



# Friends of Bats

newsletter

Issue 96, March 2010



## No Shooting Campaign - Government must decide **URGENTLY**

*Mina Bassarova*

Since December last year we have been waiting for the conclusions of the economic analysis of the Sydney and Central Coast orchards and how the NSW Government will assist growers so that shooting of flying-foxes can cease. So far the Government has made no decision.

A decision regarding assistance to growers is urgently needed so that orchardists have enough time to install protection before the 2010-2011 fruit season. The solution lies in protecting crops with full exclusion netting. For this, government financial assistance to growers to install netting will be needed. Whether we as tax payers like it or not, to end shooting, we need to support this approach.

The Flying-fox Licensing Review Panel, comprising a social scientist, ecologist, orchardist and RSPCA inspector concluded in 2009 that:

- The animal welfare issues that result from shooting as a method of mitigating crop damage caused by flying-foxes are ethically and legally unacceptable.
- It is highly probable that the grey-headed flying-fox population is in decline and that any additional mortality can only increase the rate of decline. No matter what the causes, all

mortalities are additive. Therefore any orchard shooting will hasten decline of the flying fox population, albeit by only a relatively small amount.

- Shooting is ineffective when larger numbers of flying-fox visit orchards. Full exclusion netting provides the most effective protection against damage by flying foxes.
- The industry could rely solely on exclusion netting as the means of mitigating damage to crops by Grey-headed Flying-fox. It is unlikely that netting would be erected to any large extent in the Sydney area, without adequate government grants.

Read the full report

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspecies/Flyingfoxlicrev.htm>

Despite these findings, the NSW Government continues to issue licences for the shooting of flying-foxes for crop protection. In an attempt to resolve the animal welfare issues of shooting flying-foxes, the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, with assistance from the Department of Industry and Investment, developed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) with which fruit growers

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## Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve Management Plan

The Management Plan for Ku-ring-gai Flying Fox Reserve was adopted in 1999. Much has changed since then, including the grey-headed flying-fox being listed as a threatened species and the addition of extra land to the reserve. It is time to update the plan which guides the management of the reserve.

Ku-ring-gai Council is forming an Advisory Group consisting of Council staff, two KBCS members, independent people with specialties in flying fox ecology and management, staff from Rural Fire Service, Department of Environment Climate Change and Water, National Parks and Wildlife Services and at least two local residents who live near the reserve.

The Committee will provide advice and views on the formulation of a new plan, including:

- a) human - flying fox interactions
- b) weed control
- c) landscape issues
- d) bush fire issues, and
- e) conservation of the flying foxes and their habitat.

The committee is expected to operate for nine months during which time there will be up to four meetings.

KBCS committee has agreed that Nancy Pallin and Marjorie Beck will represent KBCS.

### **TAKE ACTION!**

Use the enclosed letters to -

1. Tell the minister you want shooting in orchards stopped
2. Oppose the relocation of bats from RBG

**Your letters must be sent before Easter, 2010**

must comply. However, the SOP fails to prevent the cruel suffering for many hours (and sometimes days) of flying-foxes that are not killed outright by shooting.

The SOP adopted this season recognises that

*“Juvenile flying-foxes (i.e. from 4 to 5 weeks of age) are left in camps whilst their mother forages and are still dependent on the female for milk and other maternal care. If their mother is shot, these young are*

*orphaned and will most likely die from dehydration/ starvation. Young are not fully independent until they are around 5 or 6 months old.”*

It also states that

*“Where possible, shooting should be avoided at times when flying-foxes are giving birth and/or dependent young are present.”*

Given that the fruit season directly overlaps with the

birth of young and the presence of dependent young, it is obvious the SOP cannot make shooting flying-foxes humane.

Even as an interim measure it is unacceptable. There are also serious concerns that compliance checks by government agents will not adequately ensure compliance with the SOP and licence conditions such as the limited number allowed to be killed.

### Tribute to Margaret Beavis

*Nancy Pallin*

From 1987 and for 15 of her retirement years, Margaret Beavis spent Tuesdays in Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve tackling the weeds that were preventing the recovery of the tree canopy.

When the call went out for volunteers to restore the habitat of the Grey-headed Flying-fox camp she joined in. With a background in science, she easily took up the challenge of identifying native grasses, sedges and other groundcovers and then shared her new-found knowledge.

Margaret developed a close friendship with Anne Ringwood, chatting as they untangled surviving native plants from the enveloping weeds. Some days when those of us with families left, they worked on for hours, enjoying sharing their wide range of interests.

Ecology fascinated Margaret. She liked to find out about connections in the real world, such as, that between the wasps that pollinate figs, flying-foxes that eat figs and disperse the seed, new figs growing flowers that need wasps to pollinate. . . .

Margaret also recognised connections in the landscape. In a nearby valley,

she worked with Penny Black and local residents to regenerate the bush beside Illeroy Avenue. Her special interest in Aboriginal languages and culture led her to have this reserve named Terrum-bine, after a huge blackbutt tree. Terrum-bine is the Guringai name for blackbutt (*E. pilularis*).

Margaret tenaciously supported projects in which she believed. She wrote frequently to politicians urging them to take care of the environment. Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve, the flying-foxes and the Society, benefited from Margaret's contributions.

### NSW Farmers Association's view - Management of Flying Foxes in NSW

*Posted on NSW Farmers' Association [www.nswfarmers.org.au](http://www.nswfarmers.org.au)*

*Association Update, 21 February 2010*

The Association has written to the Hon Frank Sartor MP, Minister for Climate Change and the Environment and the Hon Steve Whan MP, Minister for Primary Industries, seeking a commitment from the NSW Government to finalise solutions to flying fox culling in NSW, through the provision of financial assistance to orchardists to implement orchard exclusion netting. The proposal is that growers in a defined area known as the Sydney Basin be paid a grant of \$20,000 per hectare, upon their commitment to construct full exclusion netting. In return, the industry will avoid culling as a management tool. There is support for the proposal from animal welfare, scientific and environment groups as well as from affected growers. The proposed grant will offset about half of the cost of constructing netting. The balance plus ongoing liabilities for maintenance and depreciation will be the responsibility of growers. The Association estimates that the scheme is unlikely to exceed a total cost to the Government of \$9 million.

### Release of hand-reared Grey-headed Flying-fox orphans into Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve Gordon 2010

*Cary Kuiper and Marjorie Beck*

This summer 23 hand reared grey-headed flying-fox orphans joined the wild flying-foxes camped in Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve Gordon (KFFR). These orphans were rescued and reared by Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Service members.

After being crèched at Kukundi Wildlife Shelter, Lane Cove National Park, where they learned to be bats not humans, the

orphans were banded and then transferred to the release cage in KFFR early in February. A week later the hatch on the release cage was opened and the young flew out to join the wild flying-foxes. They will be support fed until the end of March or until they stop returning for food. It is an absolute joy to see them hanging in trees nearby (recognisable by their bands) and looking so relaxed with the wild mob.

KBCS member Jocelyn Chenu has once again made her home available to the people cutting up fruit to feed the orphans. Many thanks to Jocelyn.

KBCS congratulate the dedicated carers who have yet again done such a wonderful job in rescuing and raising another batch of these important little animals to be released back into the wild.



Orphans hanging out in creche

# 'Relocation' of flying foxes from Botanic Gardens

Nancy Pallin and Mina Bassarova

## KBCS withdrawal from Steering Committee

Under the NSW Flying-fox Camp Management Policy, the Botanic Gardens Trust is required to form a Steering Committee to provide advice for the relocation of flying-foxes from the Royal Botanic Gardens. The Committee includes stakeholders such as managers of land to which flying-foxes might relocate, wildlife care organisations, scientific experts and organisations involved in managing camps.

KBCS was ably represented on this committee by Marjorie Beck until December 2009, at which time she resigned. KBCS advised the Botanic Gardens Trust that we had withdrawn our representative from the committee on the grounds that the Botanic Gardens Trust had not adequately consulted with the

committee, nor taken into account much of its advice regarding the welfare of the flying-foxes.

## Relocation update

The proposal to relocate the flying-fox camp from the Royal Botanic Gardens is currently being assessed by the Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. KBCS remains very concerned that, if approved, disturbance using noise and dispersal of flying-foxes from the RBG will be detrimental to the grey-headed flying-fox.

The proposed relocation is an exercise in cost shifting. Shifting the impacts of flying-foxes to other land managers/residents. The question is, where will they go? Will it be to Hyde Park, Centennial Park, Trumper Park, Cooper Park or any group of tall trees? The

Botanic Gardens Trust has promised short term assistance to land managers for further dispersal of flying-foxes from what are considered "inappropriate" sites (assuming that can be verified). Does this mean that they will be chased all over Sydney? Is this the way to treat a threatened species?

A dispersal from the Botanic Gardens is very likely to result in flying-foxes joining and causing conflict at other camp sites in Sydney. Ku-ring-gai residents living close to the camp at Gordon have indicated that they do not want to have more flying-foxes in this reserve. Similarly, increased numbers of flying-foxes at Kareela in Sutherland Shire is likely to become a problem for two schools and homes nearby. Interestingly, the Kareela camp formed after flying-foxes vacated the camp site at Kurnell during

construction of the desalination plant. Ironically, Sydney Water did not object to the flying-fox camp at Kurnell, so this is an unfortunate result of the noise during construction of the plant.

Interestingly, Sydney Botanic Gardens makes this statement on its website "We are committed to achieving best practice in environmental management by: **Managing fauna and flora to enhance biodiversity and visitor enjoyment**" (*Ed: our emphasis*), which appears to be at odds with evicting native animals.

By comparison, Ku-ring-gai Council and KBCS members have contributed substantial funds and volunteer effort annually for decades to restore the canopy at Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve.



Nancy Pallin

Flood debris of leaves, plastic bags, plastic plant pots, even a green waste bin and a garden hose are suspended amongst the remaining vegetation. Bushcare volunteers will have a big job extracting plastic mesh from the flood debris and pulling bent metal stakes out of the ground. Fortunately some of the coachwood seedlings survived the power of the floods and others will recover if we can relieve them of their burden of debris.

The Flying-fox Reserve Bushcare team would be delighted to have some extra assistance to cut through branches of fallen trees so we can move along the creek.

On the other hand, disturbances such as fires and floods can also benefit the environment. We will be watching to see what plants germinate where the weeds have been swept away.

Of course in an urban setting, with lots of hard surfaces, the flood volume and velocity are dramatically increased resulting in considerable bank erosion. This was the biggest flood event for more than 20 years.

## Stoney Creek in flood – a 1 in 20 year event

Nancy Pallin

The intense rainstorms in Sydney, in February on 6<sup>th</sup> (77.4 mm) and on 13<sup>th</sup> (70.0mm) resulted in huge floods in Stoney Creek which overtopped the banks and rolled rocks and logs around. Trees were uprooted and the carefully planted seedlings and their wallaby exclusion cages were dragged downstream.

This log was swept 25 metres downstream, knocking down all in its path

## 14th Australasian Bat Society Conference

The 2010 Australasian Bat Society Conference will be held at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, from 12 – 14 July.

To register go to <http://conference.ausbats.org.au/> and download the Registration form.

Base for the post-conference field trips will be Pine Creek, 200 km south of Darwin and will take in two nearby locations: Kohinoor Adit and Umbrawarra Gorge.



## The bats and the bees . . . . .

*Nick Edards*

During extreme weather flying-foxes are prone to heat stress that can be fatal. There can be mass mortality with thousands of flying-foxes killed in a matter of hours. The most recent serious event in Sydney was the death of 6000+ bats in Cabramatta Creek colony in 2006 .

The weekend before Australia Day 2010 brought weather conditions that looked like they could cause heat stress. With temperatures peaking at 42C, Kerry and I went to the colony in Parramatta Park to see how the bats were handling the heat. Things were not looking good. Flying-foxes were struggling to deal with extreme heat and low humidity.

As we were working through options for dealing with what could be a significant heat stress event, a change came through which dropped the temperature by about 10C in a matter of minutes. The danger had passed. As the winds picked up, Kerry and I both heard a sound like a plank of wood being broken and a large number of bats vacated one of the larger trees and moved elsewhere in the colony. Shortly after this, Tim Pearson, who had been checking on conditions in the Gordon colony, joined us.

Then things just got silly. The breaking plank sound had been a warning of things to come.

Suddenly, the top half (a section of about 10-15m in length) of the tree that the bats had recently vacated simply collapsed.

Tim and I hoofed it across the weir towards the fallen tree. We reached it within a minute and were relieved not to see any downed bats. We were a lot less relieved to see a broken bee hive in the tangled mess of the tree. The bees were even less happy to see us. Apparently they blamed us for the destruction of their home and decided to vent their buzzy/stingy anger on us.

Our first reaction was to run. The little buggers (sorry, buzzers) were persistent, angry and armed. Tim describes me running back towards the weir with arms flailing as "Comedy Gold".

To get back to safety, we had to negotiate a narrow concrete stairway down to the weir. I managed to run across the stairway at an angle and then slam myself in the rocks, bat poo and discarded chairs that were strewn at the side of the stairway. I hate those situations where you're lying in a tangled heap wondering whether you've broken anything. I hate it even more when you're still getting stung by bees. Eventually, we both managed to get down to the river and get enough water over ourselves to discourage the more persistent of the angry horde.

After taking stock of our situation and making sure that all my limbs were pointing in the right

direction, we retreated to the opposite side of the river. I was having a bit of trouble figuring out which joints were still in working order but Tim was ready to go back into battle. After covering himself from head to foot, now looking like a ninja warrior, he headed back over the weir for a more comprehensive assessment as to whether there were any injured bats.

I'm happy to report that a) Tim came back alive and unstung b) there were no injured bats.

We left Parramatta with the sense of a job well done. Having got home and taken my shirt off, the full carnage was revealed. 40+ lovely little welts. A veritable bee tattoo. I looked like I'd been machined-gunned. If it's a choice between bats or invertebrates with weapons, I'll take the bats every time.

Apparently, no bats were harmed in the making of this adventure. Several bees may have perished. I grieve for them. But not much. One human was battered, bruised and stung. Two other humans were unharmed and quite possibly mildly amused. Why the bees stung me and not Tim is a bit of a mystery. It may simply been that they saw me first. Or maybe they were European bees that simply don't like the English. We will probably never know.

So there you go. It was just another day in the service of the flying foxes . . . . .



Photo: Nick Edards

### E-Newsletter!

Would you like to receive this newsletter by email rather than as a posted paper copy? It would help KBCS save paper, money and volunteer time.

If you are happy to take the E- FOB option, please send a blank email to: [web@sydneybats.org.au](mailto:web@sydneybats.org.au) with the subject as: **PLEASE ADD ME TO YOUR E-FOB REGISTER**

*Valerie Insall, Newsletter Editor*

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### Bat Conservation Gift Fund News

Donations received from January to March 2010 totalled \$800.00 (for the year so far \$3990).

Donors: E Burgess, J Fairlie-Cuninghame, C Jackett, R MacGregor, M Oakwood, Oatley Flora & Fauna Conservation Society Inc., S O'Grady, E Sehmer & D Lennard, N Sutherland, C Wheatley.

**Thank you all for your generosity!**

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