

## Bats Already Had Problems. Now, Add Taxidermy Listings on Etsy and eBay.

Rachel Nuwer · 7/25/2024



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Some of the bright orange bats were framed in shadow boxes, their boldly striped wings spread wide. Others were mounted in miniature coffins with shiny fittings. A few were promoted as Halloween or Christmas gifts.

Bigger, more charismatic species like elephants and tigers usually come to mind when the illicit animal trade is mentioned. But a [study published this month](#) has revealed a flourishing black market in stuffed and mounted bats that, until now, has gone largely unnoticed. In the United States, especially, bats are openly sold, intact or as skeletons, on e-commerce sites like Etsy, eBay and Amazon.

“If people aren’t discerning, they might think they’re buying products that are sustainably sourced, but they’re not,” said Nistara Randhawa, an epidemiologist and data scientist at the University of California, Davis, and a co-author of the study, which appeared in *The European Journal of Wildlife Research*. “Instead, they could be inadvertently supporting the population decline of this bat species in the wild.”

Image

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\$59.00

Kerivoula picta  
bat Indonesia

BicBugs ★

✓ Arrives soon

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Pay in 4 installments

★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
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We have a r

A listing this month on Etsy, one of three e-commerce sites that researchers monitored for bat specimens.

Other researchers first noticed [a worrisome number of bats for sale on eBay in 2014](#). Dr. Randhawa and her colleagues followed up on that observation with a more systematic study. From October to December 2022, they regularly searched for listings on eBay, Etsy and Amazon. Many types of bats appeared in the results, but they focused primarily on *Kerivoula picta*, a species from Asia known as the painted woolly bat or fire bat, because its distinctive orange fur and striped wings make it easy to identify.

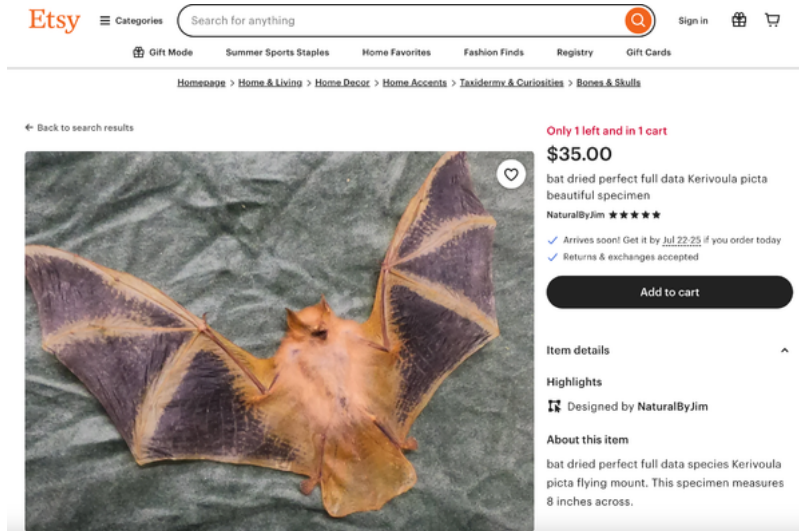
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In 2020, [conservationists declared \*K. picta\* “near threatened”](#) after determining that the overall population had very likely declined by up to 25 percent over the past 15 years. They cited online demand for specimens and skulls as one of the primary threats driving that decline.

In the search, the group found a total of 856 bats listed for sale online, a quarter of which were *K. picta*. Etsy accounted for half of the listings, eBay for 45 percent and Amazon for 5 percent.

Most sellers were in the United States, and some indicated that specimens had been imported from Indonesia. Many claimed that their bats were sustainably sourced or bred in captivity. One Etsy seller even stated that purchasing from them helps to “prevent extinction and support the fight against deforestation and habitat destruction worldwide.”

Image



A listing this month. Researchers found a total of 856 listings for bats during the study period, from October to December 2022.

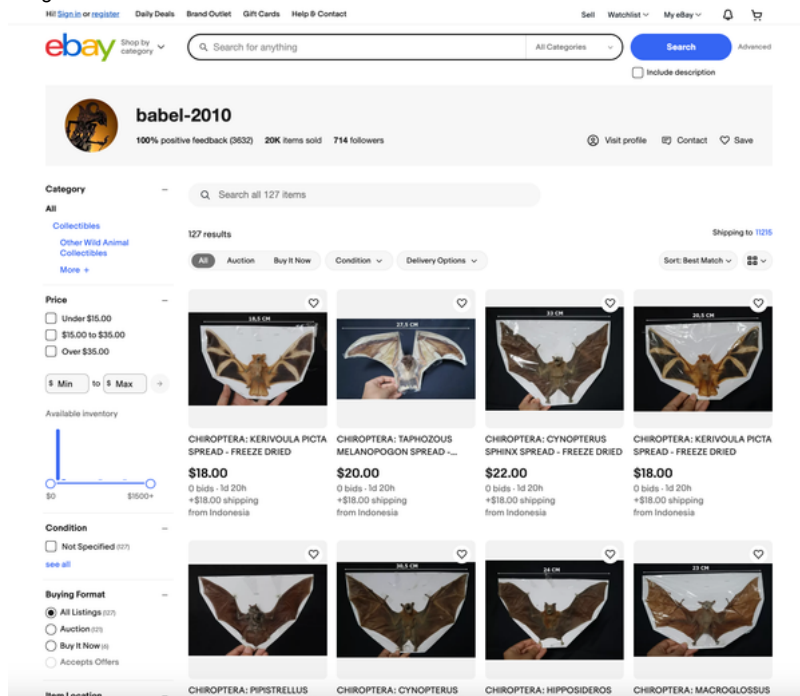
Such claims are “rubbish,” said Chris Shepherd, a co-author of the study and executive director of Monitor, a wildlife trade research group that focuses on lesser-known species. “It’s a frivolous and purely luxury trade,” he added.

*K. picta*, like the vast majority of other bat species, has yet to be evaluated for inclusion in international wildlife trade regulations. But the species is illegal to hunt or sell in most, if not all, of the respective countries where it occurs, including Indonesia, said Joanna Coleman, an ecologist and conservation biologist at Queens College, part of the City University of New York. She was also a co-author of the findings.

This would make *K. picta* illegal to trade in the United States under the Lacey Act, which prohibits the importing and sale of wildlife that was unlawfully obtained in its home country. “We’re talking about a fundamentally illegal activity,” Dr. Coleman said. “It’s also very unlikely to be sustainable.”

Amazon declined a request for comment about the study’s findings and what, if anything, the company does to limit illegal wildlife trade on its platform. Scott Overland, an eBay spokesman, said that the site prohibited the sale of all bats, “whether live, dead or taxidermy.”

### Image



An eBay seller’s page this month. It later disappeared from the site.

On Monday, after The Times sent eBay links to two listings of *K. picta* being advertised by a seller in Indonesia, the posts were removed. By Tuesday, one of the posts had reappeared, along with 36 other listings for bat specimens of

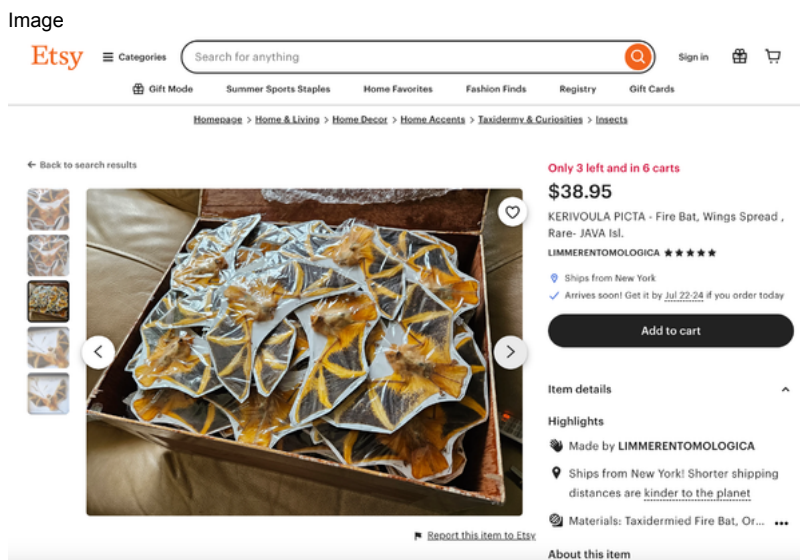
different species from the same seller. After the Times pointed this out, the seller's account disappeared.

"Users found attempting to list prohibited items may face consequences up to, and including, a permanent suspension," Mr. Overland said.

An Etsy spokesperson, who declined to be identified by name or quoted directly, said that taxidermy was allowed on the site but that sellers had to comply with the company's policy of prohibiting the sale of endangered or threatened wildlife. When asked whether Etsy planned to take any action against the sellers offering bats on the platform, the spokesperson said that it was the responsibility of sellers to know and follow the law.

The Times contacted several sellers with current listings for *K. picta* on Etsy and Amazon. One of the most active was listed as Charles Limmer. A Long Island resident with the same name has previously been [indicted on charges of wildlife trafficking](#). Mr. Limmer did not respond to a request for comment. The Etsy spokesperson later said that Mr. Limmer's account had been flagged for review.

NaturalByJim, an Etsy seller in Akron, Ohio, was the only one who responded. "These specimens were legally imported over 20 yrs ago," he wrote. "They have been stored in a freezer." Dr. Coleman noted that the Lacey Act was passed in 1900. The Times was unable to verify the seller's claim or to determine from where those bats had been imported.



Etsy accounted for half of the listings found by the researchers, eBay for 45 percent and Amazon for 5 percent.

Vincent Nijman, a wildlife trade researcher at Oxford Brookes University in England who was not involved in the research, noted that Etsy sellers in Oregon, Ohio, New York and Britain all advertised *K. picta* specimens with virtually the same packaging and mounting, even down to the pattern of staples used. This suggests that "they all come from the same supplier, which seems to be based in East Java," Dr. Nijman said.

Given the limited scope of the study, the findings were almost certainly an underestimate of the true extent of the bat trade, Dr. Coleman said. She said she had spotted *K. picta* specimens for sale on dozens of other websites and at curio shops.

For now, the findings highlight the fact that "just about any animal that can be traded will be traded, if money can be made," Dr. Nijman said. As with many other types of wildlife commerce, he added, there is "no evidence and no data to suggest it is sustainable or ethical."

Bat populations around the world already face myriad threats from climate change, habitat loss, persecution, wildlife disease, collisions with wind turbines and more, said Liam McGuire, an ecologist at the University of Waterloo in Ontario who was not involved in the research. "To see bat populations further threatened purely for decorative and aesthetic purposes is very concerning."