ACT Wildlife
Rescue • Rehabilitate • Release

Megabats and Microbats



Megabats are described as a 'keystone' species as they play a very important part in pollination for some native trees and shrubs. For some species they are far more efficient than birds and bees, being able to spread pollen and seeds as far as 120 km in one night.

Two species of flying-foxes are found in the ACT: the Grey-headed Flying-fox and the Little Red Flying-fox.



Since first recorded in large numbers in 2003 Grey-headed flying-foxes have been coming to the ACT each year and roosting in Commonwealth Park over the summer season.

They are found up and down the eastern seaboard, from Bundaberg in Queensland to Melbourne in Victoria, and in 2010 began settling in Adelaide. Flying foxes are nomadic, travelling to different locations depending on where food can be found.

They arrive in September/October each year establishing a maternity colony in Commonwealth Park and in most years leave around mid-May. Peak season numbers in the camp in recent years have ranged from 6,000 to more than 9,000.

Little Red flying-foxes are occasional visitors to Canberra and sometimes roost near Lake Ginninderra.

Flying foxes are very social animals. They like to live together in camps (high up in trees, safe from predators. Colonies or roosts are other names for camps. They prefer dense vegetation near water.

The Grey-headed flying-fox is listed as vulnerable. Their numbers have been affected by loss of habitat, extreme weather events due to climate change, and human made hazards like fruit netting, barbed wire and electric wires.



Heat stress events can occur when temperatures rise to 40 degrees C or higher. Bats can suffer dehydration, vital organ failure and eventual death. Cold snaps, if temperatures drop below freezing, can cause deaths for young pups who have not yet begun to regulate their own temperature. Hailstorms are another hazard, causing wing damage and broken bones.

Did you know?

Flying foxes:

- **Live on a diet of blossom, nectar and fruit**
- **Can be up to 1kg in weight with a wingspan of over 1 metre**
- **Have well developed eyes and a strong sense of smell**
- **Do not echolocate, unlike most insect eating microbats**
- **Are sometimes called 'fruit bats'**
- **Can travel up to 100 km a night dispersing seeds and pollen**
- **They can live to approximately 20 years, but due to extreme weather events and food shortages 8 years is a more normal lifespan in the wild.**

See page 2 for Microbats

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Microbats vary in size but the most common bats in our region are the Chocolate Wattled Bat (adult 12g), Goulds Wattled Bat (adult up to 19g) and the Lesser Long Eared Bat (adult from around 8g to 14.5g). Occasionally other species are recorded.

Identification can be difficult but improves with experience, for instance a Chocolate Wattled bat is an all over brown; a Goulds Wattled Bat has a darker blackish head and a brown or grey-brown body and Lesser Long Eared Bats have large ears.



Microbats:

- Are insectivorous
- Use echolocation to find energy-rich food: moths, flying and terrestrial insects, spiders, beetles, flying termites and mosquitos. Some species have specialized diets and eat fish (myotis), orb spiders (phoeniscus). It is possible that some of the larger microbats may eat smaller bats if housed together (scotorepens orion).
- They eat up to 50% of their weight each night.
- Microbats can catch up to 500 insects in an hour.
- Some species of Microbats can fly at 60km/hr and fly up to 30km to find food each night.
- Wingspan is approximately 25cm (depending on species).
- Weight of adults approx. 2 – 170g (depending on species).
- Make up the vast majority of Australian bats.
- Have long lifespans compared to other small animals, over 20 years for most species
- Microbats roost in caves, tree bark and hollows, and any small spaces they find including inside cavities in walls and chimneys.
- Microbats make up 20% of the world's total mammal groups.
- 175 species in Australia.



All bats can carry the potentially deadly Lyssavirus. DO NOT try to pick up or rescue any kind of bat. They should only be handled by vaccinated and experienced bat carers.

If you see a bat needing help, please call ACT Wildlife on 0432 300 033. We are on call 24/7.

