragmentation on insectivorous bats in a daminduced landscape in peninsular Malaysia. Using passive acoustic monitoring, we surveyed insectivorous bats in 26 forest islands and two mainland continuous forest sites. Across a gradient of habitat loss and insular fragmentation, we tested the effect of island size, isolation, and habitat quality (island shape and NDVI), at the following levels of bat diversity (1) overall assemblage, considering sonotype richness, activity and assemblage composition, (2) foraging guild, separately considering the activity of forest, edge and open-space foragers, and (3) sonotype, given each sonotype activity. We hypothesise that increased forest size and canopy density (i.e., higher NDVI values), and decreased isolation positively influence sonotype richness and activity. Yet, the different foraging guilds are hypothesised to show contrasting responses. In particular, forest foragers are expected to respond positively to forest size, canopy density, and connectivity to the mainland and surrounding forest patches, while open-space and edge foragers are expected to show opposite responses.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Study area

This study was conducted within the insular fragmented landscape of the Kenyir Lake and its surroundings in peninsular Malaysia. This artificial freshwater reservoir was formed in 1986 by the damming of the Kenyir river. The novel insular landscape occupies 260 000 ha and is composed of >340 islands ranging in size between 0.6 and 1428 ha embedded in the water matrix (Figure 1). Tropical humid forest on the islands and the adjacent mainland continuous forest are characterised by lowland and mid-elevation dipterocarp vegetation. The wide reservoir landscape, including the islands and surrounding mainland continuous forest, was subject to selective logging prior to damming (Muhammad Yusuf, 2005; Qie et al., 2011). This practice is still allowed in some parts of the lake's catchment area, but not in Taman Negara National Park, which borders its south-eastern side (Mariapan et al., 2017). This region experiences a wet season between November and March, and a dry season between May and October. Annual precipitation varies between 2700 and 4000 mm annually (Qie et al., 2011).

2.2 Study design and data collection

We selected 26 islands covering a range of sizes (min-max: 0.45 - 167.3 ha) and distances from the mainland (135 - 2748 m), in addition to two mainland sampling sites. This sampling strategy was set up to study the effects of forest size and isolation independently, i.e. maintaining a low correlation between these variables (r = -0.36 when considering island size and distance to mainland, r = -0.49 when considering log-transformed island size and distance to the mainland). Bat acoustic surveys were carried out between September 8th and October 13th 2019, using Audiomoth recorders (Hill et al., 2018) set on a sampling rate of 384 kHz and the gain to the second setting ("med"). This sampling period has been selected to avoid the severe monsoons typical of this region, and thus scaping any rain-induced deterioration of the acoustic recording. We deployed one recorder in each sampling

- 171 site and recorded for six hours, a sampling effort deemed adequate when aiming to
- 172 detect bat populations' and assemblages' response to habitat modification (López-
- 173 Baucells et al., 2021). Recordings were divided into two time periods starting 30
- minutes before sunset and ending 30 minutes after sunrise: from 18:00 to 22:00, and
- from 04:00 to 06:00 (Hayes, 1997), covering the two peaks of bat activity at dusk and
- dawn (Fenton, 1970). Each recorder was attached to a tree, positioned 2 metres
- above the ground and, to minimise any uncontrolled impact from edge effects,
- placed as inland as possible relative to island size, i.e., between 14 and 123 m from
- the edge (median: 50 m).

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2.3 Acoustic analysis

- 181 Using the software Kaleidoscope Version 5.4.7 (Wildlife Acoustics, 2019), we split
- the recorded sequences into 5-second recordings (Torrent et al., 2018). The same
- software was used to filter the sequences containing sounds with a minimum
- 184 frequency of 10 kHz and a maximum frequency of 250 kHz, and a pulse length
- between 2 and 500 ms. Among these sequences, only those containing one bat
- pass, i.e., at least two pulses of the same sonotype were kept for subsequent
- analysis (Torrent et al., 2018).

Prior to the acoustic analysis, we first compiled a list of all species of insectivorous bat known to occur in peninsular Malaysia (Lim et al., 2014; Nor Zalipah et al., 2019). Secondly, we collated reference calls for these species. We did so by conducting a literature survey using the Web of Science platform, between September and November 2021. We searched for publications by each species' name followed by the country name: we favoured reference calls obtained in our study area in order to avoid any potential geographical variation in the call parameters. For those species we could not find any reference calls, we used the reference calls available in the bat call library Chirovox (Görföl et al., 2022) (Supporting file 1). We therefore matched the call type of the species present in peninsular Malaysia to one of the sonotypes described in Yoh et al. (2022) for bat species in Malaysian Borneo, namely CF, FM, FMqCF1, FMqCF2, FMqCF3, FMqCF4, FMqCF5, QCF and LF sonotypes. Using start and end frequency, frequency of maximum energy, duration and interpulse interval as defined in Russo & Jones (2002), we classified the calls into one of these nine sonotypes. Given their very distinct echolocation parameters, the CF calls belonging to the genera Rhinolophus and Hipposideros could be identified to the species level.

As the shape of the echolocation calls reflects the physical constraints encountered by the bats, we were able to classify bat sonotypes into three foraging guilds: (1) the constant-frequency and FM calls represent forest foragers, (2) FMqCF4, FMqCF5 and QCF represent edge foragers, and (3) LF, FMqCF2 and FMqCF3 calls represent open-space foragers (Yoh et al., 2022). Social calls could not be identified to the sonotype level and were treated as assemblage-level activity.

2.4 Patch variables

- 212 Patch variables were obtained from a georeferenced LANDSAT 5 image which was
- 213 transformed into a land/water matrix using an unsupervised classification on the
- 214 software ArcGIS (ESRI, 2011). We then used the "landscapemetrics" R package
- 215 (Hesselbarth et al., 2019) to extract: (1) island size (area; ha), (2) shortest Euclidean

216 distance to the mainland (dist.main; m), (3) shortest Euclidean distance to the 217 nearest neighbour island or mainland (dist.neigh; m), (4) island shape (shape), defined as the ratio between the patch perimeter and the hypothetical minimum 218 perimeter of this patch, i.e. the perimeter of a maximally compact patch (McGarigal & 219 220 Cushman, 2002), (5) the normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), and (6) 221 distance between the recorder and the forest edge (dist.edge: m). Given that the 222 mainland continuous forest sites are characterised by an extensive forest coverage non-isolated area, we attributed these sites with the closest possible values to 223 224 'reality'. This included area values of one order of magnitude higher than the largest 225 island (1670 ha) and zero distances to either the mainland or the nearest neighbour. 226 To streamline, we refer to the area of both islands and mainland size as 'forest area'. 227 NDVI and shape were calculated as for the remaining sampling sites but considering 228 a 1000 m buffer centred in the sampling site and excluding water.

2.5 Data analysis

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Assemblage-level metrics include sonotype richness, activity, and assemblage composition. Sonotype richness was defined as the number of sonotypes: this measure is representative of the diversity of call traits present at a site. Activity i.e., the number of bat passes, was used as a proxy for abundance. Although activity is widely used as a surrogate for abundance when studying echolocating bats (see for instance Charbonnier et al., 2016; Ellerbrok et al., 2022), this method may overestimate abundance due to the possibility of multiple detection of a single individual (Gibb et al., 2019; Kunz et al., 2009). Yet, it offers an effective tool for the detection of damming effects (e.g., López-Bosch et al., 2021 and Colombo et al., 2022), as well as other human-induced disturbances on bat communities (Mena et al., 2022; Williams-Guillén & Perfecto, 2011). Assemblage composition was summarised as a single variable using a Non-Metric Multi-Dimensional Scaling (NMDS) ordination. This analysis was performed considering sonotype activity and using a Bray-Curtis similarity matrix (stress = 0.130). The scores of the first axis of the NMDS composed the assemblage composition metric. Guild activity was calculated by summing the activity of the individual sonotypes respectively belonging to the forest, open-space and edge guilds (Table 1). Sonotype-level responses were examined for the sonotypes recorded in more than 10 sites and which had more than 50 bat passes. This threshold was intended to ensure a normal distribution of the residuals, as well as homoscedasticity. Social and unidentified calls were only included in the assemblage-level analysis. Among the sonotypes that met the threshold to be analysed, namely FMqCF2, FMqCF3, FMqCF4, FMqCF5, LF, R. trifoliatus, H. diadema and QCF, H. diadema and FMqCF2 had unequal error variances and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

We first accounted for spatial autocorrelation by applying Mantel tests using the R package "ade4" (Dray & Dufour, 2007). These tests correlate geographic distance between sampling sites and each response variable as well as the residuals of each model introduced in the subsequent section. We found no spatial autocorrelation (p > 0.05) in all instances. We also examined the pairwise correlation between patch variables using Pearson correlation coefficients. *Shape* and *area* ($\log_{10} x$) (r = 0.720), as well as *area* ($\log_{10} x$) and *NDVI* were highly correlated (r = 0.800). Given the overall importance of area explaining biodiversity patterns in insular forest fragments (Jones et al., 2021), we preferred to keep this metric to enable comparisons with other studies, whereas *shape* was excluded from

subsequent analysis. Due to the lack of knowledge on the effects of canopy closeness on bats in this region, we chose to also keep *NDVI* in subsequent analyses. However, *area* (log₁₀ x) and *NDVI* were not included together in a model. Collinearity between predictor variables was also examined using Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs), with no variable showing substantial collinearity (VIF>5) (Dormann et al., 2013).

We then analysed the combined effects of patch variables – area, dist.main, dist.neigh and NDVI – on (1) sonotype richness, activity and assemblage composition; (2) activity of forest, edge, and open-space sonotypes, and (3) the individual activity of eight sonotypes. To do so, we applied Linear Models (LMs) to each of these response variables, whose distribution was scrutinised prior to the analysis. The response variables regarding overall assemblage, guild and sonotype level activity, as well as forest area were log-transformed. Although all models were run with a gaussian error distribution, we initially considered a negative binomial distribution for the overall, guild-level and sonotype-level activity responses. Given that none of the models addressing individual sonotypes activity nor forest guild activity converged with a negative binomial error distribution, and that the distribution of these variables' residuals was closer to a normal distribution when using a log-transformation with a gaussian error structure, we chose to retain that transformation and error structure in the models. We further considered dist.edge as a covariate in each model, aiming to control for any eventual effect of distance to the forest edge.

A candidate model set including all possible combinations of patch variables (including the covariate dist.edge), except combinations involving area ($log_{10} x$) and NDVI in the same model, was generated using the dredge function of the "MuMIn" R package (Barton, 2022). All models were ranked by Akaike Information Criteria corrected for small sample sizes (AICc: Burnham & Anderson (2002). To account for model uncertainty in multi-model inference, we used a model-averaging approach considering the most parsimonious models, i.e. those having the lowest AICc within a Δ AICc <2 (Δ AICc = AICc $_i$ – AICc $_{min}$, i being the ith model derived from the dredge) (Froidevaux et al., 2022). We report model average estimates along with their 95% confidence intervals (CIs) which were considered significant if not overlapping zero (Nakagawa & Cuthill, 2007). Assumptions about the normal distribution of the variables and their residuals were verified using the R packages "performance" (Lüdecke et al., 2021) and "Dharma" (Hartig, 2022). All data analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2022).

3. Results

In total, we recorded 21 197 bat passes from 16 different sonotypes: 10 forest, three edge and three open-space foragers (Table 1). Sonotype richness varied between 4 and 13 sonotypes per site, activity varied between 43 and 3351 bat passes per six hours recording. Activity varied greatly across sampling sites $(43 - 3351, 757.03 \pm 744.18)$, and among foraging guilds $(0 - 689, 101.89 \pm 174.73)$ for forest foragers, 2 $- 2923, 489.39 \pm 698.75$ for edge foragers, and $11 - 641, 130.39 \pm 144.01$ for open-space foragers). While the edge forager FMqCF4 and the open-space forager LF were present at every site, the following forest foragers were found at only one site: *Rhinolophus refulgens* (island 13), CF.46 (island 25), *Hipposideros cervinus*, *H. kunzi* and *H. bicolor* (CF A) (Tables 1 and S1). According to the NMDS, low values in the first axis were mostly associated with larger forest sites and forest foragers (*H. cervinus*, *H. kunzi*, *H. bicolor*, FM), while high values were associated with smaller

- islands, as well as with edge (FMqCF4, FMqCF5), open-space (FMqCF3), and forest
- foragers (R. refulgens, R. affinis) (Figure 2). Overall, 988 bat passes could not be
- 314 identified to either the guild or to the sonotype level, including 981 bat passes
- 315 corresponding to social calls (Table 1). R. trifoliatus was likely greatly influential on
- the response of the forest guild: being present in less than half the forest sites, it
- accounted for nearly 80% of the forest guild's activity (Table 1). Most of the FM
- 318 sonotype activity (71.42%) was recorded on the mainland sites.

3.1 Overall assemblage responses

- Sonotype richness increased with NDVI ($\beta = 0.819 \pm 0.409$, p = 0.045, CI _{min} = 0.017,
- 321 CI max = 1.620), while total bat activity was unaffected by the patch variables
- 322 considered (Table S2). Assemblage composition varied among sites based on their
- 323 size ($\beta = -0.536 \pm 0.137$, CI min = -0.817, CI max = -0.254), p < 0.001) (Table S2,
- 324 Figure 3D, I and Figure 4).

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3.2 Guild-level responses

- Forest sonotypes were more active at sites with higher NDVI ($\beta = 1.476 \pm 0.439$, p =
- 328 0.002, CI $_{min}$ = 0.616, CI $_{max}$ = 2.335). The activity of forest sonotypes also increased
- with decreasing distance to the closest neighbouring forest site ($\beta = -1.468 \pm 0.439$,
- 330 p = 0.002, CI min = -2.328, CI max = -0.608), while edge sonotypes activity decreased
- with increasing both island size ($\beta = -1.050 \pm 0.366$, p = 0.004, CI min = -1.768, CI
- 332 max = -0.332) and distances to edge ($\beta = -1.045 \pm 0.355$, p = 0.003, CI min = -1.741,
- 333 CI $_{max} = -0.350$). None of the tested variables had a significant effect on open-space
- 334 sonotypes (Table S2, Figure 3O Q and Figure 4). Unlike all other response
- variables, only one model was selected for the activity of forest foragers (Dist.neigh,
- 336 *NDVI*, AICc = 132.129) (Table S3).

3.3 Sonotype-level responses

- 338 Among all the six individual sonotypes, only FMgCF4 and *R. trifoliatus* showed a
- 339 significant response to the tested patch variables. FMqCF4 sonotype showed higher
- 340 activity in smaller islands ($\beta = -1.127 \pm 0.365$, p = 0.002, Cl min = -1.841, Cl max = -
- 341 0.412), while R. trifoliatus was more active on larger forest sites ($\beta = 1.487 \pm 0.446$, p
- = 0.001, CI min = 0.614, CI max = 2.361) (Table S2, Figure 4 and S1).

4. Discussion

- A number of studies have demonstrated that habitat loss and insular fragmentation
- cause species local extinctions across lowland tropical forests (Gibson et al., 2013;
- Moore et al., 2022; Palmeirim et al., 2022; Pinto Henriques et al., 2021). Here, we
- 347 contribute to fill an important knowledge gap by accordingly demonstrating overall
- 348 negative bats response to dam-induced disturbance across an insular fragmented
- landscape in Southeast Asia. Our results highlight the role of canopy density driving
- 350 the number of sonotypes, whereas forest area dictated which sonotypes were able to
- persist. Our guild-level analysis revealed that forest foragers were associated with
- denser forest structures, likely representing higher habitat quality for this guild, and
- were negatively affected by increasing isolation from neighbouring landmasses. In
- contrast, edge foragers seemed to benefit from island shrinkage. Fragmentation
- effects were not so clearly observed at the sonotype-level, with only two of the six

sonotypes analysed responding to patch variables, namely to forest area which had a positive effect on the forest forager *R. trifoliatus* and a negative effect on the edge sonotype FMqCF4.

Effects of forest area

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Forest area did not predict sonotype richness at our study site. Owing to their high 360 correlation, habitat quality and forest area were precluded from being combined in 361 models, and models including habitat quality were more parsimonious than those 362 including area: the absence of area effects is therefore more likely a consequence of 363 the study design rather than a proper lack of area effects. In fact, a large body of 364 evidence reports that area affects bat richness in fragmented insular (Luypaert et al., 365 2023), and non-insular systems (Rocha et al., 2017). This pattern holds true for 366 367 several taxa on reservoir islands (Palmeirim et al., 2022), including dung-beetles (Qie et al., 2011), primates and ungulates (Yong, 2015), and birds (Yong et al., 368 2011) surveyed in nearly the same islands in Kenvir. Notwithstanding, bat 369 assemblage composition varied along the gradient of forest area, with edge foragers 370 371 being particularly active on smaller islands. This trend was further reflected at the sonotype level by the edge forager FMqCF4 and the forest forager R. trifoliatus, both 372 373 of whom displayed contrasting responses to forest area, the former being negative, 374 and the latter being positive. These responses were expected given that small 375 islands tend to be edge-dominated. The extensive variation in species-specific 376 home-range size may have further influenced the ability of some species to use the 377 smaller fragments: while that of most edge foragers (5 – 210 ha) and R. trifoliatus (5 378 ha) are notably small, the majority of forest foragers have a vast home-ranges, 379 reaching up to 2199 ha for some species (Wilson et al., 2010). Given their tendency 380 to avoid flying across the water matrix (Meyer & Kalko, 2008), forest foraging species, mostly belonging to the FM sonotype, were therefore rarely recorded on 381 smaller islands. Yet, as a caveat to this study, in small islands, detectors had to be 382 placed closer to edges given the lack of forest interior. It is therefore possible that the 383 detectors on small islands, being mechanically closer to forest edges, recorded a 384 higher activity of edge foragers. This is further supported by the negative relationship 385 386 between edge foragers activity and the Dist.edge. In any case, this would still demonstrate the preferential use of edges by this bat guild (López-Bosch et al., 387 2021). In contrast, our results show that the forest forager R. trifoliatus responds 388 positively to forest area, suggesting that this sonotype requires greater habitat 389 390 complexity associated with larger areas of forest (Benchimol & Peres, 2015a).

Effects of habitat quality

Despite the absence of clear effects of forest size, canopy closeness, as indicated by the NDVI, promoted an increase in the number of bat sonotypes and forest foragers activity across the Kenyir landscape. A bat species' response to habitat quality is likely influenced by the intrinsic habitat characteristics such as 3D forest structure or canopy ruggedness, ultimately impacting which species are able to use each site (Froidevaux et al., 2016). Our study landscape has been subject to intensive selective logging prior to the construction of the dam (Qie et al., 2011). Indeed, evidence for previous logging is still noticeable in the area, with logging trails and canopy holes being observed *in-situ*, resulting in a low but variable overall NDVI on the islands and surrounding continuous forest sites. Whilst the effects of logging on bat species richness seem to be limited both in the Neotropics (Meyer et al., 2016) and in the Paleotropics (Struebig et al., 2013), logging appears to strongly influence

405 assemblage composition, edge species being indicative of repeatedly logged sites 406 (Peters et al., 2006). Yet, the effects of logging on biodiversity depend on the intensity and extraction methods (Burivalova et al., 2014), and further investigations 407 408 regarding the effects of logging intensity in the context of insular forest fragments are needed to further our understanding of how logging may drive bat sonotype richness. 409 Notwithstanding the potential effects of logging, forest insularisation led to the 410 411 creation of edges, whose deleterious effects on vegetation include increased exposure to wind-throws, culminating in shifts towards disturbance-adapted pioneer 412 413 trees (Benchimol & Peres, 2015a; Santo-Silva et al., 2021). While sites with low 414 canopy closeness can be widely used by edge foragers, only those sites harbouring increased NDVI may represent suitable habitat for manoeuvrable forest dependent 415 species that are further adapted to echolocate in more cluttered environments 416 417 (Froidevaux et al., 2016; Suarez-Rubio et al., 2018). By allowing forest foragers to persist, habitat quality contributes to maintain bat diversity, as also observed for 418 other biological groups, e.g., large-sized mammals and reptiles (Oliveira et al., 2020: 419 420 Silva et al., 2022). This is further supported by the increase in forest bat activity we 421 observed in denser canopies. Higher NDVI values may also be associated with higher availability of mature trees that provide roosting sites for species such as R. 422 trifoliatus, R. sedulus, K. papillosa and K. pellucida, all of which depend on these 423 424 structures to rest and thus to persist. For instance, in Malaysia, the absence of tree 425 cavities due to forest disturbance was associated with the decline of the forest 426 foragers Kerivoula sp. (Struebig et al., 2013). Our findings reiterate the importance of 427 habitat quality as a key driver of species diversity in fragmented landscapes (Armstrong et al., 2022; Poniatowski et al., 2018). 428

Effects of isolation

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430 Contrary to our expectations, isolation was not an important variable explaining bat assemblage-level responses. These results contrast with an insular fragmented 431 432 landscape in Panama, where isolation to the mainland was the main predictor of bat richness (Meyer & Kalko, 2008). However, our results are in agreement with findings 433 from a non-insular Malaysian fragmented landscape, where isolation has also been 434 435 found to be a poor prediction of bat richness (Brändel et al., 2020). The lack of isolation effects may be related to the overall small distance separating most of the 436 437 sampling sites, and the overall size of the lake, as the home ranges for most local 438 species exceed the distance separating most of the study sites (Wilson et al., 2010). 439 Nevertheless, forest foragers were more active in sites less isolated from neighbouring landmasses, which might be due to morphological constraints (Norberg 440 441 & Rayner, 1987). Indeed, forest foragers have a wing morphology characterised by a 442 low aspect ratio (wingspan²/wing area) and a low wing loading (body mass/wing area) (Norberg & Rayner, 1987). Although this characteristic allows them to have a 443 444 slow and highly manoeuvrable flight, it also makes flight over open spaces 445 particularly energetically demanding (Altringham, 2011; Bader et al., 2015). Furthermore, the absence of distance-to-mainland effects in favour of distance-to-446 neighbour effects for forest foragers underlines the value of intermediary islands to 447 448 act as stepping-stones for forest bats to cross the water matrix and reach more remote islands. This idea is supported by Saura et al. (2014) who also stress that 449 450 these intermediate islands need to be sufficiently large and of high quality in order to 451 act as stepping-stones.

Limitations and potential caveats

453 Our results emphasise the valuable use of passive acoustic monitoring techniques to survey bat assemblages, further allowing us to examine bat responses at multiple 454 levels. However, the use of sonotype richness instead of species richness likely 455 biased the estimated sonotype richness towards forest species. Indeed, while the CF 456 calls produced by forest foragers could be identified to the species level, other 457 sonotypes including FMqCF, QCF and LF contained multiple species. Likewise. 458 459 given the similarity of the ecological constraints faced by edge foragers, the calls produced by the species belonging to this guild can only be separated between three 460 sonotypes (FMqCF4, FMqCF5 and QCF). For this reason, our results might 461 462 underestimate the effects of habitat loss and insular fragmentation on insectivorous bats, which is further enhanced by the fact that larger forest sites – expected to 463 464 harbour higher species diversity – were proportionally less sampled. In addition, as 465 species detectability is a function of call intensity (Hayes, 2000), forest bats producing low-intensity FM calls such as Vespertilionidae (e.g., Kerivoula and Myotis 466 spp.) tend to be under-detected (Waters & Jones, 1995). This might further explain 467 the relatively weak responses observed at the sonotype-level, which should 468 469 therefore be interpreted with caution. Likewise, even the most commonly used devices in bat detection, including Audiomoths, tend to lack the sensitivity required to 470 detect some of the high intensity calls emitted by smallest-bodied bats such as H. 471 472 cervinus, H. larvatus and H. bicolor (Kingston, 2010): although common in 473 Peninsular Malaysia (Lim et al., 2014), these species have probably been under detected in our study. Live trapping remains the most efficient method to monitor 474 475 these species (Kingston, 2013), and still, studies using these trapping methods have 476 highlighted the high sensitivity of these forest genera to forest disturbance (Huang et al., 2019). 477

Conservation implications

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SE Asia may lose over 74% of its original forest cover by the end of the century. putting forest-dependent species at tremendous risk (Sodhi et al., 2004). Forest foragers from the Kenvir lake are no exception: being absent from the smallest islands, they showed low activity in isolated and degraded forest patches, which nevertheless make up the majority of the landscape of Lake Kenvir. Additionally. three forest species, namely H. bicolor, H. cervinus and H. kunzi, were only found on the mainland. Our results suggest that conservation efforts should target forest bats which, given their forest-adapted morphology and the rapid vanishing of their foraging habitat, are particularly extinction prone (Jones et al., 2003; Safi & Kerth, 2004). The FM sonotype, of which most potential representatives such as Kerivoula. intermedia, K. pellucida or Nycteris tragata are listed as near threatened (Senawi & Ahmad, 2021), was mostly active in the mainland, and completely absent from 21 islands. We therefore stress that bats highly dependent on forest can only persist in large undisturbed forest tracts. The independent presence of dense canopies and connection to nearby landmasses does not guarantee the use by forest bats. Indeed, only patches that are large, well connected to the mainland, and harbouring a high habitat quality can serve as stepping-stones, and therefore allow less vagile species to commute over the water matrix (Saura et al., 2014). In insular forest patches, species are lost in a sustained and delayed manner according to the time elapsed since isolation, a process referred to as an "extinction debt" (Jones et al., 2016). Furthermore, these islands suffer an inevitable vegetation decay (Benchimol & Peres, 2015a). In line with (Jones et al., 2016), our results suggest that islands

501 should not be used as conservation units for mitigation purposes due to the imminent extinction debt. Instead, conservation efforts should prioritise maintaining mainland 502 habitat quality, for instance by minimising logging activity in these highly forested 503 504 areas (Hari Poudval et al., 2018; Harvey & Brais, 2011), This can be achieved by 505 legally protecting the islands and surrounding mainland continuous forest/wider reservoir landscape as to minimise disturbances. Such measures have successfully 506 507 helped minimising further human activities in a Brazilian Biological reserve encompassing part of a mega-dam (Benchimol & Peres, 2015a, 2015b). In addition, 508 509 future hydropower developments should consider how dam placement is likely to 510 affect the creation of different island systems. These developments should aim to reduce the creation of a myriad of small, isolated, and habitat-degraded forest 511 fragments, for instance by targeting craggy locations over flat areas, therefore 512 513 drastically minimising the flooded area. The biological impacts of damming tend to be largely underestimated, as current environmental impact assessment methods 514 poorly predict the extent and location of dam-induced flooding, possibly leading to a 515 64.5 % increase of the flooded surface compared to initial predictions (Cochrane et 516 517 al., 2017). Working towards a more accurate planning is therefore essential to 518 minimise the flooding area, avoid the flooding of ecologically valuable zones, and 519 adequately locate future dams.

5. Conclusions

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521 Hydropower development is set to massively expand across Southeast Asian 522 forests, with energy production expected to increase threefold by 2035 (Petinrin & Shaaban, 2015; Tang et al., 2019). In Malaysia alone, at least four additional major 523 dams will soon be constructed (> 34 000 MW) (Foo. 2015). Coupled with a steadily 524 525 declining share of forest in this region, these threats put insectivorous bat assemblages at risk, especially for forest-dependent species. Here, we showed that 526 canopy density played a central role in promoting both sonotype richness, 527 528 persistence and activity of forest foragers, while this guild was negatively impacted 529 by isolation to -neighbouring forest patches. Forest area further affected the 530 assemblage composition, larger forest patches being associated with forestdominated assemblages, and smaller patches being associated with edge-foragers. 531 Large, dense, well connected forest fragments still supported a subset of the 532 533 mainlands' assemblage diversity. Yet, our results suggested that preserving a high canopy density, especially in the mainland, is essential to serve the preservation of 534 535 forest-dependent species. Keeping forest disturbances such as logging minimum and developing more efficient tools to predict the spatial extent of future dam's 536 537 effects is therefore a priority for the preservation of bat assemblages in SE Asia.

Acknowledgements:

- We are grateful for the fieldwork assistance of David L´opez-Bosch and Ahmad Faizul Bin Zulkifli during data collection. We thank the Economic Planning Unit, Department of Prime Minister, Malaysia for
- 542 permission to conduct research and Department of Wildlife and National
- 542 permission to conduct research and Department of Wildlife and Nationa 543 Parks Peninsular Malaysia for permission to work in Kenyir (JPHL&TN
- Parks Peninsular Malaysia for permission to work in Kenyir (JPHL&I
- 544 (IP):100-34/1.24 Jld 14(57). AFP was supported by the Outstanding
- Postdoctoral Fellowship of the Southern University of Science and
- Technology (SUSTech), and is currently funded by the European Union's
- Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement

- No. 854248. L.G. was supported by the China Thousand Young
- 549 Talents Program (K18291101), as a Guangdong Government distinguished
- expert (K20293101), and by the Shenzhen Government
- 551 (Y01296116). JSPF is funded by the Leverhulme Trust through an earlycareer
- fellowship (Award Reference: ECF-2020-571). NY was supported
- by the UK's Natural Environmental Research Council (NERC) via a
- 554 EnvEast DTP scholarship (NE/L002582/1). JS was supported by National
- 555 Science Fund USA through Texas Tech University (ST-2019-006)
- and Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education (FRGS/1/2020/WAB11/
- 557 UKM/02/3).

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Figures and Tables:

Colour should be used for figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and S1

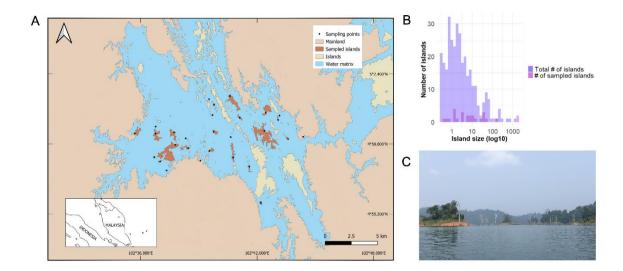


Figure 1. Map of the Kenyir Lake (A) Location of the study area and sampling sites in the Kenyir lake, peninsular Malaysia. The solid dots depict each of the 28 sampling sites. (B) Distribution of island sizes in Kenyir lake. (C) Photo of the Kenyir Lake. *Two columns fitting image*

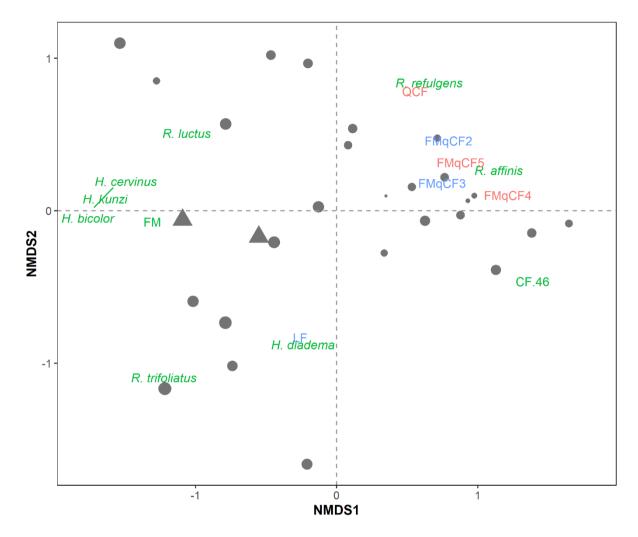


Figure 2. Non-Metric Multi-Dimensional Scaling (NMDS) ordination plot denoting both sampling sites and sonotypes. Sampling sites are represented by circles, matching the islands which are sized proportionally to their size (log₁₀ x), and triangles correspond to the mainland continuous forest sites. Sonotypes are represented by their name and colour-coded according to the corresponding foraging guild: forest (in green), edge (red) and open-space (blue) (for further details regarding each sonotype, see Table 1). Given that the sonotypes *H. kunzi*, *H. cervinus* and *H. bicolor* are overlapping, for the sake of clarity, the position of these sonotypes is replaced by a green line and the sonotypes labels are separated. *Single column fitting image*

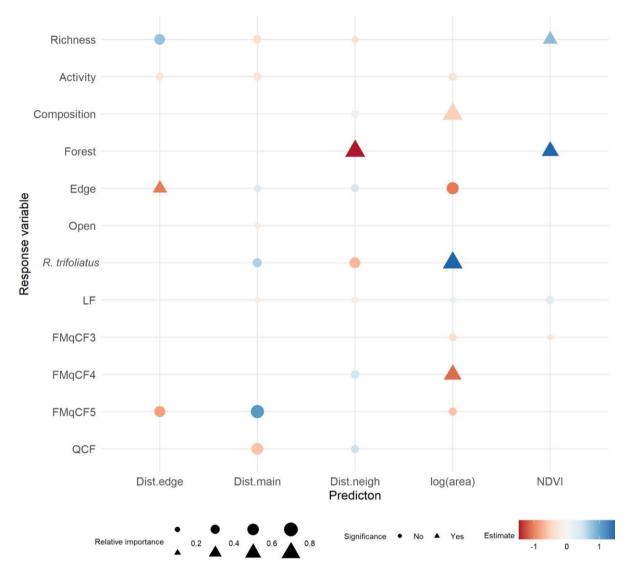


Figure 3. Results of the model averaging procedure. Response variables are shown on the y axis, and predictor variables are shown on the x axis. The variables that were retained in the model selection and averaging appear at the intersection between response and predictor variables. The value of each estimate is depicted with a colour gradient, negative estimates being increasingly red, and positive estimates being increasingly blue. The significance of each selected variable is shown with point shape: significant variables are represented with a triangle, and non-significant variables are shown with a circle. The relative importance of each selected variable within the averaged model is shown with point size, smaller points having a lower relative importance than larger points. *Two columns fitting image*

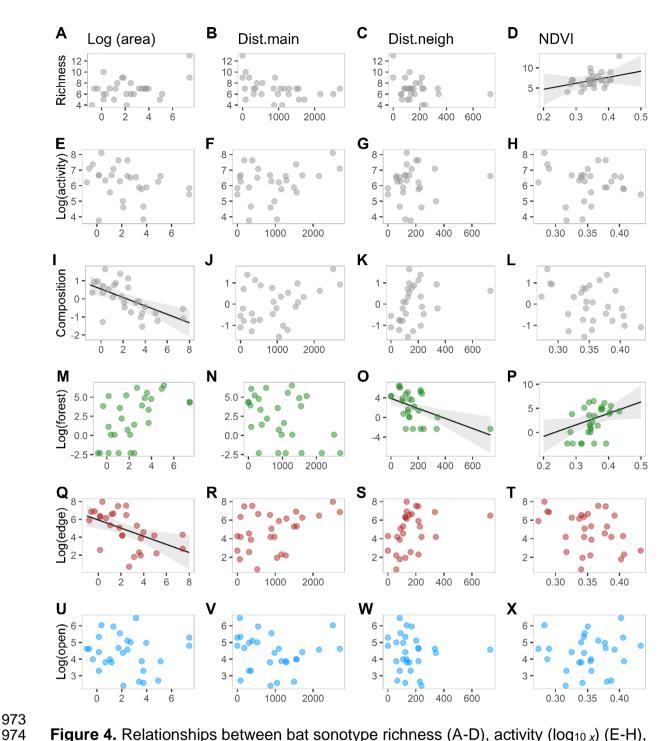


Figure 4. Relationships between bat sonotype richness (A-D), activity ($\log_{10} x$) (E-H), assemblage composition (axis 1 of the NMDS) (I-L), and the activity of forest ($\log_{10} x$) (M-P), edge ($\log_{10} x$) (Q-T), and open-space foraging bats ($\log_{10} x$) (U-X) and *Area* ($\log_{10} x$) (A, E, I, M, Q, U), distance to the mainland (*Dist.main*) (B, F, J, N, R, V), Distance to neighbour (*Dist.neigh*) (C, G, K, O, S, W) and *NDVI* (D, H, L, P, T, X). In each panel, the solid black line is the prediction given by the averaged model obtained from the dredge, and the shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval. The predictions of the selected model were only shown for significant variables.

Two columns fitting image

Table 1. List of all sonotypes identified during the acoustic bat surveys across the insular fragmented landscape of the Kenyir Lake, peninsular Malaysia. For each sonotype, we indicate the potential species matching that sonotype, corresponding foraging guild, total activity (number of bat passes), and number of sampling sites in which each of the sonotypes was recorded. Bat passes that could not be identified were labelled as "unknown".

Sonotype name	Potential species	Guild	# of bat passes	# of sites occupied (%)
H. diadema	Hipposideros diadema	Forest	392	11 (39.3%)
R. affinis	Rhinolophus affinis	Forest	146	7 (25%)
R. trifoliatus	Rhinolophus trifoliatus	Forest	2268	12 (42.8%)
R. luctus	Rhinolophus luctus	Forest	6	2 (7.1%)
R. refulgens	Rhinolophus refulgens	Forest	2	1 (3.6%)
H. kunzi	Hipposideros kunzi	Forest	1	1 (3.6%)
H. cervinus	Hipposideros cervinus	Forest	1	1 (3.6%)
H. bicolor	Hipposideros bicolor	Forest	2	1 (3.6%)
CF.46	Hipposideros lekaguli ²	Forest	1	1 (3.6%)
FM	Species from the subfamilies Kerivoulinae and Murininae, Nycteris tragata, Coelops frithii, C. robinsoni, Lyroderma lyra, Megaderma spasma	Forest	35	6 (21.4%)
LF	Arielulus circumdatus, A. cuprosus, Chaerephon johorensis, Chaerephon plicata, Cheiromeles torquatus, Mops mops,	Open- space	2048	28 (100%)
FMqCF2	Hesperoptenus blanfordi, H. doriae, H. tomesi	Open- space	162	11 (39.3%)
FMqCF3	Pipistrellus stenopterus	Open- space	1441	27 (96.4%)
FMqCF4	Tylonycteris robustula, Glischropus tylopus, Hesperoptenus blanfordi, P. tenuis, P. javanicus, Myotis adversus, M. horsfieldii, M. hasseltii, M. montivagus, Scotophilus kuhli, Miniopterus magnater,	Edge	13 195	28 (100%)
FMqCF5	Glischropus tylopus, Tylonycteris pachypus, T. robustula,	Edge	389	15 (53.6%)

² This species has not been sampled around our study site to our knowledge

QCF	Myotis ridleyi, M. muricola, M. ater, M. siligronensis, Pipistrellus tenuis Emballonura monticola,	Edge	119	16 (57.1%)
QOI	Taphozous melanopogon, T. longimanus,	Luge	119	10 (37.170)
Unknown	Saccolaomius saccolamius,		988	26 (92.8%)