



Melbourne's Flying-foxes New home at Yarra Bend Park, Kew

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Background

Grey-headed Flying-foxes, sometimes called "fruit bats", are large bats that are native to Australia. Flying-foxes are intelligent, social animals that roost together at a "camp" during the day, but feed individually or in small groups at night.

They play an important role in regenerating our native forests by pollinating and dispersing seeds. Due to large-scale habitat loss, Grey-headed Flying-fox numbers have declined dramatically and the species is listed as threatened at both a National and State level.

Grey-headed Flying-foxes are an important part of Melbourne's wildlife and, until recently, have been roosting in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Their presence in the Royal Botanic Gardens was not sustainable due to the sensitive nature of the plantings. A relocation project was undertaken in an effort to preserve the heritage-listed Gardens and provide a secure roost site for the endangered flying-foxes.

Where are the flying-foxes now?

Yarra Bend Park, Kew

The Grey-headed Flying-fox relocation trial has been a success.

The colony was moved out of the Royal Botanic Gardens to a site where they can remain secure and flourish. The site is part of Yarra Bend Park, five kilometres from the city, where conflict with human use and values is minimal and the habitat needs of the animals are being met.

No flying-foxes have roosted in the Royal Botanic Gardens since April 2003. The affected area is recovering and a restoration program is under way. A maintenance program is in place to ensure that the flying-foxes don't return.

It will be a priority to address the concerns of any local residents and users of Yarra Bend Park. However, a balance must be struck between the needs of the community and the conservation of the threatened Grey-headed Flying-fox.

Will the flying-foxes remain at Yarra Bend Park?

Yes. The Yarra Bend Park site meets the habitat needs of the flying-foxes and, with some improvement and ongoing management, will be suitable for the long-term.

Yarra Bend Park is an area of natural bushland that is appropriate for flying-foxes to roost in due to its size, relative isolation, vegetation, protection from weather, minimal recreational use and the opportunities for education and tourism. Since arriving, the colony has chosen to remain at the site and has raised many young.

The risks associated with any attempt to move the colony are too great to warrant further relocation attempts. There is a chance that flying-foxes could disperse into surrounding residential areas, inner-city parks or back to the Royal Botanic Gardens.

How were the flying-foxes moved out of the Royal Botanic Gardens?

The relocation trial relied on two approaches – attracting the colony from the Royal Botanic Gardens to an alternative site (the animals moving themselves there) and dispersing the colony from the Gardens. This kind of approach has never been attempted in an urbanised area.

Despite best efforts, flying-foxes couldn't be attracted to establish a colony at Horseshoe Bend in Ivanhoe as was hoped. However, it was possible to manoeuvre the colony and at the same time prevent it from roosting in inappropriate areas.

Now that the colony will remain at Yarra Bend Park, the captive flying-foxes will be released from Horseshoe Bend. The habitat restoration program at Horseshoe Bend will be completed as planned.

Won't the flying-foxes cause damage to vegetation at Yarra Bend Park?

Flying-foxes will always be present in Melbourne so it is important to manage their presence in areas where the conflict between people and wildlife is minimised.

Irrespective of where flying-foxes roost, they will, like all animals, have an impact on their surrounds, so it's a matter of managing that impact and ensuring it's sustainable.

Yarra Bend Park is proving to be a suitable site because of its size and vegetation type. The area the animals occupy is within a 26-hectare site, which is big enough for the animals to move around and give affected vegetation an opportunity to recover.

The native vegetation at Yarra Bend is hardy and resilient and can recover from temporary impact. It has evolved to cope with native wildlife, including flying-foxes. That said, there still needs to be active management to ensure that the site remains sustainable through weed control and revegetation of the degraded site and installing artificial roosts to ease the pressure on the trees.

What improvements will be made to Yarra Bend?

\$1.7 million will be spent over five years to improve and manage the habitat at the site and ensure its long-term sustainability as a functioning flying-fox campsite.

Attention will be given to minimising any impacts on the local community and provision will be made for educational and visitor opportunities, such as viewing platforms and information about flying-foxes.

Funding will be used for things such as weed control, revegetation, wetland creation, installing artificial roosts and visitor management. The proposed improvements will not only benefit the flying-foxes, but all wildlife and visitors who use the area.

Further information

For further information about Melbourne's flying-foxes, contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit the Department's website: www.dse.vic.gov.au