



FlyingFoxes

of South East Queensland



Photo: Theo Allofs



Summary

South east Queensland is home to three species of flying fox that rely on certain forest types for their survival. The species, their characteristics and habitats are outlined below.

Black flying fox

Black flying foxes (*Pteropus alecto*) are mainly found in wet and dry eucalypt forests, mangroves, melaleuca swamps and casuarinas. Black flying foxes form permanent camps, often with grey-headed flying foxes. In Queensland, camp sizes generally exceed 20,000 individuals.

They feed on nectar, flowers and fruits of native trees and on cultivated fruit (bananas, paw paws, mangoes, lychees etc.) when native food is sparse. Their search for food rarely exceeds 20kms, and most foraging takes place less than 6kms from their camp.

Grey-headed flying fox

Grey-headed flying foxes (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) occupy similar habitat to black flying foxes (see above) but over a smaller range that extends south into Victoria. Populations that once extended north to Rockhampton are now contracting southward of Maryborough in response to diminishing forest resources. Grey-headed flying foxes may travel up to 40km per night in search of food.

The species was listed as nationally 'vulnerable' to extinction under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* in December 2001.

Little red flying fox

Little red flying foxes (*Pteropus scapulatus*) are a nomadic species that prefer to feed on nectar. They move seasonally in response to the patterns of flowering eucalypts and paperbarks and form only

temporary camps. Their nightly search for food is generally up to 20-30km from their camp.

Their most distinguishing feature is the semi-transparent brown wings, which can be seen when it flies during the day. They are the only species of flying fox that will roost in tight clusters with as many as 30 individuals on a single branch.



Seed Dispersal and Pollination

Flying foxes play a vital role in the regeneration of native forests. Due to their nocturnal feeding habits and extensive feeding ranges, flying foxes are able to pollinate tree species that produce most of their nectar at night and are less likely to be pollinated by day-feeding birds and bees.

Pollen is collected on the fur of flying foxes while feeding on the nectar of flowers. It attaches mainly to the head and neck region and is distributed between different feeding sites. This may lead to cross-pollination between flowers of the same tree or between flowers of different trees of the same species in separate forest patches.

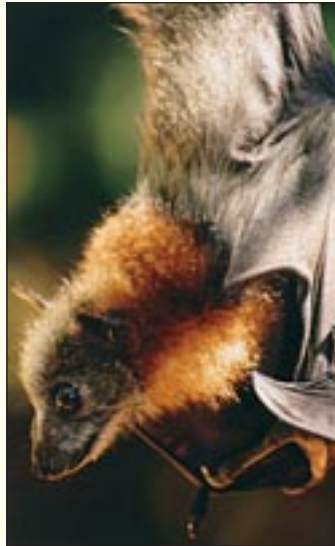


The dispersal of seeds by flying foxes may happen in one of three ways:

- fruit may be taken from a tree, consumed elsewhere and large seeds spat out some distance from their origin;
- fruit may be taken away and dropped during transport;
- fruit may be taken and eaten on-site but small seeds excreted elsewhere.

The seeds of many species of rainforest trees will only germinate if moved some distance from the parent tree. Due to their ability to carry large fruit and move it over considerable distances, flying foxes are responsible for maintaining genetic diversity amongst remnant patches of forests.



Identifying Flying Foxes of South East Queensland

Distinguishing Characteristics	Grey-headed flying fox	Black flying fox	Little red flying fox
Photo	 Photo: Chris Boston	 Photo: Errol Larkin	 Photo: Theo Allotis
Facial features	Large, dark brown eyes. Head covered with grey fur.	Head covered with black fur, often with brownish tinge around the large dark brown eyes.	Large red-brown eyes. Fur greyish.
Fur on head, neck & body	Collar of golden fur fully encircling the head. Fur long, almost fluffy. Grey to frosted silver hair extends down the legs to the toes.	Short, jet black fur, often tipped with white covers body. Dark chocolate brown patch often around back of neck and shoulders (mantle). Legs black and hairless.	Reddish-brown to light brown fur. Light, creamy brown patches of fur where wing membrane and shoulder meet. Legs red-brown and hairless.
Wings	Black, opaque, stretching length of body to ankles and inner thighs.	Black, opaque, stretching the length of the body to ankles and inner thighs.	Reddish-brown, semitransparent in flight. Outline narrower than the black and grey-headed flying fox.
Roost habit	Roost approximately a wingspan apart.	Roost approximately a wingspan apart.	Roost in tight clusters, with up to 30 bats hanging together from one small branch.
Size (weight)	600 - 1000g	600 - 1000g	The smallest of the flying foxes 300 - 600g

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