



Department of
Sustainability
and Environment



MEDIA RELEASE

DISPERSAL VITAL TO RELOCATING THE GARDENS' FLYING-FOXES

An important phase is about to begin in the world-first attempt to relocate the Royal Botanic Gardens' growing colony of flying-foxes to an alternative site.

A combination of noise and movement will be used over the next two weeks to shift the colony, which currently numbers more than 28,000.

The Grey-headed flying-fox is a protected species, but the sheer weight of numbers in the heritage listed Botanic Gardens is damaging and, in some instances, killing historically significant trees and plantings.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industries, together with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Zoos Victoria and Parks Victoria, is trying to relocate a significant proportion of the colony at the Gardens to a pre-selected site in Ivanhoe, known as Horseshoe Bend.

There, a captive colony of flying-foxes, together with decoy bats in trees, free food, a moist, humid environment and a number of familiar camp smells and sounds, will lure dispersing flying-foxes and encourage them to set up a permanent roost.

Dr Philip Moors, Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, said: "It has become apparent that as long as the colony remains undisturbed in the Gardens, the animals are unlikely to relocate to the alternative site."

"Recorded and electronic sounds, loud noises such as starters' pistols, and visual stimuli such as fluorescent flags on the ends of bamboo poles and helium balloons, will be used to make the Gardens unattractive to flying-foxes," said Dr Moors. "None of these techniques will harm or hurt the flying-foxes in any way, he said.

"It won't work overnight, but if we can get the message through that their five-star accommodation at the Gardens has dropped down the quality ratings, we believe that they will look for another roost."

Media contacts: **Jean Ker Walsh on 0413 834 646 (for Royal Botanic Gardens)**
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This innovative trial has never been attempted anywhere in the world and is a model of adaptive management aimed at protecting the Gardens while providing for the threatened Grey-headed Flying-fox.

Deputy Director of Flora & Fauna for the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Dr Robert Begg, said the relocation effort is a three-year trial and may enter several phases before being successful.

“No-one should expect that the flying-foxes are all going to shift en masse to the place we’ve tailor-made for them,” Dr Begg said. “This is a world-first experiment in urban wildlife management which may take several years to show definitive results.”

“We are now in a position to make their environment less comfortable in the Gardens because there is an alternative site at Horseshoe Bend for the flying-foxes to move to”.

Flying-foxes are a normal part of our urban wildlife and have been coming to Melbourne for over 100 years. They feed throughout the suburbs at night in trees in backyards, parks and reserves, before heading back to the Gardens to roost during the day.

Dr Begg said that residents in the suburbs around the Gardens and along the Yarra River might notice flying-foxes during daylight hours while the animals search for an alternative roost after being evicted from Fern Gully.

“If people see flying-foxes in their yard during the day, they should leave them alone and they will probably leave in a day or two because such environments don’t provide quality roost sites”, Dr Begg said.

There is no need to report the presence of flying-foxes unless they have roosted there during the day for more than seven days in a row or there are more than 50 animals on the property during the day. The public can call the DSE/DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186 between 8am and 8pm for more information.

Staff from DSE/DPI, Parks Victoria and local Councils will monitor any concentrations of flying-foxes on areas of public land. If they are considered to be in an inappropriate area, such as close to residential developments, the flying-foxes will be moved on.

People are reminded not to handle flying-foxes. Anyone who is bitten or scratched should seek immediate medical attention.

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