



Media release

From the Department of Sustainability and Environment



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Encouraging start on bat disturbance

The first phase of the flying-fox disturbance program at the Royal Botanic Gardens has been concluded with encouraging signs for the wildlife management experiment.

Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Dr Philip Moors, said ten days of unsettling noise and visual effects had moved several thousand bats out of the Gardens into outlying areas of adjoining parkland, and disrupted the rest of the colony.

“It is much too early to claim success, but there are several promising outcomes so far,” Dr Moors said.

“We have used a number of disturbance techniques and have a good idea of which are more effective when used at different intensities and under certain conditions.

“For instance, we know that the ‘sound buggies’ work best. They are mobile sound systems playing a CD of mixed sounds scientifically tested and found to be uncomfortable to flying-foxes. The sound is funneled upwards into the tree canopy, disturbing the bats and making them take off and flee the noise.”

Dr Moors said the animals had become used to some of the disturbance techniques after a few days, but the recorded sounds had maintained their effectiveness.

“This is especially encouraging because it is a measure low in cost and low in labour intensity. We’ve decided to cease the other activities and just persist with using the sound buggies at dusk and dawn to maintain the unattractive environment for the animals in and around the Gardens,” Dr Moors said.

Dr Moors said almost 200 volunteers - staff from the RBGM, Department of Primary Industries and Department of Sustainability and Environment, and members of the Friends of the RBGM - had shown great commitment by turning up repeatedly at 5.00am and 7.00pm to support the flying-fox disturbance program.

“On behalf of everyone who loves these Gardens, I thank the volunteers for their generous support,” Dr Moors said. “I also thank our neighbours for their understanding, some of whom have been disrupted by our early morning activities and have, nevertheless, affirmed their commitment to our efforts to protect the Gardens from continuing damage.”

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Dr Moors said the disturbance program was adjusted to reduce the noise impact on neighbours during the early morning disturbance sessions.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment said flying-foxes were continuing to visit the alternative roost site at Horseshoe Bend during the evening, however, as yet, no animals were observed roosting there during the day.

“We did not expect the colony to shift after just 10 days of the program,” said Dr Robert Begg, DSE’s Deputy Director of Flora and Fauna. “But we are encouraged by the shift of a significant number of animals out of the Gardens.

“It’s important now to make further progress on lowering the attractiveness of the Botanic Gardens as a comfortable and secure roosting site, while we continue to make Horseshoe Bend as attractive as possible.”

Dr Begg said the program would continue in a refined form using the most effective dispersal techniques.

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