

HUME CITY COUNCIL

Living with wildlife

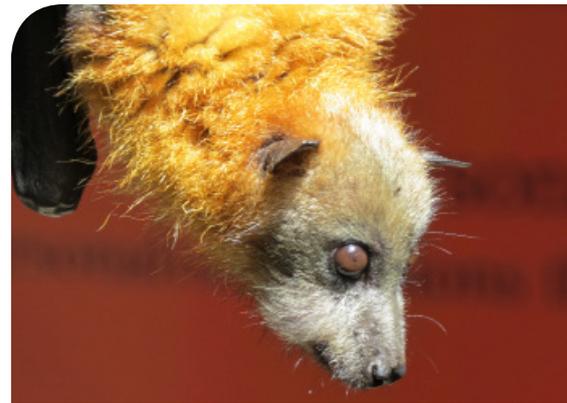
FRUIT BATS

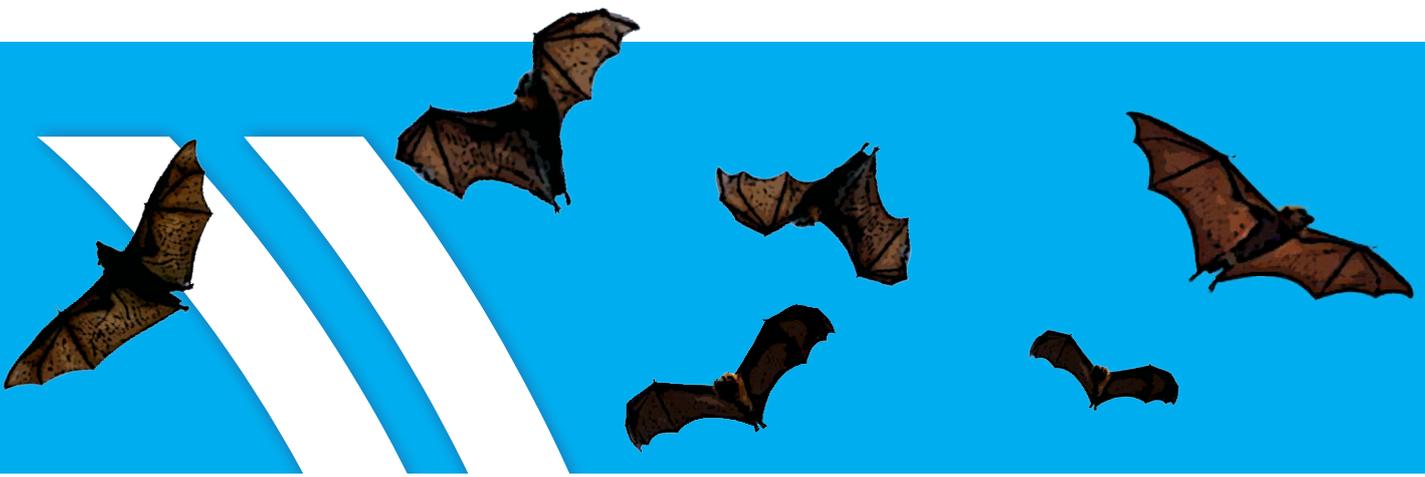
There are thirteen species of fruit bats in Australia. They are often referred to as flying-foxes as their face and ears resembles that of a fox. There are two types of fruit bats found in the urban areas of Melbourne; the Grey-headed Flying-fox and the Little Red Flying Fox.

The Grey-Headed Flying-fox is rare and listed as Vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 and Threatened in Victoria under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The survival of the Grey-headed Flying-fox is vital for cross pollination and seed dispersal of some native plant species. The Grey-headed Flying-fox is often destroyed illegally in orchards, even though shooting does not deter others.

Fruit bats or Flying Foxes are becoming more common in residential areas, as more of their natural habitat is being cleared for housing. Agriculture and Forestry has also greatly reduce their natural food resources. Urban areas with their diversity in garden plants provide a year round food source, meaning that many fruit bats no longer need be nomadic to find food sources; both species of fruit bats that are found in the urban areas of Melbourne were traditionally nomadic.

Fruit bats congregate in a camp during the breeding season (February – March), and can be seen in large numbers when feeding. Fruit bats navigate primarily by sight and locate food by a combination of sight and smell.





Diet

Grey-headed Flying Foxes are food generalists, feeding on fruit, nectar, pollen, leaves and bark, whereas the Little Red Flying Fox specialises in nectar and pollen from eucalypts and paperbarks. All fruit bats use forest and woodland trees, especially eucalypts, to forage.

When eating leaves and fruit the bats chew the food thoroughly, suck out the remaining juice, then spit out the fibrous remnant. Evidence of this remnant is a sign that fruit bats are feeding in the area.

Problems

When feeding, the bats become very noisy and can disrupt sleeping residents.

The camp can generate a strong, unpleasant odour, cause defoliation of trees, stains on some surfaces from their droppings and cause dogs to bark during the night.

In seasons where food is scarce, Grey-headed Flying Foxes can venture into orchards and cause a significant amount of damage to the crop.

Council's advice

Council advises residents to be tolerant of fruit bats, as they are unlikely to stay in one place for more than a week or two, and may not revisit the same trees each year. Many flowering or fruiting trees only provide a food source for a short period. Once the food supply is exhausted they are likely to move on.

Council encourages residents to only use wildlife friendly netting that passes the "finger test" to exclude bats from their gardens or trees. Netting with mesh holes bigger than 1cm, or holes big enough to poke your finger through, is the wrong type of netting to use. Many kinds of wildlife including bats, birds, lizards and possums, can easily get trapped in netting, where they either die or suffer from horrific injuries. Fruit protection bags are another wildlife friendly option to consider.

Injured or sick bats should only be handled by persons experienced in handling bats, as they could potentially carry diseases that could be transmitted by a bat scratch or bite.

**For more information about living with wildlife
contact Hume's Coordinator, Land and Biodiversity
on 9205 2200 or visit www.hume.vic.gov.au/wildlife**

