Statement on the developing situation for flying-foxes in parts of eastern Australia

Australasian Bat Society Urges Safe, Informed Responses to Flying-fox Distress

Friday 23 October 2026

There are currently increasing reports of flying-foxes in distress as well as mortalities in parts of eastern Australia. This includes deaths in neonatal and adult flying-foxes. The nationally Vulnerable Grey-headed Flying-fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*) appears to be the main species impacted, but there are some reports that the Black Flying-fox (*Pteropus alecto*) is also being affected.

While investigations into the possible reasons are ongoing, the cause of this event has not yet been confirmed. However, starvation may be a contributing factor as many individuals appear to be severely emaciated. Flying-foxes rely on nectar from flowering trees and other natural food sources, and a range of factors influence their availability. These can include recent weather conditions, the timing of flowering events, climate change and habitat loss or degradation. In response, flying-foxes are showing changes in behaviour. Hungry flying-foxes may remain in flowering or fruiting trees during the day rather than returning to the camps, forage in unusual locations or appear unusually approachable as they search for food.

Though people may want to help flying-foxes in distress, feeding or attempting to handle them can put both people and animals at risk. The Australasian Bat Society (ABS) urges the public to keep children, pets and other people away from bats they encounter. If you find a bat in distress, contact your local wildlife rescue group immediately. Never attempt to handle a flying-fox, whether it appears injured, unwell or approachable. In addition, avoid handling any bats that have already died.

Flying-foxes may carry Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV), a rare virus that can cause a fatal disease in humans. There is no effective treatment once symptoms develop, making urgent medical assessment following a potential exposure essential. Transmission can occur when infected saliva enters the body through a bite or scratch, or contacts the eyes, nose, mouth or open wound. ABLV does not survive in the environment, and transmission does not occur through contact with bat urine or faeces, or being within close proximity. People can safely share environments with flying-foxes by maintaining a safe distance and avoiding all direct contact.

Anyone bitten or scratched by a bat should immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 minutes, apply an antiseptic if available and seek urgent medical attention. Any potential exposure involving the eyes, nose or mouth also requires urgent medical assessment.

Flying-foxes are vital pollinators and seed dispersers, helping maintain and regenerate Australian forests. Giving these animals space and leaving their care to trained wildlife rescuers helps protect both people and flying-foxes.

Further information about this developing event can be found on the Wildlife Health Australia Incident Information page.

ABS members are working hard on the ground and behind the scenes with multiple stakeholders to support ongoing investigations and response efforts. The ABS encourages the community to support wildlife rescuers, and to protect and plant suitable native flowering and fruiting trees. These trees help provide natural food resources for flying-foxes into the future.

About the Australasian Bat Society

The Australasian Bat Society Inc. (ABS) is the peak body promoting bat conservation in the Australasian region. The primary aim of the ABS is to promote the conservation of bats and their habitats through the advancement of quality science and the extensive experience of our members. We recognise the intrinsic value of all bat species as well as their place in this region's natural heritage and the key ecological roles they play in our natural environment.