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

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

**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 will be ongoing until the fruit is finished. If you do not want flying foxes feeding in your backyard you could remove the fruit manually or properly 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. Find more information about netting on the [Wildlife Friendly Fencing website](#).

There are simple, non-harmful deterrents which may be of assistance on your property, such as:

- Creating visual/sound/smell barriers with fencing or hedges using plants that do not produce edible fruit or nectar-exuding flowers
- Placing predator decoys (e.g. owls) on verandahs or in trees
- Keeping food or habitat trees in your yard trimmed and pruned
- 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 don’t use these plants at all.

Residents are not allowed to conduct flying-fox removal or dispersal activities, so 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 can result in prosecution under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

**Noise**

Flying foxes are noisiest when the flying foxes leave their camp early in the evening to feed and when they return in the early morning. They continue being noisy as they fly around trying to find a roost. During the day they can fight and bicker like children over a favoured spot, usually trying to find one as close as possible to water. Unfortunately this is a daily event while the camp is active.

When flying foxes are stressed or frightened they make a lot more noise. Colonies tend to be noisiest when they are disturbed by people and least noisy when left alone. If you plan on making some noise near a camp, such as mowing the lawn, you can expect the flying foxes to get rowdy for a while.

Try to be considerate if you are visiting an area with a flying fox camps to not disturb the animals to help keep noise to a minimum.

**Smell**

Humans have different sensitivities to smells. Not all people will find the smell of a flying fox camp difficult to live with. This may explain why residents sometimes find it difficult to get others to understand how much impact the odour has on their daily life.
The main odour associated with flying foxes is the scent male flying foxes use to mark their territory and is strongest at the camp. It is not associated with the faeces dropped during flight or around the camp. The most important thing to note is that the odour is not a risk to human health.

**Predicting relief from the smell:** The smell is usually at its strongest during hot, humid and still or low-wind days. Good rain will wash away the smell for a period of time. The wind direction will often also determine when the odour will be at its most difficult. 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.

**Managing the smell within the home:** Planting vegetation with fragrant flowers can assist with masking camp odour. Fragrant deodorisers can assist within the home and it helps to close all windows and doors. Obviously this can be a problem on hot days. 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.

**Faeces**

Flying foxes excrete either during flight or by turning heads-up and holding onto a branch by their thumbs. The flying fox digestive system is much faster than a human system (12 to 30 minutes between eating and poo-ing) and they often don't physically chew and swallow their food – they crush it against the roof of their mouth and spit it out after swallowing the juice. This primarily liquid diet contributes to their quick digestive system.

Faecal drop increases under flying fox foraging routes or when they are disturbed and airborne for longer periods of time. Lighting assists flying fox navigation and increases fly-over, so where possible, turn off outdoor lighting at night.

**Drying your clothes outdoors:** Residents will experience the greatest impact from faeces 'bombs' on washing as the flying foxes fly over when they are leaving their camp in the evening or arriving in the morning. It is useful to note the approximate times the flying foxes leave and return in relation to the sunrise and sunset to gain some level of control to know when to ensure washing is brought in off the line. Some residents in other regions have constructed tarpaulin coverings over their clotheslines to protect their washing.

To remove flying fox faeces from washing, treat them like fruit stains. Soak the item as soon as possible (preferably while the stain is still wet) in a good stain remover. Unfortunately some fruits with strong coloured flesh (e.g. mulberries) may leave a permanent stain.

**Cars and other painted or outdoor surfaces:** Some residents have reported that flying fox faeces seems to strip paint from cars, houses and garden furniture. There is some information to suggest that this is more likely due to the faeces drying and peeling off a surface and, especially if the underlying paint is older, lifting off a patch of the surface paint with it. Flying fox droppings are less corrosive than bird droppings, and the best response is to remove the faeces as soon as possible with soapy water, as you would for bird droppings.

If you live next to an established camp, you may be eligible for a free car or clothesline cover:

- **To apply or register your interest please complete this form (360KB).**
Swimming Pools: If your pool has a filter system installed already and you follow the correct maintenance for your pool, this will be adequate to keep it clean and you shouldn’t have to take any extra action specifically to address flying fox faeces. If you’re experiencing a large volume of faeces, a pool cover is an option, but in general, flying fox faeces are no different to bird droppings landing in your pool.

Water tanks: Read the FAQ Can I drink the water from my rainwater tank?

Can I get sick from flying foxes?

Human infections from viruses borne by flying foxes are very rare. There are no confirmed cases of anyone ever getting sick by touching flying-fox faeces, urine or blood, but of course you should still wash your hands after touching anything like that. Importantly:

- do not attempt to touch or handle live or dead flying foxes
- only trained, vaccinated bat handlers should attempt to catch injured or sick bats
- if you encounter a sick, injured or dead bat, contact the experts at WIRES on 1300 094 737
- if you have been bitten or scratched by a bat, gently but thoroughly wash the wound immediately with soap and water for at least five minutes and consult a doctor as soon as possible.

There are two well-publicised viruses borne by 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. To date there have only been three confirmed cases of Australian Bat Lyssavirus in humans. These have all occurred in Queensland and were the result of direct flying-fox bites or scratches during the handling of infected animals. There are no obvious indicators that a flying-fox is carrying the virus, therefore it is always best to assume that any flying-fox could be infected. View NSW Health Fact Sheet

- **Hendra virus** is an influenza-like virus and infection in horses and humans is rare. There is no evidence of bat-to-human, human-to-human, bat-to-dog or dog-to-human transmission of Hendra virus. It is thought 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 have been caused by exposure to high levels of virus in body fluids from infected horses, and all occurred in Queensland. View NSW Health Fact Sheet

There has been concern in the community that flying-foxes are triggering or exacerbating poor health conditions for people with compromised immune systems or chronic respiratory problems. This has not been reported in relation to other flying fox camps and Southern NSW Local Health District advises that there has not been an increase in respiratory-related admissions, but if you are experiencing any medical concerns it is recommended that you visit your doctor.

A number of Batemans Bay residents have expressed concern about the mental health impacts of the flying foxes related to the odour and noise around the camp. While the dispersal aims to ameliorate this...
situation, there will be additional risks to mental health in the short term that are associated with dispersal activities.

If things become overwhelming, support is available:

- contact your GP
- phone Lifeline on 13 11 14
- phone Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636

What if a flying fox scratches or bites me?

Do not handle flying foxes. If you find a sick, injured or dead flying fox during dispersal activities, contact Council on 02 4474 1000. At all other times contact the wildlife carers at WIRES on 0417 238 921.

If you are bitten or scratched, gently but thoroughly wash the wound straight away with soap and water for at least 5 minutes. Put on an antiseptic, such as Betadine and see a doctor as soon as possible.

- Find out more in the Department of Primary Industries’ fact sheet about bats and health risks.

What about my pets?

The disease risk to people, their pets and horses from the flying foxes is very small.

NSW health reports that there is no evidence of dog to human transmission of Hendra virus. According to the Australian Animal Health Laboratory in Victoria there have been no reports of illness in pets caused by eating deceased flying foxes. However, pets should be kept away from flying foxes if possible to reduce likelihood of scratches or bites. If a pet becomes sick after contact with a flying fox, seek advice from a veterinarian.

While activities to disperse the colony may increase the opportunity for contact between bats and domestic animals because displaced flying foxes may turn up in areas where they haven't been previously, the risks are still very small.

- Find out more about risks to pets in the Department of Primary Industries’ fact sheet about bats and health risks.

Horses may get the Hendra virus infection from eating food recently contaminated by flying fox urine, saliva or other body fluids. But there is no evidence of human to human, bat to human, bat to dog, or dog to human transmission of Hendra virus. All confirmed human cases to date became infected following high level exposures to body fluids of an infected horse, such as doing autopsies on horses without wearing appropriate personal protective equipment, or being extensively sprayed with mucus from infected horses.
If you have horses, keeping them away from flying fox camps and vaccines are the best way to reduce the risk of infection. Vaccines are available from your vet.

- You can get more information on managing horse health risks from the Hendra virus on the Department of Primary Industries website.

Can I drink the water from my rainwater tank?

If there is public drinking water available, NSW Health recommends you use this for drinking and limit the use of water from your tank to gardening, toilet flushing and car washing.

Faecal contamination in rainwater tanks from wildlife is a known risk not just associated 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. Australian Bat Lyssavirus cannot be contracted from drinking or using water from rainwater tanks that is contaminated with bat faeces.

To minimise the risk of faecal bacteria and other microorganisms contaminating your rainwater tank, here are some methods you can use:

- Install a ‘first flush’ device that will divert the first dirty water flow away from the tank;
- Clear and trim vegetation (eg. overhanging tree branches) away from awnings, gutters, and tanks to reduce accessibility from wildlife;
- Install a <1mm screen to filter material entering the tank;
- Regularly flush your tank to ‘de-sludge’ and remove accumulated debris;
- Disinfect your tank (eg. add 40ml of sodium hypochlorite per 1KL of water);
- Disinfect water prior to use through filtration and boiling;
- Regularly inspect the tank for signs of animal access.

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 advice on safely managing rainwater for drinking purposes where there is no alternative supply.

Local water catchment: There is no evidence that a flying fox camp has any impact on publicly available drinking water provided by local authorities. The water continues to be treated and this eliminates any contamination from additional flying fox faeces in the catchment.
Can I get a car or clothesline cover from Council?

Council is providing free car covers and clothesline covers, as well as help in removing exotic cocos palm trees, to residents living right next to the main Water Gardens and Catalina flying fox camp as illustrated in the maps below.

Eligible residents are those that live on South Street, Pacific Street, High Street, Short Street, Old Princes Hwy, Bent Street, Bavarde Avenue, and Orient Street in Batemans Bay, and Heron Road, Country Club Drive, Albatross Road, Sandpiper Place, Penguin Place, Crane Court, Gull Close, Ibis Place and Gannet Place in Catalina.

You can appreciate that the residents that have been living right next to the main camps deserve all the help they can get. There is only a limited budget for these covers and we can't afford to give them to everyone or there will be none left for the people that need them the most.

- To apply or register your interest please complete this form (360KB)

What should I do about damage to my property or power outages?

Residents who are concerned about damage to their property should contact their home insurer for advice on making a claim.

Council is not responsible for electricity supply. Any residents who have suffered damages as a result of power outages should contact their electrical provider or their home insurer.

Essential Energy is working with the Office of Environment and Heritage to understand the nature of the influx of flying foxes to the area and, where possible, have re-routed the local electricity network to minimise the number of customers affected by power outages.
Essential Energy's advice is that:

- customers phone 13 20 80 to report or get information about unplanned power outages.
- if you rely on an electric pumping system for your household water supply, make sure you have enough water stored to cover your needs during an interruption.
- switch off stove hotplates, ovens and any other small appliances in case you are not home when supply is restored.
- avoid opening your fridge or freezer. Deep frozen food will generally last up to 24 hours if the freezer door is left closed.
- never run a generator inside your home or garage. Ensure generators are only used in well-ventilated areas.
- **if you have a medical condition that requires a 24 hour power supply, follow the advice on Essential Energy's website.**