

Born to be wild

Mating occurs in early Autumn and females have a six-month gestation (pregnancy) period. From early October, females give birth to a single baby whilst hanging upside down. The well-developed, fully furred baby is caught in mum's wings and then tucked under her arm/wing where it holds onto one of two mammary glands (teats). The mother carries the baby wherever she flies until it gets too heavy, then the youngsters are left together at night in a camp creche until they can fly independently at about 3 months of age. Young can continue to be nursed for up to 6 months.



This project has been assisted by the New South Wales Government and supported by Local Government NSW.

Did you know?

Flying-foxes:

- Cannot transfer disease to humans when they fly overhead, roost or feed in garden trees.
- Despite camps numbering thousands of individuals, overall the population is in decline and females only have a single young each breeding season.
- Are very clean animals and constantly groom themselves.

How can you help?

Never handle a flying-fox. Although a very small percentage of bats (less than 1% of the total population) may carry Australian Bat Lyssavirus which can be passed to humans, only experienced and vaccinated bat handlers should touch flying-foxes.

Please remember if you do not touch there is no risk! If you are bitten or scratched, wash the site immediately with plenty of soap and water and seek medical attention straight away. Report the incident to NSW Health.

**Please help protect this keystone species.
If you see a flying-fox near or on the
ground, do not approach it. Please call:**

**Wildlife Rescue South Coast,
24/7 hotline 0418 427 214**

FLYING-FOX FACTS

Living amongst one of
Australia's most unique and
threatened species

One of the South Coast's most breathtaking wildlife events takes place every night here in the Shoalhaven. Grey-headed Flying-foxes (Fruit Bats) have called the Shoalhaven home for hundreds of years. You may have witnessed their fly-out from a camp at dusk, as they leave to forage on local food sources.

Do you know what we are?

We are Megabats and, unlike smaller insectivorous microbats, we are vegetarians feeding on nectar, pollen and fruit. We do not use echolocation but rely on our excellent vision and

keen sense of smell – essential for navigation and foraging.

Megabats are flying mammals and like us, are found in tropical areas around the World except Europe, North and South America. Australia is home to five flying-fox species.

Flying Foresters

Flying-foxes are forest makers. At night they disperse from the camp and forage for food. Their favoured food is the nectar from eucalyptus blossom which they lick with their long tongues and also carry pollen on the fur of their pointed noses to other blossoms. Not only do they cross-pollinate flowers over long distances, they also distribute seeds by eating fruit and spitting out or passing the seeds at other places. As they can fly long distances each night (up to 50 kilometres), pollen and seeds can be carried and distributed throughout the forests and vegetation of the South Coast. This makes flying-foxes vital in maintaining ecosystem diversity and health.

Under threat

All Australian native wildlife species, including flying-foxes, are fully protected. The Grey-headed Flying-fox is listed as a 'Vulnerable' (threatened) species due to a rapid decline in their numbers because of extreme heat events as a result of climate change, habitat clearing, reduction in food sources, illegal killing and entanglement in barbed wire, netting and powerlines. As a result, these flying-foxes face increasing dangers of being forced to live in closer contact with humans as they simply need somewhere to live.

Megabats are often poorly misunderstood and misjudged. Not only do they play a key role in pollination and long-distance seed dispersal, these flying mammals are a unique, intelligent and an iconic Australian animal essential to biodiversity and economic activities such as tourism and forestry.

Party animals

As the name implies, Grey-headed Flying-foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) have a head covered in light to dark grey fur and a collar of orange/rust brown fully encircling its neck. Like people, they are very social creatures and congregate in colonies (or camps) amongst the treetops for roosting and raising young.

They spend much of their day sleeping, grooming, sunbathing and chattering to their neighbours – they have a complex social system of up to 40 different calls for communication! Although you may smell male hormones (used to mark territories on trees with secretions from a shoulder scent gland), they are very clean animals and even turn head-up, hanging by their thumbs, to defecate.

They usually wrap themselves in their large wings (around 1 metre wingspan) whilst sleeping and gently flap them during the hottest part of the day to keep cool. Roosts are often semi-permanent, sometimes dispersing seasonally or when food is no longer available nearby, or when an area is overtaken by the impacts of encroaching development.

