



Friends of Bats

newsletter



Issue 97, June 2010

'Relocation' of flying foxes from Botanic Gardens given the Go ahead

Tim Pearson

On Friday, 14 May, the Federal Minister for the Department of the Environment, Water and the Art (DEWHA), the Hon. Peter Garrett MP, handed down his decision on the proposed relocation of the predominantly GHFF colony in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (RBGS).

As expected, the decision was - "Approved - with conditions".

The first reaction is not good - DEWHA has given the RBGS a licence to disturb the resident flying-foxes annually for 20 years. However, the conditions that have been applied to this approval will be difficult (but not impossible) to meet and will hopefully minimise the impact.

Firstly, RBGS is only allowed to attempt dispersal in the three month period from 1st May to 31st July each year. The use of noise must build up in a defined manner (starting just in the afternoon, then gradually increasing) over a 14 day period. The attempts must stop after 31 days and then cannot restart for 5 days, at which point they have to start from the beginning again. And if the bats vacate the RBGS at an earlier stage of the dispersal attempt, then the 5-day break is enforced as well.

And a maximum of three attempts can be made in the 3-month period.

The action must also be tightly monitored. Colony monitoring, radio tracking, colour banding, and other actions are all required for each year a dispersal action takes place. And all actions need to be monitored by a team of observers who will hopefully be both independent and impartial.

Other requirements include:

- to stop the action immediately if dead flying-foxes are found within a kilometre of the dispersal (or re-dispersal) site,
- prevent bats from establishing camps where they are not wanted and;
- Onerous and regular reporting on activities undertaken and outcomes.

RBGS is also required to implement passive measures to prevent the bats returning if they do in fact leave the vicinity of the Gardens.

These conditions do not mean a victory for the bats. What they do mean however, is that the action will be long, complex, expensive, and very closely monitored. It of course remains to be seen just how closely RBGS abide by the conditions, and how rigidly DEWHA enforces them.

White-nose Syndrome

Bat Conservation International (BCI) reports heartbreaking news from biologists monitoring White-nose Syndrome (WNS). History's worst bat-killing disease has now spread further west. After decimating bat populations in the eastern United States, WNS has now reached Missouri, on the edge of the American Midwest. It is also confirmed in Tennessee, at a cave in Great Smokey Mountain National Park that is home to the state's largest colony of endangered Indiana bats. And WNS has moved northward into Ontario and Quebec in Canada.

This disease has killed more than a million bats since it was discovered at a cave in northern New York State in February 2006. Mortality rates approaching 100% are reported at some hibernation sites, and entire colonies have been destroyed. WNS has now spread across 12 U.S. states and biologists fear bats throughout North America are at risk.

WNS still defies the efforts of scientists to find a cure or at least a way to slow its spread. BCI is working with many partners on the search for solutions. But more is required to stop WNS before it drives bat species into extinction across Canada and the United States.

For more information about White-nose Syndrome and BCI's conservation efforts, visit their website: www.batcon.org

Not all bad news for bats!

Two recent articles prove that not all journalists take a hysterical line when reporting on flying-fox issues. Check these out:

Ian Henschke, Adelaide Advertiser, 28 May 2010

<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/in-depth/i-dont-mind-if-you-hang-around-here/story-e6frebsu-1225872668361>

And Liz Moore, The Noosa Journal, 10 June 2010

<http://noosa-journal.wherelive.com.au/lifestyle/story/heres-the-facts-on-flying-foxes/>

KBCS Inc.
Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 17 August, 2010
8.00 pm

4 Taylor St, Gordon

See page 4 for details

Flying-foxes shift southward

Nancy Pallin

New flying-fox camps are being reported in Dorrigo, Dapto, Orange, Sydney and Adelaide and apple crops were damaged by flying-foxes at Orange, Batlow and in Gippsland. Flying-foxes have attracted widespread media attention this year and sadly much of it is negative. Things are very tough for flying-foxes now.

Extreme weather including cyclones, prolonged rain events and widespread flooding affected south-east Queensland and northern NSW. None of the flying-foxes' regular trees are flowering in the north of their range. Very probably the weather has affected the trees, so flying-foxes have migrated south. Wildlife carers have reported starving flying-foxes attempting to get food from the ground and getting attacked by domestic animals.

All three species of flying-foxes, grey-headed, black and little reds, have turned up further south than recorded previously. Little red flying-foxes, which give birth in May as opposed to September-October for the other species, are giving birth near Nowra. Huge numbers of all three species are camped in Port Macquarie. Other unusual events include: 1000 grey-headed flying-foxes in Adelaide; one flying-fox found dead in Hobart, only the third known to reach Tasmania; twenty reached an oil rig in Bass Strait where workers fed them grapes. If there was enough food for flying-foxes in their usual habitats they would not be travelling

great distances to new territory in search of it.

Fruit growers and people living near camps believe that the flying-foxes are in plague proportions, when in reality the total population declined by an estimated 30% during the 1990s. They cannot understand why the grey-headed flying-fox is listed as a threatened species. They question the methodology for declaring them as 'vulnerable' and are lobbying NSW and federal politicians, calling for their de-listing. The Sydney Basin fruit growers and apple growers west of the Great Divide are still putting pressure on government for financial assistance for netting.

Will shooting end?

At this stage it is still impossible to say. In March conservation and animal welfare organisations met with advisors to the NSW Minister for Environment. The case for ending shooting for crop protection was strongly put and government assistance to fruit growers to install full exclusion netting was emphasised as essential for shooting to stop and to protect local food production.

On May 13 NSW Environment Minister Sartor met with technical advisors and Members of Parliament representing electorates with flying-fox issues. Still there is no announcement regarding funding for crop protection netting and ending shooting.



Photo by Tim Pearson

Eucalyptus robusta

In March flying-foxes were feasting on swamp mahogany (above) nectar on the northern beaches and along the lower Hawkesbury River.

Bats and Wind Energy

From a report in *Bat Conservation International's Bats Newsletter*, Fall 2009

"Efforts to reduce the alarming number of bats killed at wind-energy facilities took a big step forward when scientists with the BCI-led Bats and Wind Energy Cooperative demonstrated that bat mortality falls dramatically when wind turbines are stopped during low-wind conditions after dark."

"...the study found that bat kills were reduced an average of 73 percent when turbines were left off-line until wind speeds reached between ... 5 and 6.5 meters/second. That is compared with monitored mortality at turbines that remained fully operational, starting up at a wind speed of 3.5 m/s."

"The research found that temporarily stopping all ... turbines at low-wind periods, (at night and during bat migration season) would have resulted in the lost electricity output of just 0.3 to 1.0 percent of total annual power production."



Croc versus bat

From ABC News

www.abc.net.au/news/photos/2010/02/26/2830962.htm

Freshwater crocodiles snap at bats swooping towards the water at Fitzroy Crossing, north-western WA, October 24, 2004. Photographer Drew Taylor said: "I couldn't believe my luck when I managed to get this shot. I was like a little boy jumping around in my boat after seeing the digital image on the screen. Take note of all the crocs sitting in the water waiting for their moment of chance."

The bats in this photo are little red flying-foxes swooping down to drink (Ed)

OH YES! WE (MIGHT) HAVE NO BANANAS (QUITE SOON)

Ken Holland

Seedless grapes are so convenient. All one has to do is peel them and eat them. No annoying seeds to spit out. Clearly the seedless varieties are totally dependent on humans for their continued existence. Because seedless grapes are a fairly recent phenomenon, and can be seen in the shop sitting beside the traditional varieties, we are all aware of them.

Less obvious is the fact that all the bananas in the shop are seedless. Seed-bearing bananas are confined to the forests of a region extending from India through SE Asia to New Guinea. The wild bananas are considered to be all but uneatable by humans, being "packed with hard shelled seeds and little pulp". Cultivated bananas have been grown from suckers by humans for thousands of years, and cannot survive on their own. Because they lack genetic diversity the entire world banana population is susceptible to the depredations of any new strain of disease that may arise. The long-time favourite of 50 years ago was the Gros Michel variety, which was finally wiped out by disease in the 1960s. Now it is the erstwhile less favoured Cavendish, by far the major commercial variety available today, that stands on the brink

of extinction due to a recently identified fungal disease.

The loss of the Cavendish might signal the end of the several millennia of TLC that humans have lavished on bananas, but perhaps all would not be lost. As long as the wild banana persists there is always hope. But will it persist? Perhaps not.

An investigator* reports that, before WW II, observers in Jakarta in Indonesia could watch as, each evening, "enormous flights of flying-foxes blocked out the setting sun", but have since disappeared. As this author suggests, "Bats are crucial to the survival of the world's tropical forests". This includes the wild banana plant which is pollinated by nectar-eating bats. What has already happened in Jakarta is exactly what is happening now on Australia's eastern seaboard.

The trees are going, so the bats are going, so the trees

**Ivan W. Buddenhagen, Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Davis. "Disappearing Wild Bananas" published in "Bats", (northern) Winter 2008 edition, published by "Bat Conservation International".*



Photo by Merlin Tuttle

Flying-fox feeding on a wild banana flower.



Photo by Nancy Pallin

The nectar in bananas flowers attracts flying-foxes. Growers who remove the 'bell', the flower-producing shoot, once sufficient bananas have formed on the stalk, avoid flying-fox damage to their crops.

Mystery Objects photographed at Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve



The orange coloured dropping (left) is from a flying-fox which had been feeding on the flesh of palm fruit. The second photo (right) is a fruit from a Canary Island/Phoenix Palm. The seed remains inside the fibres. Increased planting of these popular palms provides an additional food source for flying-foxes which feed on the fruit and carry them away. Many hundreds of seedlings germinate in Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve each year. They are also dispersed through the suburbs growing on street verges and in gardens. These palms have strong spines at the base of the fronds which injure many people, requiring costly surgery.

Bats on YouTube

Check out the story of the relocation of RBGS bats told on YouTube by UTS student Nina Pace.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/NinaPace>

Annual General Meeting Ku-ring-gai Bat Conservation Society Inc.

Tuesday 17 August, 2010 at 8.00 pm
4 Taylor St, Gordon (corner Waugoola St)

Please join us at 7.00 pm for a light meal, bat chat and hear Professor Deborah Bird Rose, Professor of Social Inclusion at Macquarie University on her research into the passions and motivations of people working for the protection of flying foxes.

RSVP by 13/8 for catering purposes to: Jocelyn Chenu P 9498 1420 E chenu@bigpond.net.au

Subscriptions & Donations

Membership renewal for the year 2010/11 falls due 30 June, 2010 for all members except those who have paid in advance. There has been no increase in the annual subscription rate.

PLEASE CHECK THE LABEL ON THE ENVELOPE IN WHICH YOUR NEWSLETTER ARRIVED FOR YOUR SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRY DATE.

A renewal form is included with all newsletters – even if you don't have to renew your membership, we always welcome donations and you can use the same form to donate.

Newsletters - You will notice on the renewal form you have the option to receive your quarterly newsletter by email, rather than a paper copy (help the environment and help us save paper at the same time). Let us know your preference.

News Alerts – Bat relocation from the RBG, Stop shooting of bats by orchardists, other issues that arise and items of general environmental interest – we will email these to you from time to time, unless you tell us otherwise.

Jocelyn Chenu KBCS Treasurer

KBCS benefits from Westpac's gift matching program

KBCS thanks Westpac Bank who, through Westpac Group's Matching Gifts program has donated \$1,200 to our Bat Conservation Gift Fund this year. Westpac matches the donations of their employees, dollar for dollar, to any tax-deductible charity in Australia. Perhaps your employer does the same. Why not find out!

News from KFFR

A giant bamboo clump at Lady Gowrie Nursing Home is spreading gradually into Ku-ring-gai Flying-fox Reserve. The person standing at the base of the clump will give you an indication of its size!

Taronga Zoo was approached to see if they could harvest and make use of it but unfortunately this type of bamboo is not suitable for animal feed.

So, now we're looking for other possible uses. Let us know if you have a bright idea for using the bamboo.

Art, construction material . . . All ideas to - web@sydneybats.org.au



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 with the subject as: PLEASE ADD ME TO YOUR E-FOB REGISTER

Valérie Insall, Newsletter Editor

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Bat Conservation Gift Fund News

Donations received from April to June 2010 totaled \$1790 (for the year so far \$5885).

Donors: B Crowther, J & M Hingston, J Hutchinson, H Logie, J Morris, E Sehmer & D Lennard, T Schroder, Westpac Banking Corporation, M Wood.

Thank you all for your generosity!

Donations over \$2 are tax deductible - receipts are mailed with the next newsletter unless otherwise requested.