

Flying Fox Facts

By Dr Martin Cohen (Wild About Australia)

Flying Foxes (including Spectacled and Little Red Flying Foxes):

- Are **vegetarians** and mainly eat nectar and fruit.
 - Are extremely important to **maintaining biodiversity** in Australian forests.
 - Have the ability to **cross-pollinate** over great distances and carry fruit and seeds far away from parent trees.
 - Are the **main pollinators** of many native Australian trees as they carry pollen on their fur to other flowers.
 - Are **vital to the continued survival of many rainforest trees** as they eat the fruit and spit the seeds out at other places.
 - Have **excellent vision** and a **sense of smell** and **DO NOT** use echolocation like the small, insectivorous microbats.
 - Have very large wingspans up to 1.6 metres.
 - Are **very clean animals** and constantly groom their fur and wing membrane.
 - Can fly around 40 kilometres per hour and up to **50 kilometres each night**.
 - Have average wing beats of 120 per minute.
 - Have a **complex social system** and spend their day in permanent tree-top communal camps.
 - Have more than **20 different calls for communication**.
 - Have old males guarding the boundaries of the camp keeping a look out for predators such as eagles and pythons.
 - **Spectacled Flying Foxes** mate in March/April and give birth to a **single young** between October and December.
 - **Little Red Flying Foxes** mate in November/December and give birth to a single young in April/May.
- Flying Fox numbers have significantly decreased during the past 50 years and the Spectacled Flying Fox is now classified as **'Vulnerable'** under the Federal Government's **Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (the EPBC Act)**.
 - Lyssavirus in Flying Foxes populations is rare but when infected the flying fox soon dies from the disease.
 - It is vital that only people vaccinated against rabies handle wild flying foxes.
 - People will **NOT** be exposed to Lyssavirus when Flying-foxes fly overhead, when they roost or feed in garden trees, or even from touching their droppings. Lyssavirus can only be transmitted through deep tissue bites or scratches.
 - Bird droppings are actually more corrosive than flying-fox faeces. Soaking the stain with a damp rag is the easiest way to remove it. Unless the paint is old or peeling, no permanent damage should result from a bat leaving its calling card.
 - **Better bat education** is an essential solution to the communities perceived bat problems.





Myth 1: Flying foxes are dirty animals

FACT: Flying-foxes are exceptionally clean animals and they invert or hang right side up in order to avoid soiling themselves. During hot weather a mother bat may urinate deliberately on her young to help cool it down.

Myth 2: Bats in Australia suck your blood

FACT: Blood-sucking, or Vampire Bats, are only found in Central and South America. These small bats weigh only 36gms.

Myth 3: Bats are pests and serve no purpose in our environment

FACT: Flying-foxes and Blossom Bats play a vital role in the out-crossing of pollen and in seed dispersal in our native forests. It is estimated that a single Flying-fox can disperse up to 60,000 seeds in one night. Without bats our forests may become genetically weak, may not be as diverse in number of species and most likely would not survive many generations without bats. Microbats are capable of eating their own body weight in insects each and every night. They are excellent natural controllers of moths and mosquitoes, and without microbats insect populations would become enormous.

Myth 4: Bats live in caves

FACT: While a large proportion of Australian microbats do live in caves, many microbats will choose to live in tree hollows, roofs of houses, telephone junction boxes, sheds, rolled up beach umbrellas. In fact microbats may live anywhere that can provide stable conditions, protection from weather, predators and safety.

Myth 5: Blind as a bat

FACT: Bats are not blind, not even the microbats, although they do not rely heavily on sight as much as Flying-foxes do. Flying-foxes have excellent eyesight (20 times better than our own!) and can see up to 1 kilometre at night. Many of our native trees have evolved to have light coloured blossoms and fruit which are highly visible to Flying-foxes on dark nights.

Myth 6: You can catch Lyssavirus from touching bat droppings

FACT: People will NOT be exposed to Lyssavirus when Flying-foxes fly overhead, when they roost or feed in garden trees, or even from touching their droppings. Lyssavirus can only be transmitted through deep tissue bites or scratches.

Myth 7: Bats get tangled in your hair

FACT: Bats are all good navigators and naturally fearful of humans so even an accidental collision is most unlikely.

Myth 8: Bats are cold and clammy to touch

FACT: Bats are warm, fuzzy and in fact quite cute! Their wing membrane is not dissimilar in feel to the skin of our own eyelids.

Myth 9: Bats are the only mammals in the world without an anus (!)

FACT: Bats are placental mammals with exactly the same excretory organs as ourselves. Due to their rapid digestion (approximately 20 minutes) and their inability to digest fibre, bats will chew the fruit they eat, extract the juice and spit out the remains. The silly myth about bats excreting from their mouths is simply a misinterpretation of this behaviour.

Myth 10: Flying fox droppings strip paint from cars and houses

FACT - Bird droppings are actually more corrosive than flying-fox faeces. Soaking the stain with a damp rag is the easiest way to remove it. Unless the paint is old or peeling, no permanent damage should result from a bat leaving its calling card.

PO Box 154
Mareeba QLD 4880
65 Rankin Street
Mareeba QLD 4880

Telephone: 1300 308 461
Facsimile: (07) 4092 3323
Email: info@msc.qld.gov.au
Website: www.msc.qld.gov.au