

Fact Sheet

Flying-foxes in urban areas

Flying-foxes occupying bushland reserves in built up areas can cause concern for some local residents. These animals are nomadic, but at times many thousands of flying-foxes can colonise individual camps.

Council acknowledges that living next door to very large numbers of flying foxes can be difficult for some residents.

While the first reaction may be a wish to see them removed, this is not a simple matter. Experience elsewhere shows that dispersal attempts are likely to fail and may even generate more problems, such as splintering the colony across other residential areas. This leaflet seeks to provide useful information about these animals including Council's management role.

Flying-foxes in the Australian landscape

Flying-foxes are one of Australia's most important and valuable native mammals and are essential for forest health and seed dispersal.

They pollinate commercial, hardwood tree species, as well as paperbarks, figs and eucalypts. These trees provide habitat and food for other native species, including koalas.

Nationally, flying-foxes have declined in number, largely due to clearing of their feeding territories, destruction of campsites and illegal killing. Although they appear plentiful because they live together in colonies, the reality is their survival is not assured. They are protected under the Queensland Nature Conservation Act 1992 and the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The Grey-headed flying-fox is listed as 'vulnerable' at the national level. The survival of flying-foxes depends on our ability to share our neighbourhoods and protect their habitat.

Why have flying-foxes come into the area?

Flying-foxes are a natural part of the environment and have been moving in response to food availability for many thousands of years. Their diet consists of nectar, pollen and native fruits from at least 40 eucalypts and 66 other native plants. It is not possible to predict where flying foxes will camp but it is likely they prefer to be near waterways to aid with night navigation. Nor is it possible to predict how long they will stay as this depends on food availability. Once their food source is diminished, they move elsewhere. In our coastal regions, they follow the arrival of the paperbark and bloodwood blossoms in particular, but also feed on other flowering exotic plants and fruits.

The Grey-headed flying-fox and the Black flying-fox tend to occupy regional camps (e.g. hinterland to coast) and breed around the same times, although the Black flying-fox has been known to breed outside the usual season. The Little Red flying-fox have a greater range (e.g. state-wide) and will breed later in the year.



Grey-headed flying-fox

(Photos courtesy of Flying-Fox Rescue Noosa Inc.)



Black flying-fox



Little red flying-fox

Flying-foxes have been in this area for many thousands of years. Historically, colonies in the Noosa region have been recorded at Weyba Creek, Pinaroo Park, Cooran, Coorobah, Goat Island, and now at Wallace Park. Flying fox camps are normally temporary, moving to new locations after a limited number of seasons. The camp beside Lake Weyba Drive existed for around 3 years before naturally dispersing.

Issues of concern

Residents often express concern about infection from flying-foxes, noise, the strong smell emanating from their colonies and the staining of pavements and outdoor areas.

- **Health risks** - flying-foxes are not a health risk unless you are bitten or scratched, so please do not handle them. You will not be exposed to the Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL) if flying-foxes fly overhead or feed or roost in your garden. Flying-foxes (and other bats) are associated with rare events where the Hendra virus is transmitted to a host species such as a horse. There is no evidence that Hendra virus can be transmitted directly to humans from flying-foxes. Nor is there any evidence that diseases have spread from the droppings or urine of these animals. For more information contact Queensland Health www.health.qld.gov.au or phone 13 43 25 48.
- **Smell** - the strongest odour in flying-fox colonies occurs during mating season when males exude a musk-like odour from scent glands in their necks which they rub on branches to mark their breeding territories. Weather patterns will impact on the strength and spread of this odour.
- **Droppings staining outdoor areas** - because of their nectar and fruit diet, flying-fox droppings or spats can dry out and be difficult to clean. It is recommended to wash these off as soon as possible, if practical.
- **Sick or injured flying-foxes** - if a flying-fox is on the ground or alone during the day, it almost certainly needs help. Again, residents are reminded not to handle these animals. For dead, sick or injured flying-foxes please contact Flying-Fox Rescue and Release Noosa Inc. www.flying-foxrescue.org/ or phone 07 5485 3393.
- **Noise** - flying-foxes are most vocal during mating season, or when they are stressed or frightened. They have over 30 different calls some of which are unique to mothers and their young. Mothers carry their young while feeding until the load gets too heavy. They will then leave their protesting youngsters behind in the crèche and will find them again through special calls and scent.



Female grey-headed flying-fox carrying young./ wrapping young under her wing
(Photo courtesy of Flying-Fox Rescue Noosa Inc.).



What is Council's role regarding flying-fox management?

As a general rule, Council does not interfere in the natural migration of native species. Any attempts to interfere with a flying fox camp, or disperse flying foxes, requires State and National permits and approvals. Strict codes of practice apply to any interference. For example, if pregnant flying foxes are observed in the colony, then no disturbance is allowed. Tree vegetation works can only occur after the flying foxes have moved on.

When complaints are received from residents in urban areas, the flying-fox colonies are monitored by Council officers in conjunction with the State government, volunteers from Flying-fox Rescue and Release Noosa Inc., and neighbouring councils.

Table below shows the estimated number of flying-foxes in Wallace Park and Goat Island as a result of these monitoring activities in 2014.

This data reveals the natural fluctuations in flying-fox numbers.

Monitoring results of FF colonies in 2014.						
Month/Date	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Site				17/4-24/4	1/5-29/5	2/6-16/6
Wallace Park	No data	468,000	5,000	7,550 to 7,120	15,550 to 30,450	29,500 to 6,030
				3/4-24/4	1/5-29/5	2/6-16/6
Goat Island	No data	No data	No data	0-50	0	1,000-0

Source: Noosa Council and Sunshine Coast Council.

Unusually for this time of year, Wallace Park seems to have Little Red Flying-foxes remaining long after they would normally disperse from our area. This is combined with an unusually high influx of Grey-headed and Black Flying-foxes. We are unsure why this has occurred. Discussions with Brisbane City Council confirm that they are also experiencing unseasonal behaviour amongst their many Flying-fox colonies at present.

Reserve Management

Council will also continue to maintain the fire trail between the residential areas and the Wallace Park Bushland Reserve as an annual operational aspect of reserve management.

This involves slashing and mulching of overgrown vegetation along the trail.

Bushland Reserves are a valued asset for the conservation and protection of native fauna and flora. They provide a green addition to built-up urban areas and form corridors for the safe movement of wildlife within Noosa and beyond.

Any further actions by Council will be subject to future consideration and on-going monitoring of local flying-fox colonies.

For more information, please contact Noosa Council on 5329 6500.



Paperbark Forest



Flowering Paperbark (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*)