

## FACT SHEET

# LIVING WITH FLYING-FOXES

Sutherland Shire is home to a population of Grey-headed Flying-foxes which increases and decreases according to the season. They are one of several native flying-fox species, all of whom play a vital role in maintaining the vigour of our native forests and sustaining ecosystem health by pollinating trees and dispersing seeds over great distances. Habitat loss and land clearing is affecting flying-foxes across Australia, resulting in a large population decline of Grey-headed Flying-foxes. As a result, they are listed as vulnerable to extinction and are protected under federal and state legislation.

### FLYING-FOXES IN SUTHERLAND SHIRE

Flying-foxes are extremely social, nocturnal animals. During the day they roost in large groups called 'camps.' At dusk, they fly out to feed on fruit and nectar. Where the flying-foxes go to feed is determined by the variety and availability of suitable food sources in the area. This makes it almost impossible to control or predict where they will be each night.

Sutherland Shire currently has three Grey-headed Flying-fox camps: i) Camellia Gardens, Caringbah; ii) Bates Drive, Kareela; and iii) behind the Desalination Plant in Kurnell (this last camp is managed privately). Camp populations tend to increase during autumn (breeding season) and decrease in late winter/early spring once the young are ready to fly long distances with the group to find new seasonal food sources. Flying-foxes have been known to fly up to 50km a night in search of food such as flowering native blossoms including eucalypts, banksias and melaleucas, as well as the fruit of figs and exotic species. So if you hear flying-foxes feeding near your house at night, they may be from camps as far away as Wolli Creek!

As a general rule, flying-foxes will only be present while a tree is flowering or fruiting, and will move on from an area once the food source is removed or depleted. Associated impacts such as noise and droppings will likely also reduce at this time.

Grey-headed Flying-foxes resting in camp.  
Image: R. Williams, Sutherland Shire Council (2019)



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### HOW CAN I PROTECT MY PROPERTY?

Flying-foxes can be noisy, smelly and messy and Council is sympathetic to impacts that may arise from flying-foxes feeding or roosting near residential areas. However, they are a protected species so management options are very limited. It is an offense under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* to harm, disturb or interfere with flying-foxes or their habitat in any way. Simple things you can do to protect your home from flying-fox impacts without harming them include:

- Bring your washing inside overnight or hang it under cover;
- Hang shiny, moving objects around the problem area (old CDs, strips of aluminium foil or used foil pie-dishes are perfect for this!);
- Cover your car and/or pool at night;
- Remove palm fruit regularly and/or use wildlife-friendly tree netting on fruit trees;
- Use a scarecrow or hang a hawk/owl-shaped kite or decoy in your yard;
- In extreme cases, installing air-conditioning or double-glazing windows can provide relief from noise and odour, particularly in summer months.

### ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO MY HEALTH?

The risk of contracting disease from a flying-fox is low. A very small percentage (<1%) of wild flying-foxes are believed to carry the Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV). ABLV is found in the saliva of infected animals and can only be transmitted through a bite or a scratch. Generally speaking, flying-foxes are curious but timid animals and are not aggressive towards humans or other animals, but may scratch if frightened or hurt.

NSW Health advises the public to avoid handling dead or injured flying-foxes but to contact WIRES (1300 094 737) instead. WIRES wildlife carers are vaccinated and trained to rescue and care for flying-foxes safely. ABLV cannot be transmitted through urine or faeces and, according to NSW Health, living, working or playing near a flying-fox camp does not pose a significant risk.

For more information, visit:  
[sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Residents/Animals/Flying-Foxes](https://sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Residents/Animals/Flying-Foxes).

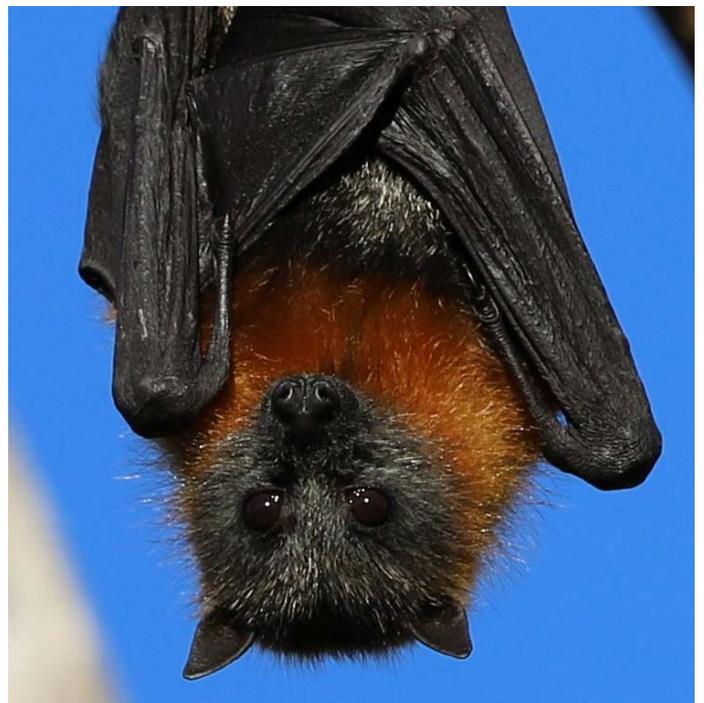
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### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THE MESS?

Although messy, the droppings do not carry ABLV, and may be safely cleaned away from cars, walls or driveways using a hose or high-pressure cleaner. Contrary to popular belief, they are no more corrosive than bird droppings; stubborn marks on cars are best treated by softening with a damp paper towel before removing. It is recommended that basic hygiene practices (e.g. washing hands) are followed after contact with any animal faeces.

Cocos Palms (*Syargus romanzoffiana*) are prevalent throughout the Shire and their fruit is particularly attractive to flying-foxes. The palms produce copious amounts of berries which drop to the ground, make a mess, and may cause an unpleasant odour if left to ferment. Unfortunately, eating these causes flying-foxes to produce very thick, sticky droppings which are difficult to wash away. Cocos Palms are a weed species and may be removed without Council approval. Removal of these palms can help in reducing negative impacts you may be experiencing from Grey-headed Flying-foxes.



A young Grey-headed Flying-fox resting at Camellia Gardens.  
Image: R. Williams, Sutherland Shire Council (2019)

