

# FLYING FOXES

## Fact or fiction?



### BUSTING THE TOP TEN BAT MYTHS

#### 1 Flying foxes are dirty animals.

Flying foxes are actually exceptionally clean animals and they invert or hang right side up when they need to go to the toilet to avoid soiling themselves. Due to their rapid digestion it only takes 20 minutes for food to go from their mouth to their rear!

#### 2 Bats in Australia suck your blood.

Blood-sucking or Vampire Bats are only found in Central and South America. Flying foxes are vegetarian and like to eat blossoms and nectar from eucalyptus and melaleuca trees, and native fruits such as Quandongs, Lilly Pillies and Figs. Flying foxes detect their food using their excellent sense of smell.

#### 3 Bats are pests and serve no purpose in our environment.

Flying foxes play a vital role in ecosystem health as they have the ability to cross-pollinate over great distances. They are extremely important in maintaining biodiversity in Australian forests. It is estimated that a single flying fox can disperse up to 60,000 seeds in one night.

#### 4 Heard the saying 'blind as a bat'?

Well, it's not true. Flying foxes have large eyes and are not blind. They actually have excellent vision - 20 times better than our own! Insectivorous bats aren't blind either. They use echolocation together with their eye sight.

#### 5 Flying fox droppings strip paint from cars and houses.

Bird droppings are more corrosive than flying fox faeces. Soaking the stain with a damp rag is the easiest way to remove it. Unless the paint is old or peeling, no permanent damage should result from a bat leaving its calling card.

#### 6 It's not safe to live near flying foxes because it increases your risk of catching Australian bat lyssavirus.

There is no reason to be alarmed if flying foxes set up camp nearby. The risk of becoming infected with ABLV is very low, with less than 1% of flying foxes carrying the disease. The virus can only be transmitted when infected bat saliva enters the human body, usually by a bite or scratch. Issues related to smell, noise, mess and damage to vegetation can be quickly addressed or handled with the assistance of council.

#### 7 I can disperse flying foxes on my property.

Flying foxes and their habitat are protected by law in Queensland. It is therefore illegal to attempt to disperse flying fox camps without approval from an appropriate authority. Inappropriate dispersal methods have actually been known to result in colonies staying for longer periods than normal, the formation of splinter colonies, increased levels of stress-related disease and erratic or unusual behaviour.

#### 8 Humans can catch Hendra virus from flying foxes.

Flying foxes are a natural host for Hendra, which can be transmitted to horses. However, there is no evidence the virus can be passed directly from bats to humans.

#### 9 Bats can get tangled in your hair!

Bats are all good navigators and naturally fearful of humans so even accidental collision is most unlikely.

#### 10 Flying foxes are in plague numbers in Australia.

Because flying foxes are colonial animals - living together in roosts and flying out together at dusk for feeding - they give the impression of existing in very large numbers. But two species are listed as threatened because their numbers have declined so much.

# Flying foxes in residential areas

## Can I disperse flying foxes from my property?

Flying foxes and their habitat are protected in Queensland. It is illegal to attempt to disperse flying fox camps without approval from an appropriate authority.

Residents should be aware that activities which result in the purposeful disturbance of flying fox camps can result in prosecution under the Nature Conservation Act 1992. This may include activities such as whipper snipping or mowing under a camp if carried out deliberately or excessively and with the intention of driving the flying foxes away. Activities such as these must be undertaken in accordance with the *Code of Practice for Low Impact Activities Affecting Flying Fox Roosts*, available from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection website.

Inappropriate dispersal methods have been known to result in a camp staying for longer periods than normal, formation of splinter colonies, increased levels of stress-related disease and erratic or unusual behaviour, increasing the potential of human-flying fox contact.

## Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

Advice from Queensland Health is that the risk of becoming infected with ABLV is very low. Less than 1% of the flying fox population carry ABLV and it can only be transmitted by direct contact through a skin-penetrating bite or scratch.

Infection can be fatal if it remains undetected, however the disease in humans can easily be prevented by avoiding direct contact with bats. Pre and post-exposure vaccinations that will prevent the disease are available. You can't catch ABLV from living near a roost or a fly-out route, or from bat droppings.

## What should I do if I have been bitten or scratched by a flying fox?

Immediately wash the wound with soap and water for five minutes. Apply an antiseptic cream and seek medical attention as soon as possible from your doctor or the Queensland Health information line 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84). If bat saliva contacts the eyes, nose or mouth, the area should be flushed thoroughly with water. If the bat is dead, it can be taken to Queensland Health to be tested for ABLV.

## Avoid handling flying foxes

All bats should be viewed as potentially carrying ABLV. Please don't handle flying foxes, even if dead. If disposing of a dead flying fox, do not directly touch it. Use a shovel or tongs and place into two plastic bags with your general rubbish.

Report dead or injured flying foxes to any of the following:

- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection 1300 130 372
- Queensland Health (Central Queensland) 4920 6989
- Biosecurity Queensland 13 25 23
- RSPCA 1300 264 625
- WIRES 1300 094 737
- Central Highlands Regional Council 1300 242 686