

# BELLO BIO BLOG

NO 2

## FLYING FOXES

The Bellingen Shire is home to five active flying-fox camps; two are within walking distance of the township, Bellingen Island camp and Bellingen Community Gardens camp. These camps are mostly occupied by the grey-headed flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), a nationally threatened species, and on occasion by the black flying-fox (*Pteropus alecto*) and the little red flying-fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*).

The grey headed flying fox is an umbrella species in Council's Biodiversity Strategy. This means that protecting this species, the many other species that make up the ecological community of its habitat are also protected.



Image: Pair of Grey Headed Flying-Fox

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### Importance of Flying Foxes

Flying-foxes play a vital role in ecosystem health. Consuming fruit, nectar and blossoms, they can travel up to 100 km in a single night, pollinating and dispersing seeds of native trees. Flying-foxes are protected native animals (like kangaroos and koalas). Their existence is threatened by human activities such as vegetation clearing, illegal killing and entanglement in wire, netting and powerlines. The survival of flying-foxes depends on our ability to live with them, and Council aims to find a balance between managing flying-foxes in urban areas and protecting their future through education and research.

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# Bello Bio Blog No 2. Flying Foxes (cont)

## Tips for living near Flying-Foxes

It is illegal to deliberately disturb flying-foxes or their habitat without a licence.

The level of noise and smell from a camp can sometimes impact residents living nearby.

- When disturbed or frightened flying-foxes will become more vocal. To avoid increasing noise levels from a roost it is best that they are admired from a distance.
- Flying-foxes may seem like a nuisance to some people and are often misunderstood. Issues relating to smell, noise, mess and damage to vegetation are usually short-lived and can generally be quickly addressed.
- Flying-fox droppings can be removed by hosing with water.
- You can reduce flying-foxes coming into your yard by managing plants that attract them such as those with edible fruits or flowers with lots of nectar.

## Protecting your backyard fruit

- Flying-foxes do not regard our fruit trees as the first choice for their diet. However, at times they will utilise fruit trees, especially when natural food sources of nectar and pollen are scarce.
- There are a wide range of netting options and some may even help to increase the yield of fruit. Only netting with a small weave that you cannot poke your finger through should be used to avoid entangling flying-foxes and other wildlife such as possums.
- Avoid the use of barbed wire fences near flowering/fruited plants or dams so that flying-foxes feeding, or drinking don't become ensnared.

## Flora for foraging flying-foxes

- Every year many flying-foxes are injured or killed from eating Cocos palm fruit. It can cause severe dehydration and gut problems and the seeds can choke flying-foxes or get caught behind their teeth, leading to a slow death by starvation. Flying-foxes can also become entangled or damage wing membranes on the tough flower spikes. To avoid these issues, and also minimise noise at night and mess from foraging flying-foxes, remove Cocos palms from your property or cut down the fruits when they are green.
- If you don't mind flying-foxes dropping in for a quick feed, see the table below for native food species for flying-foxes. Alternatively, aromatic plants that don't attract flying-foxes are also provided.

### Flying-fox food

- Lilly Pilly (*Acmena smithii*)
- Bangalow Palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*)
- Pink Bloodwood (*Corymbia intermedia*)
- White Mahogany (*Eucalyptus acmenoides*)
- Grey Box (*Eucalyptus moluccana*)
- Brush Cherry (*Syzygium australe*)

Image: Little Red Flying Fox eating melaleuca flowers



## Bello Bio Blog No 2. Flying Foxes (cont)

### Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV)

The risk of Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV) exposure is very low; research indicates that less than 1% of free-living bats carry ABLV.

Infection is easily prevented by not handling any bat (even if dead). If disposing of a dead bat, do not directly touch it, wear thick gloves or use a shovel or tongs, then double-bag in thick plastic before disposing.

Pre and post-exposure vaccinations that will prevent ABLV are also available.

You can't catch ABLV from living near a camp or a fly-out route, or from bat droppings.

No dog or cat has become ill with ABLV, but any mammal that comes into close contact with the virus may be at risk and measures should be taken to prevent pets coming into contact with bats.

This may include keeping pets inside when flying-foxes are feeding on fruiting or flowering trees on your property. If you believe your pet has been exposed, wash the area (as with human exposure) and seek immediate veterinary advice. Post-exposure vaccinations are possible if needed.

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

- Immediately wash (but do not scrub) the wound with soap and water for five minutes. Apply an antiviral antiseptic (e.g. betadine).
- Seek immediate medical attention from your doctor or New South Wales Health (ph. (02) 9391 9000).
- If flying-fox saliva contacts the eyes, nose or mouth, the area should be flushed thoroughly with water and contact your doctor to determine whether post-exposure treatment is required.
- If the bat is dead, call Council to ask them to remove it.

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### Flying-foxes, horses and Hendra virus

Flying-foxes are a natural host for Hendra virus, which can be transmitted to horses. Infected horses sometimes amplify the virus and can then transmit it to other horses and humans. The virus has never been passed directly from flying-fox to human.

Horses are thought to contract the disease after ingesting food contaminated with flying-fox urine, saliva or birthing fluids. Vaccination and appropriate horse husbandry can protect horses, and subsequently humans, from infection. Further information for horse owners can be found at [Department of Primary Industries](#).

Two dogs have tested positive for Hendra virus, both following close contact with infected horses. There is no evidence that dogs can be infected directly from flying-foxes.

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## Bello Bio Blog No 2. Flying Foxes (cont)

### Reporting dead or injured flying-foxes

RSPCA (Wildlife Emergencies)  
1300 094 737  
To safely collect a live or injured bat  
[www.rspca.org.au/](http://www.rspca.org.au/)(link is external)

WIRES (Wildlife Rescue)  
1300 094 737  
Rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured or orphaned wildlife  
[www.wires.org.au/branch/midnorthcoast/](http://www.wires.org.au/branch/midnorthcoast/)(link is external)

Bellingen Vet Hospital  
02 6655 1098  
To accept of sick, injured or orphaned flying-foxes  
[www.bellingenveterinaryhospital.com/](http://www.bellingenveterinaryhospital.com/)(link is external)

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### Further information

[Bellingen Island Camp Management Plan](#)

[Wildlife Friendly Fencing Project](#)

[Grey-headed flying-fox native species diet list](#)

[Bello gives a Fig](#)

[Little Aussie Battlers - Flying Fox Facts](#)

Image: Black Flying Fox

