

Black flying-foxes in Sydney

Although the main flying-fox seen in the Sydney area is the grey-headed flying-fox *Pteropus poliocephalus*, black flying-foxes *Pteropus alecto* have been repeatedly seen in Sydney since the summer of 2005.

Range

- Historically, black flying-foxes are found across the northern reaches of Australia and into Papua New Guinea
- Between 1930 and 1960 their range extended southwards along the east coast from Rockhampton to the Tweed River in northern NSW
- By 1990 the most southerly known camp was 40 km further south on the Richmond River
- Between 1990 and 2004 black flying-foxes were seen in camps of grey-headed flying-foxes another 350 km south to the Manning River near Taree
- Since then they've been spotted in camps further down the coast, culminating in a small group settling into the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, in the summer of 2006

Settling into Sydney

This group of around 45 bats disappeared when winter hit, presumably to head back north. The following summer, in February 2007, a larger group of around 170 individuals arrived and this time most of them stayed even through that year's harsh winter. This was the first time a functional group of adult males, adult females, and juveniles had been seen so far south. In late 2007, there were two pups born to the group, followed by a further eleven pups in the 2008 season, and another eleven in 2009 - suggesting that they are definitely here to stay.

The Botanic Gardens camp seems to be the only one in Sydney where the blacks have taken up permanent residence, although early in 2008 a few were observed for a week at Kurnell. Despite repeated checks, no sightings were made at any other Sydney camp until the relocation disturbance at the Royal Botanic Gardens in 2010, when a small number of black flying-foxes turned up briefly at the Gordon camp, and a larger number (c. 50 animals) set up temporary residence at Parramatta camp. The Botanic Gardens group, meanwhile, has maintained a constant presence, with numbers fluctuating.

Why are black flying-foxes moving south?

While we don't know for certain what is moving the black flying-fox southwards, we can have a good guess. For most of our native wildlife species, habitat destruction is the main threat and cause of changes to range. For flying-foxes, this has been especially relevant in recent years in south-east Queensland and northern NSW as these areas have increasingly been cleared and developed for housing. Climate change is another factor, making the environment in Sydney warmer and more suitable for what is usually a tropical species.

While the black flying-fox has been expanding southwards, so has the grey-headed flying-fox: they've become permanent residents in Melbourne and have recently established a presence in Adelaide.

In 2010 the first black flying-foxes were reported in the Yarra Bend camp in Melbourne, with two animals briefly spotted roosting amongst the grey-headed flying-foxes.

We don't know if the black flying-foxes moving south will have any effect on the population of grey-headed flying-foxes or on the environment in general. So, for the time being it's just a case of

monitoring the camps and observing the interactions between the two species.

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