

# Answers to the community’s most commonly asked questions about grey-headed flying-foxes

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## What can I do to reduce the impacts of living near flying-foxes?

### Noise

Flying-foxes are noisiest when they leave their camp early in the evening to feed and when they return in the early morning. During the day they can bicker over a favoured spot or an unwelcome neighbour. These bursts of noise are usually short lived. During breeding season noise may become more constant.

When flying-foxes are stressed or frightened they make more noise. Camps tend to be noisiest when they are disturbed by people, machinery, dogs and wildlife, including birds-of-prey. Some camps are flightier than others, but they are all usually quieter in the afternoons.

### Deterring flying-foxes

If you experience an individual or small group of flying-foxes feeding at night in your fruiting or flowering trees and shrubs, including palm trees, this may continue until the fruit is finished.

If you do not want flying-foxes feeding in your backyard you could remove the fruit manually or net the tree to make access for the flying-foxes difficult. Only use netting with holes smaller than you could fit your finger through to prevent the flying-foxes getting tangled.

Some non-harmful, passive deterrents that may help keep flying-foxes from roosting and foraging on your property include:

- creating visual/sound/smell barriers with fencing or hedges using plants that do not produce edible fruit or nectar-exuding flowers
- placing fake predator decoys (eg. owls, hawks) on verandahs or in trees
- keeping food or habitat trees in your yard trimmed and pruned, or netted - check with Council for tree removal guidelines and procedures
- when landscaping, plant fruit or habitat trees away from the home, or do not use such plants at all.

Please be aware that these are passive deterrents - as opposed to active deterrents, such as targeting flying-foxes with noise, objects, water, smoke etc. Passive deterrents can only be set up when flying-foxes are absent from foraging or camping in your yard and cannot be within a distance that will impact on any nearby established camp. If unsure, please contact Council for advice.

## Smell

Individuals often have different sensitivities to smells. Some people will find the smell of a flying-fox camp difficult to live with. The smell from a camp is likely to fluctuate over a season depending on factors such as the size of the camp, flying-fox behaviours and weather conditions.

The noticeable odour comes from the scent male flying-foxes use to mark their territory in the camp. The important thing to note is that the odour is not a risk to human health.

The smell is usually at its strongest during hot, wet and/or low-wind days. Good rain will wash away the smell for a period of time, but the males like to reapply it soon after. The wind direction can also affect the strength of the smell. Residents may find it useful to follow the weather forecasts and relate them to the high-odour days. This will help to predict when there may be some relief.

Planting vegetation with fragrant flowers can assist with masking camp odour. Fragrant deodorisers and odour neutralisation pots (such as used in hospitals) may help within the home. If the smell is particularly strong, close all windows and doors. Obviously, this can be a problem on hot days or with in/out activities. Where possible use air-conditioning on a recirculate option (where the air is drawn from inside the home rather than outside) or use fans to circulate internal air. Try to seal off at least one room so there is a place when you need some relief.

## Faeces

Flying-foxes excrete either during flight or by turning heads-up and holding onto a branch by their thumbs. If your house is under a flying-fox flyout route, you may be impacted by droppings.

Flying-fox droppings are no different to other animal droppings. Avoid direct handling.

Try not to have your washing out when the flying-foxes are flying overhead. It may be useful to note the approximate times the flying-foxes leave and return in relation to the sunrise and sunset. A tarpaulin or shower curtain covering over the clothesline works well to protect washing. Or use a dryer for the period that droppings are an issue. To remove faeces from washing, treat them like fruit stains. Soak the item as soon as possible with a good stain remover.

Some residents claim that flying-fox faeces strips paint from cars, houses and garden furniture. This is likely due to the faeces drying and peeling off a surface, especially if the underlying paint is older. Removing the faeces as soon as possible with soapy water is the best solution.

The best way to protect your belongings is to store them under cover, especially during the night. A car cover, shade sail or marquee may be useful for protecting your car if you do not have a carport or garage.

To clean up small areas of moist or dry flying-fox droppings on buildings, lawns and other surfaces:

- wear disposable gloves and a mask
- soak or spray the droppings using a low-pressure water spray
- wipe up droppings using a sponge or rag
- if needed, clean the area again with a soapy water solution
- put gloves and rags in a rubbish bag and seal
- wash hands with warm soapy water after the clean-up is finished.

Larger and tougher areas like driveways or paths can be cleaned with a high-pressure hose.

All Eurobodalla Shire residents affected by flying-fox faecal drop can borrow a high-pressure water cleaner from Council. These can be obtained from the Batemans Bay depot, phone 4475 4035.

## Can I get sick from flying-foxes?

A big concern for some residents is the potential health issues associated with flying-foxes. Human infections from viruses borne by flying-foxes are extremely rare. There are no confirmed cases of anyone getting sick from touching flying-fox faeces, urine or blood. Of course, you should still wash your hands after touching anything like that. Importantly:

- do not touch or handle live or dead flying-foxes
- only trained, vaccinated bat handlers should attempt to catch injured or sick bats
- if you find a sick, injured bat, contact the experts at WIRES on **1300 094 737**
- if bitten or scratched by a bat, wash the wound straight away with soap and water for five minutes, put on an antiseptic lotion and see a doctor as soon as possible.

There are two well-publicised viruses able to be borne by Australian flying-foxes:

- **Australian Bat Lyssavirus** is a virus that is similar to rabies. The virus can only be transmitted through contact of mucous membranes (including the eye) or broken skin with the saliva or neural tissues of a bat. In Australia, there have only been three confirmed cases of Australian Bat Lyssavirus in humans. These were the result of flying-fox bites or scratches during the handling of infected animals. You cannot tell if a flying-fox is carrying the virus just by looking at, so it is always best to assume that any flying-fox could be infected.
- **Hendra virus** is similar to influenza virus and infection in horses and humans is extremely rare. There is no evidence of bat-to-human, human-to-human, bat-to-dog or dog-to-human transmission of Hendra virus. Experts think that horses may contract Hendra virus infection from eating food recently contaminated by flying-fox urine, saliva or other body fluids. All seven confirmed cases of Hendra virus in humans were caused by exposure to high levels of virus in body fluids from infected horses. All occurred in Queensland.

Visit NSW Health's website for detailed and up-to-date advice on managing human health risks associated with flying-foxes:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/flying-foxes-questions.aspx>

## What if a flying-fox scratches or bites me?

The basic rule is **DO NOT TOUCH** a flying-fox. If you are bitten or scratched, wash the wound straight away with soap and water for 5 minutes. Put on an antiseptic and see a doctor as soon as possible.

If you come across a sick, injured or stressed flying-fox call **WIRES on 1300 094 737**.

If it is obviously dead, the body can be removed by wearing heavy gloves, double-bagging and putting in the red bin, or burying. If it is in a public area notify **Council on 4474 1000** to have it removed.

You are more likely to come across a dead or injured flying-fox when they have a shortage of food (due to drought and/or fire), when temperatures are above 38°Celsius, or when populations are in high numbers.

## Is it safe for my children to play outside?

Educate your children about flying-foxes. As with other wildlife, children need to understand what is safe and what is dangerous in relation to the animal. Pass on the DO NOT TOUCH rule and encourage your children to stay away from flying-fox camps, unless supervised.

Infrastructure such as tables and play equipment that have been soiled by flying-fox droppings should be washed with a pressure hose or warm water. Where possible, bring children's toys inside or store them under cover before dusk, to avoid flying-fox droppings. Sandpits should be raked regularly and covered when not in use to avoid contamination from a range of animals.

Children will often want to help an injured animal out of kindness. Please let your children know that they should not approach any injured or sick animal, no matter how cute. Injured animals are often scared and vulnerable, so may try to defend themselves against those who try to help them by biting or scratching. Flying-foxes are no exception to this.

## What about my pets?

NSW Health reports that there is no evidence of dog to human transmission of Hendra virus. One dog in Queensland has been infected with Hendra virus. It is more likely that the infection was transmitted from an infected horse than directly from a flying-fox.

- Visit NSW Health's website for more information:  
[https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/hendra\\_virus.aspx](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/hendra_virus.aspx)

No cat or dog has ever been known to contract Australian bat lyssavirus from a flying-fox. There may still be a risk, but the best available evidence suggests there is no need to vaccinate pets against the virus.

Cats and dogs occasionally catch flying-foxes. It is good practise to keep pets away from flying-foxes if possible, to reduce any likelihood of scratches and bites.

If a pet becomes sick after contact with a flying-fox, seek advice from a veterinarian.

If you have horses, keeping them away from flying-fox camps and vaccines are the best way to reduce the risk of Hendra virus infection. Vaccines are available from your vet.

- Visit NSW Health's website for more information:  
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/flying-foxes-questions.aspx>

## Is it safe to drink water that may have bat droppings in it?

There is no evidence that a flying-fox camp has any impact on publicly available drinking water provided by local authorities. The water is treated, and this eliminates any contamination from additional flying-fox droppings in the catchment.

It is not safe to drink water directly from natural waterways, always filter water from these sources.

NSW Health recommends against drinking water from rainwater tanks if there is public drinking water available.

Faecal contamination in rainwater tanks from wildlife is a known risk associated not only with flying-foxes, but also birds, possums, and other animals. For households using rainwater for food preparation and drinking, the risk of getting a gastro illness from bat faeces is no different than for other animals. You cannot get Australian Bat Lyssavirus from drinking or using water from rainwater tanks contaminated with bat faeces.

To minimise the risk of ill effects from your rainwater tank, you can:

- install a 'first flush' device that will divert the first dirty water flow away from the tank
- clear and trim vegetation, such as overhanging tree branches, away from awnings, gutters, and tanks to reduce accessibility from wildlife
- cover the tank with a roof structure
- install a <1mm screen to filter material entering the tank
- regularly flush your tank to 'de-sludge' and remove accumulated debris.
- disinfect your tank
- disinfect water prior to use through filtration and boiling
- use a filter on your drinking and kitchen use water tap

It is the responsibility of the owner to ensure rainwater collected is treated to a healthy standard prior to consumption.

Visit the NSW Health website for further advice on safely managing rainwater for drinking purposes where there is no alternative supply.

- Visit NSW Health's website for more information:  
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/flying-foxes-questions.aspx>

## What should I do about power outages?

If you have any issues with power outages, contact **Essential Energy 132 080**.

## Why can't we just get rid of them?

As a native animal, all flying-foxes are protected. The grey-headed flying-fox is also listed as a threatened species. This means Council needs to work closely with the NSW and Australian Government Environment agencies to ensure no harm comes to the flying-foxes while we are managing impacts on our community.

In November 2018, Council adopted the Eurobodalla Flying-fox Management Plan. The Plan provides a framework to help reduce the effects of flying-foxes on people in the Eurobodalla region, while conserving the animals and the ecosystem services they provide. This plan is supported by the NSW government.

Council is now working on implementing the recommendations in the plan. Some of these are: maintaining buffer zones around the camps, providing subsidised services to residents within 300m of camps (when required), regular assessments of new and existing camp and education.

Community input helped identify triggers for management options. The primary focus is to minimise the impacts of flying-foxes on people within 300 metres of camps.

Council does have current approval to conduct dispersal activities in Batemans Bay, however there are strict conditions that must be met before these can occur. No active dispersal can be undertaken when the flying foxes are pregnant or have dependent young. Studies done on flying-fox dispersals across Australia show that dispersals are very expensive and rarely effective.

Visit Eurobodalla Council's website for more information:

<https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/living-in/natural-environment/animals,-the-bush,-and-the-coast/grey-headed-flying-foxes/flying-fox-plans,-approvals-And-legislation>

## What else is happening towards future flying-fox management?

Many councils and land managers across Queensland, NSW and Victoria are struggling to understand the unpredictable nature of flying-fox movements and the issue of flying-foxes becoming more frequent in urban areas. Managers and researchers continue to share information and learn more about the animals and their environment through various means. Council continues to be involved in research collaborations.

- Visit Eurobodalla Council's website to find out more about what is happening in flying-fox research relative to our area, and to read completed papers:  
<https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/living-in/natural-environment/animals,-the-bush,-and-the-coast/grey-headed-flying-foxes/flying-foxes-in-eurobodalla>