About Grey Headed Flying Foxes

FACT SHEET

Flying fox behaviour and habitat
Flying foxes are intelligent, social animals that live in large colonies comprised of individuals and family groups. Flying fox numbers at any one site can vary according to season, roost condition and vegetation flowering periods.

Flying foxes use various calls as a form of communication. They tend to make the most noise at dawn and dusk when flying out to feed at night or returning to camp trees to sleep during the day. During the day, flying foxes are generally quiet as they are nocturnal, however noise increases dramatically if animals are disturbed.

Flying foxes are very clean animals that are constantly grooming and cleaning themselves. However, flying foxes also communicate by scent. This is what causes the odours surrounding camps, not flying fox faeces. Odours are used by flying foxes to identify camp trees, each other, and also to attract mates.

While unpleasant, flying fox droppings, or guano, pose no serious health hazard to humans. Guano can be cleaned with water and soap, and is usually less corrosive than bird droppings.

Flying foxes are critical in ensuring ecosystem health and the long term survival of our Eucalypt forests. They forage on the pollen, nectar and fruit of native vines and trees (particularly Eucalyptus, Melaleuca and Banksia species). As a consequence, flying foxes spread seed and pollen over long distances improving the health and diversity of native forests.

Threats to grey headed flying foxes
The distribution and patterns of occupation of flying fox roost sites in south east Australia are changing rapidly. These changes reflect the behavioural responses of flying foxes to acute food shortages and habitat loss.

Grey headed flying foxes are a threatened species under NSW and Commonwealth legislation. While the Batemans Bay region experienced unprecendented numbers in April 2016, on a national basis they are on the decline primarily due to clearing and modifying of native vegetation.

Flying foxes are also very vulnerable to heat stress. Over the past two decades, tens of thousands of flying foxes have died during extreme heat events.
Flying foxes in our region

It is likely that heavy flowering of *Corymbia maculata* (Spotted Gum) and *Corymbia gummifera* (Bloodwood) and seasonal rainforest fruiting in autumn 2016 led to the unprecedented numbers of flying foxes in Batemans Bay at that time as the animals sought to take advantage of a camp close to their natural food supply.

Eurobodalla Shire Council is managing flying foxes in line with the Australian and NSW Government-approved Dispersal Plan 2016-2019. This includes carrying out approved dispersal activities in accordance to strict conditions which take resident impacts and flying fox welfare into consideration.

The first phase of dispersal took place in June-July 2016 and, assisted by natural migration, many flying foxes left the region and remaining flying foxes were relocated to one area away from residences.

From around August each year female flying foxes are pregnant and are unlikely to leave their camp except to feed until they have given birth and their young become independent. Dispersal cannot be carried out while there are pregnant females and unweaned juveniles present at the camp.

Council is authorised to perform selected maintenance dispersal activities to prevent flying foxes returning to roost at previous camp sites close to houses.

It is highly unlikely that all flying foxes will leave the region completely. As there are established camps and plentiful food sources around Eurobodalla it is probable that flying foxes will return each year, however in what numbers and to which locations cannot be predicted.

Residents are not authorised to conduct flying fox removal or dispersal activities at any time. Simple, non-harmful deterrents that you may use on your own property include:

- Placing predator decoys (e.g. imitation owls) on verandahs or in trees
- Create visual/sound/smell barriers with fencing or hedges using plants that do not produce edible fruit or nectar-exuding flowers
- Removing Cocos palm trees
- Placing reflective or shiny deterrents (e.g. CDs or aluminium foil strips) in tree branches
- When landscaping, plant fruit or habitat trees away from the home, or not at all

These actions are only able to be used in locations prior to flying fox camps establishing. If a camp has been established, residents are reminded that any activities that may result in the disturbance of a roosting flying fox colony or individual flying fox are illegal and can result in prosecution.

More information

Council is the key community contact regarding flying foxes. Call 02 4474 1000 or find more information on our website www.esc.nsw.gov.au/flyingfoxes