



# Relocating Melbourne's Flying-foxes

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## Grey-headed Flying-foxes

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.

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

## Royal Botanic Gardens: flying-fox free!

The project to relocate Melbourne's flying-fox colony from the Royal Botanic Gardens has achieved its major goal - no flying-foxes have roosted in the Gardens since April 2003 and there are no animals roosting in any inner-city parks. This is the first time in almost twenty years that there have been no flying-foxes roosting in the Gardens.

The most severely affected area of the Royal Botanic Gardens (Fern Gully) is showing signs of recovery and a restoration program has begun, although recovery will take many years. An on-going maintenance program is in place to disperse the flying-foxes should they attempt to roost in the Gardens or any of the other inner-city parks again.

Although flying-foxes continue to visit the trial site at Horseshoe Bend at night and small numbers have roosted there for limited periods, no large-scale roosting has occurred.

## Where are the flying-foxes now?

### Yarra Bend Park, Kew

Following a strategic and systematic program of dispersal from the Botanic Gardens which started in March 2003, most of Melbourne's flying-foxes (more than 10,000), are now roosting along the Yarra River in a small area of Yarra Bend Park in Kew.

Over two hundred staff and volunteers from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Royal Botanic Gardens, Parks Victoria, Zoos Victoria, a private environmental consultant and Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, spent thousands of man-hours and covered over 300 hectares of inner-city parks to manoeuvre the colony onto the Yarra River in Hawthorn.

From there, the colony was "herded", using a different technique, along the Yarra River and into Yarra Bend Park, Kew, where it has remained since late-September.

So far, the area has met the habitat needs of the flying-foxes and there is very little conflict with human use and values. There has been no attempt by the colony to leave the area since its arrival and adults are now raising their young.

### Geelong and Warrnambool

There are also about 900 flying-foxes roosting sixty kilometres to the south of Melbourne in Eastern Park, Geelong, and a very small number (12 as at December) are roosting in the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens, 230 kilometres west of Melbourne. It is unknown whether or not these colonies will persist, as they have been declining in number since peaking earlier in the year.

## Where can we go to see the flying-foxes?

The main colony in Kew can be viewed from the banks of the Yarra River in the Bellbird Picnic Area, Yarra Bend Park, Kew (Melway Map 44 K 3). Look to the right of the car park as you face the river. Good views can also be had from the Yarra Boulevard, which looks out over the colony and towards the city skyline.

People are encouraged to watch the flying-foxes but it is important not to disturb the colony. There are heavy penalties for disturbing this nationally threatened species and Parks Victoria Rangers and Department of Sustainability and Environment Wildlife Officers frequently patrol the area.

The colony in Geelong is in Eastern Park (Melway Map 452 G 4) in a stand of pine trees, adjacent to the boundary of the Geelong East Golf Club.

The small colony at Warrnambool is in the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens.

## What happens now?

Melbourne is expecting an influx of up to 20,000 flying-foxes from New South Wales and Queensland over the summer months. The flying-foxes come to Melbourne to take advantage of plentiful food supplies before they head back along the east coast and into the northern states as food resources decline and the cooler temperatures arrive. A core population of about 8,000 animals is expected to remain in Melbourne over winter.

It is expected that the incoming animals will join with the colony at Kew. There is an ongoing, low-level dispersal program in place to ensure that flying-foxes do not return to the Royal Botanic Gardens or other inner-city parks. A response plan has been developed to manage any large numbers of flying-foxes that move into inappropriate areas.

The status of the Kew camp will be monitored and a decision made next year as to whether there is an attempt to move the colony further upstream towards the trial site at Horseshoe Bend in Ivanhoe.

## Flying-foxes – important information

Flying-foxes can carry the Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABL), which can be transmitted in bat saliva if someone is bitten or scratched. There is no danger from flying-foxes if they are observed from a distance and not handled. There have been no reports of related illness in Victoria. Contact with flying-foxes should be avoided to minimise exposure to ABL.

If bitten or scratched by a bat, including flying-foxes, the area must be washed with soap and water for at least five minutes. A medical practitioner should be consulted immediately for advice and possible immunisation.

## Further information

For further information about relocating Melbourne's flying-foxes or flying-foxes in general, 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](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)