

Fact Sheet



Grey-headed flying foxes in Parramatta

The NSW Government is helping to protect the native grey-headed flying fox with a range of measures while a new light rail network, called the Parramatta Light Rail, is being built in Western Sydney. The Parramatta Light Rail will open in 2023.

What is the grey-headed flying fox?

The grey-headed flying fox (also known by its species name, *pteropus poliocephalus*) is the largest type of native Australian bat. It travels across large areas of Australia feeding primarily on nectar and pollen from native blossoms and also on fruits, spreading seeds and pollinating native plants.

This flying fox is easily recognisable by its rusty, reddish collar, grey head and hairy legs. The adult bats have an average wingspan up to one metre and can weigh up to one kilogram.

Why is it considered a vulnerable species?

The grey-headed flying fox is considered a 'vulnerable', or at-risk, species because it is losing its natural habitat along the south-east Queensland, NSW and Victorian coasts due to human settlement.

The traditional habitat of the flying fox is located within 200 kilometres of the eastern coast of Australia, from Bundaberg in Queensland to Melbourne in Victoria – and, importantly, within the area in Sydney where Transport for NSW is building the Parramatta Light Rail. In 2010, many flying foxes were found roosting and foraging outside these traditional areas; some were found as far inland as Orange and as far south-west as Adelaide.

Habitat loss and degradation, heat stress (increased by climate change) and being hunted by other animals are some of the threatening processes which contribute to declining flying fox numbers.

Where does this flying-fox traditionally live?

The grey-headed flying fox roosts on branches in groups or 'colonies' of various sizes, from dozens to hundreds of thousands. They typically roost, or rest, near water, such as lakes, rivers or the coast. They obtain their food from rainforest patches, mangroves and from plants, known as 'vegetation' that grow next to rivers, creeks and wetlands. Colonies of grey-headed flying foxes also eat vegetation in urban and suburban areas.

What are some interesting facts about infant flying foxes?

Flying foxes are mammals (meaning an animal that breathes air, has a backbone, and grows hair). Mothers give birth to their young while hanging upside down! Their gestation (pregnancy) lasts six months, and mothers carry their baby bats, or 'pups', during their nightly feeding flights. At about six weeks of age, pups are left in 'crèches' at the roost site while their mothers do their nightly foraging (looking for food). Pups can fly at around three months of age and can feed independently by the time they are five or six months old. Knowledge of their breeding season is the key to understanding when the flying foxes might be particularly sensitive to noise, light and activity.

What is so important about the Parramatta colony of flying foxes?

The Parramatta Park flying fox colony is nationally important as it often has more than 10,000 flying foxes and has been there since 2010. They roost on the eastern and western banks of the Parramatta River.

The colony is quite resilient. Recently, they have observed the construction of nearby Bankwest Stadium, as well as concerts and celebrations in Parramatta Park.

The team at Parramatta Light Rail works hard to minimise the impact of any construction activities on this important colony.

How do we know they're okay?

The Parramatta Light Rail team uses binoculars to collect data about the fox colony every month. The team counts and checks the ages, gender and breeding status of the flying foxes (if they're having babies) and how many are there.



A grey-headed flying fox skimming the water. It will then land in a tree to lick its wet fur and have a drink.



The grey-headed flying fox in its natural habitat.

This monitoring program will allow Transport for NSW to better understand the behaviour and population trends of flying fox colonies in Parramatta. In 2020, Transport for NSW monitoring has found around 10,000 to 17,500 bats in the roost at any one time. Visual monitoring will also be undertaken during key activities throughout Parramatta Light Rail construction, to check on the wellbeing and safety of the flying foxes.

What else is being done?

Tree planting and population monitoring are some of the flying fox-friendly measures Transport for NSW is undertaking to help protect this vulnerable species during construction of the Parramatta Light Rail.

Suitable vegetation, including new trees, is being planted as part of the Parramatta Light Rail project. The flying fox colony will be able to use this as foraging habitat, from where they can gather food. The flying fox has a crucial role to play in dispersing seeds and pollinating plants so it's vital that they continue to get the nutrients and sustenance they need.

The team working on the Parramatta Light Rail also manages potential impacts such as noise and light, being sure to consider the breeding cycle when noisy construction activities need to be conducted.

Major infrastructure projects all need to do their bit to look after local flora and fauna. The Parramatta Light Rail team is committed to supporting the grey-headed flying fox to ensure it keeps flying high.

MORE INFO

For questions about the Parramatta Light Rail project or to find out more, visit parramattalightrail.nsw.gov.au.