

Flying-foxes – Frequently Asked Questions

Flying-foxes are nomadic mammals that fly across eastern and northern Australia. The two species seen in the Tamworth Region in fluctuating numbers are the grey-headed flying-fox and the little-red flying-fox. The little-red are the most widespread species in Australia.

Q. What do they eat?

Flying-foxes feed on the nectar and pollen of native blossoms and fruits such as figs. Flying-foxes are beneficial to the health of vegetation, as they spread seeds and pollinate native plants.

Q. What about disease? Can I catch Hendra Virus from a flying fox?

A. People cannot catch the Hendra Virus from flying foxes. People can only contract the Hendra Virus from coming into close contact with an infected horse.

Q. I have heard that flying foxes carry rabies. Is this true and can I catch it?

A. Flying foxes do not have rabies. Only a very small percentage of flying-foxes (less than 1 per cent) are infected with a disease called Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) which is similar, but not the same, as rabies. This virus can only be transmitted to humans by bites, scratches or saliva into an open wound from an infected bat. If you do not pick up or handle flying-foxes, you have nothing to fear. Neither you nor your pets can get ABLV (Lyssavirus) from flying-foxes flying overhead, roosting or feeding in your yard or touching their droppings.

Q. What about their droppings?

A. Exposure to bat faeces or urine does not pose a risk of catching ABLV. Bat droppings should be treated with the same hygiene as you would with any other animals.

Q. What is that smell?

A. Many people mistakenly believe that the odour from a flying fox roost is from their droppings. The smell is actually from the male's scent glands which, just like in koalas and possums, are used to mark their territories. This 'scent' is heightened during breeding season and when they are disturbed and pushed onto someone else's branch or when newcomers arrive in the roost.

Smell also plays an important role in flying fox communication.

Q. What do I do if I find a flying fox one on the ground or a sick one in my tree?

A. Call Wires on 1300 131 554. They will send out a trained carer to attend to the animal. Never attempt to rescue or handle injured flying foxes.

Q. What do I do if I get bitten or scratched by a bat?

A. Seek medical assistance immediately.

Q. What do I do if I get flying fox droppings on my car? Will it strip the paint work?

A. Bird droppings are actually more corrosive than flying fox faeces. To remove flying fox droppings, it is recommended to cover the stain with a wet cloth or newspaper and leave it to soak for about 30 minutes and then simply wipe it away. Do not leave droppings on the car to 'bake' in the sun.