

# FLYING FOXES OUR MEGABAT MAMMALS

The banks of the Broken Creek in Numurkah are home to some of Australia's megabat species. The Grey-headed Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) and the Little Red Flying Fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*) are frequent visitors to the region, and have probably been so for thousands of years. Unfortunately their numbers are under pressure due to loss of habitat.

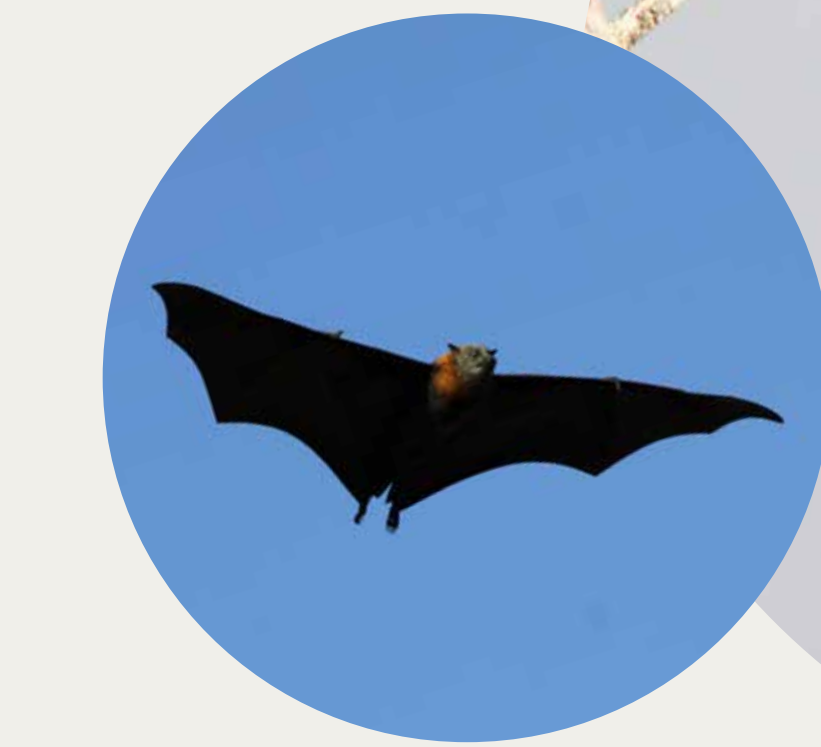
## HABITAT

Flying Foxes live in camps around swamps, woodlands, patches of rainforest and creeks – like the Broken Creek. Roosting above a water body helps them remain cool during summer. They roost high up in trees during the day, and fly to feeding grounds at night. They don't usually have a 'fixed address', rather the availability of food influences where they live, and where they move to. However, if the food source is stable, they will stay in a region for longer periods of time.

## DIET

The Flying Fox diet consists of fruits, nectar and pollen from more than 185 species of plants – they are capable of travelling 80 kilometres each night to feed. Unlike microbats, which rely on echolocation to locate food such as insects and moths, Flying Foxes rely on their sharp eyesight and sense of smell to locate food at night.

Because they feed on eucalyptus nectar, they are one of nature's great pollinators. We usually think of 'birds and bees' pollinating our plants as they feed from them, however Flying Foxes are a major pollinator of eucalypts. With their large blossoms and unpredictable flowering times, the trees have evolved to encourage Flying Foxes to feed from them. It's a 'win-win'!



## BREEDING

Female Grey-headed and Little Red Flying Foxes give birth to a single baby called a pup. Once born, the pup feeds on milk, and clings to their mother's fur while she forages at night. After several weeks they become too big, so remain at the roost to wait for their mother's return at dawn. The babies are looked after by their mother until they are able to fly and forage independently.

The Little Red Flying Fox is the smallest flying fox in mainland Australia. The nectar and pollen of eucalypt blossom is their favourite food, and like the Grey-headed Flying Foxes, they are integral to the pollination of our eucalypt species, as they transport pollen from one tree to another. They also play a vital role in the environment by dispersing seeds of plants. Many seeds won't grow if they fall too close to the parent tree, therefore Flying Foxes carry fruit – and their seeds – to new locations.

## THE FUTURE

Loss of habitat is a major threat to Flying Foxes. When their natural habitat is destroyed, they are forced to crowd into confined urban areas and gardens. This may not be so popular with the human residents!

Because they are so integral to seed dispersal and pollination, the rapid decline over the past few decades in populations of Flying Foxes is very concerning. It means the long-term survival of our unique eucalypt forest and rainforest ecosystems is under threat.

The Broken Boosey CMN is working to improve the natural habitat in our region for all native animals including our marvelous Megabats. For more information on all-things 'bat', visit the Australasian Bat Society website [www.ausbats.org.au](http://www.ausbats.org.au)

As with all bats, Flying Foxes are mammals – the only mammals capable of sustained flight. Despite their name, they are not related to foxes, rather they have been named because of their tiny fox-like facial features.

## THREATS TO FLYING FOXES

- Habitat destruction
- Disturbance by people and pets at roost sites
- Barbed wire fences
- Fruit tree netting
- Heat stress

## BATS AT THE BROKEN CREEK

The Numurkah flying fox colony is counted four times a year with the results contributing to a national monitoring program.

