



Grey-Headed Flying Fox (Fruit Bat)

General information

The Grey-Headed Flying-Fox is one of four flying-fox species found on mainland Australia, and the only one commonly present in Victoria. They are ubiquitous across the Melbourne sky at dusk as they disperse from their colony campsite at Yarra Bend to travel tens of kilometres in search of food.

There are four other colonies across Victoria: Doveton, Geelong, Bairnsdale and Mallacoota.



Always play it safe

- Do not handle any bats
- Contact Wildlife Victoria for assistance
- If you are accidentally bitten or scratched by a bat seek medical attention immediately

Myths about health risks

Flying-foxes are not a significant threat to human health. While bats carry two diseases which can infect humans - Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) and Hendra virus - rates are low in the bat population and transmission is unlikely. ABLV is only a risk if you are bitten or scratched by an infected animal. Hendra virus requires transmission through a host (there are known cases of horses becoming infected and passing it on to a human).



We hope that by increasing your understanding and awareness of our beautiful wildlife, you feel empowered to deal with wildlife situations confidently in an informed, safe and appropriate manner. For support at any time, please call our emergency response service for advice on **03 8400 7300** or report the details on our website: www.wildlifevictoria.org.au.



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How you can help

Entanglement from fruit tree netting

Many unsuspecting bats landing in fruit trees draped with netting become entangled causing life threatening injuries.

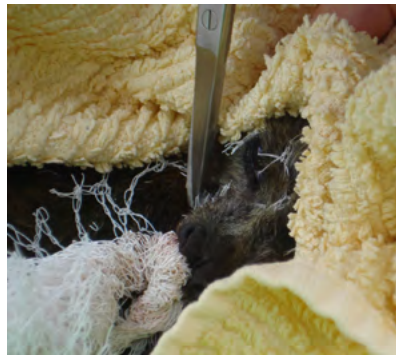


Choose the right netting:

- Go to www.fruittreenets.info for safe alternatives to standard netting.
- Use a shadecloth, or nets such as Fruit Saver, Hail Guard or Vege Net which are wildlife-friendly.
- As a guide, netting should be taut, secured to the ground, and the mesh diameter needs to be small enough (2mm is good) that you can't poke a finger through the holes.



Bat caught in netting



Wildlife rescuer cutting bat out of netting



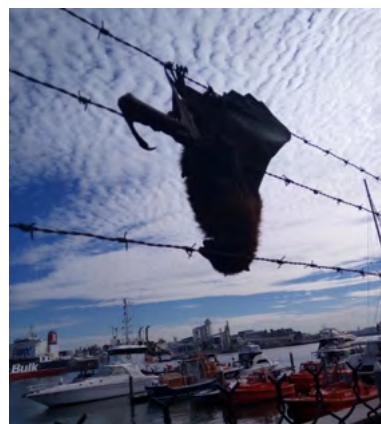
Wildlife-friendly netting

Barbed wire fencing

Flying-foxes landing on barbed wire fencing often suffer tears to the delicate wing membrane meaning they will no longer be able to fly and survive in the wild.



Go to www.wildlifefriendlyfencing.com for safe alternatives to barbed wire.



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Electrocution from powerlines

It is common for flying-foxes to be electrocuted when they try to land on powerlines.



Unfortunately there is not much we can do to prevent electrocutions on powerlines. However, in spring and summer it is important to check for orphaned young. Pups will often survive an electrocution that has killed the mother and must be removed by a vaccinated and trained Wildlife Victoria volunteer.

Heat stress during summer

Huge numbers of flying-foxes die during summer heat waves. When a bat becomes tangled in fruit tree netting on a hot day, heat stress is a significant concern in addition to direct injuries from the entanglement.



Always leave water out for wildlife, especially during hot weather events. If you find an injured or entangled bat on a hot day do not touch it, but assist by providing shade over the animal and a light mist or spray of water to cool it down. Call Wildlife Victoria.

Community attitudes

Cultural ideas: Flying-foxes sometimes undeservedly get a bad name, often associated with things like Halloween and vampires. Many people are frightened of them but cannot explain why.

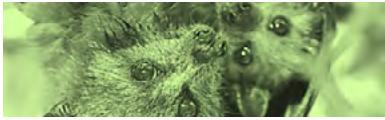


Flying-foxes are social animals and would rather avoid humans where possible. They drink nectar, not blood, and as far as we know, they do not celebrate Halloween!



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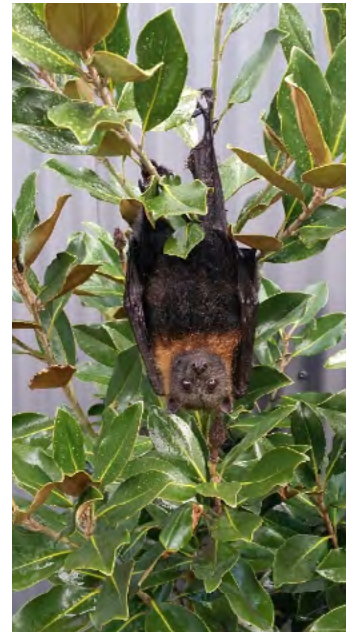
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Interesting facts

- Flying-foxes play a very important ecological role in regenerating native plant species by pollinating flowers as they feed and dispersing seeds as they move away after feeding. A single flying-fox can disperse up to 60,000 seeds in one night!
- Bats are the only mammal capable of sustained flight. Their forelimbs are the same basic skeletal structure as the human arm and hand, with long fingers between which a thin skin membrane stretches forming their incredible wings.
- A baby flying-fox is called a pup.
- Bats don't get dizzy when they hang upside down because they don't weigh enough for gravity to affect their blood flow.
- Never attempt to touch any bat! Only suitably vaccinated rescuers will be sent to rescue an injured bat.



Habitat and distribution

The Grey-Headed Flying-Fox is distributed down the east coast of Australia from Queensland to Victoria. Native forest, woodlands and mangroves are all suitable habitat.

Diet

Fruits, blossoms and nectar of native trees such as eucalypts, tea-trees and banksias are a favoured food source, which they seek out at night using their strong sense of smell and keen eyesight. They will also happily munch on introduced species including backyard fruit trees. This is one bat-related call we commonly receive at Wildlife Victoria and we encourage ways for people to live in harmony with this unique and valuable species.

Breeding

These bats are slow breeders. Females produce just one young per year in early-mid spring which clings onto the mother's fur, suckling her milk for about 12 weeks. After this time they are left at camp and weaned off over the next couple of months. It is a special sight to see a mother with her pup clinging on as she hangs or flies. Sadly, sometimes they can fall from mum, so keep an eye out for any orphaned pups during spring and summer.



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