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Office of
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- Office of Environment and Heritage:
www.environment.nsw.gov.au/animals/flyingfoxes.htm
- WIRES: www.wires.org.au/
- RSPCA: www.rspcansw.org.au/
- NSW Health: www.health.nsw.gov.au/

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Email: info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Report pollution and environmental incidents

Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only) or info@environment.nsw.gov.au

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Living with grey-headed flying-foxes



This fact sheet suggests some simple measures that the community can take to reduce conflict with flying-foxes when living alongside their camps.

Grey-headed flying-foxes are increasingly setting up camp near towns and people in search of food and shelter because of the loss of their natural habitat and in response to local food availability. Living near flying-fox camps can be difficult. Like all flying-foxes, grey-headed flying-foxes are noisy and their camps can be smelly and messy.

The grey-headed flying-fox is listed as a vulnerable species both within NSW and across Australia. As a vulnerable species, prior approval is required from the State Government to disturb or relocate a grey-headed flying-fox camp or modify its habitat. In some cases, further approval may be required from the Australian Government.

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Disease risk

Flying-foxes pose no health risks unless you are bitten or scratched, so it is very important that you never handle them. Australian bat lyssavirus and Hendra virus are two diseases associated with flying-foxes. The risk of flying-foxes transmitting disease to humans is extremely low. Provided basic hygiene measures are taken there is no reason for the public to be concerned.

Lyssavirus is extremely rare and preventable. It is only transmitted by flying-fox saliva coming into contact with an open wound or mucus membrane such as the eyes, nose or mouth. It is **not** spread through droppings or urine, so you are not exposed to the virus if a flying-fox flies overhead, feeds or roosts in your garden, or if you live near a camp or visit one.

Hendra virus outbreaks are very rare. There is no evidence that humans can catch Hendra virus directly from flying-foxes. Hendra virus may be transmitted from flying-foxes to horses and it is possible for humans to contract it from infected horses.

Often there are calls to relocate flying-fox colonies, but this causes stress to the animal and may make them more susceptible to diseases.

What can you do?

- **Never** handle flying-foxes. This includes injured or dead animals.
- If you find an injured or dead flying-fox, please contact WIRES or the RSPCA. Do not attempt to remove it yourself.
- If you are bitten or scratched, wash the site immediately with plenty of soap and water and seek medical attention straight away. Report the incident to NSW Health.
- Do not keep food and water for pets underneath trees, particularly for horses, and keep undercover if possible.
- Move horses away from paddocks where flowering/fruited trees are attracting flying-foxes.
- Use good hygiene practices around horses and be vigilant of sick animals.



Noise, smell and mess

Flying-foxes are noisy animals, but this noise is an important part of their society. When flying-foxes are present in large numbers, this noise can understandably be a nuisance for residents.

Flying-foxes can also be smelly, particularly when present in large numbers. Although this smell may be unpleasant to us, it is a very important way that flying-foxes communicate with each other, including between mother and baby.

What can you do?

- Don't disturb the flying-foxes. When flying-foxes get stressed, they tend to squabble and make even more noise. They are quietest when left alone.
- Flying-foxes prefer tall vegetation, so they may be deterred by trimming vegetation and removing branches from around houses or public buildings. If flying-foxes have already set up camp in trees, contact the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) Environment Line on 131 555 before trimming any of these trees.
- Planting a buffer of low vegetation, such as shrubs on your property can provide a screen between your house and flying-foxes.
- Plant food trees preferred by flying-foxes away from houses and orchards to divert flying-foxes.



Why do people care about grey-headed flying-foxes?

The grey-headed flying-fox, like the koala and kangaroo, are native species and are protected in Australia.

Like all flying-foxes, grey-headed flying-foxes play an important role in Australian environments because they are natural pollinators and seed dispersers. They are crucial for the survival and regeneration of our native forests and are important for local honey production. They also provide food for other native animals such as owls.

The grey-headed flying-fox is listed as vulnerable to extinction both in NSW and nationally. As their numbers are declining, destruction of their habitat remains a significant threat.

Damage to orchards and backyard fruit trees

Removal of natural habitat means that flying-foxes take advantage of a range of new foods in urban areas, including fruit trees. This is naturally a source of frustration for orchardists and backyard growers.

What can you do?

- Properly constructed netting is the best option for protecting fruit. More information about netting is provided on the OEH website.

