

Rumour has it that you have had some new furry neighbours move in nearby ....

# ... *hang in there!*

We expect that this is temporary until the weather breaks.

The Gympie region has experienced an extended period of drought. These conditions have led to reduced flowering and fruiting of many native trees. Of the trees that have flowered, most have had poor nectar production. And while we have experienced some rain in recent weeks, it has not been enough to make a big difference.

These drought conditions have been hard on our region's flying foxes and in an attempt to stay alive, many flying foxes are moving from their more remote and isolated roosts to our neighbourhood backyards and parks. They are in search of food and water. We expect that this is temporary until the weather breaks.

## ***Why are flying foxes so important for our region?***

Flying foxes play an important role in maintaining Australia's native forest. As Australia's only known long-distance pollinator, they are critical for the continued existence of many Australian eucalypt species that can only be pollinated at night.

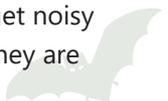
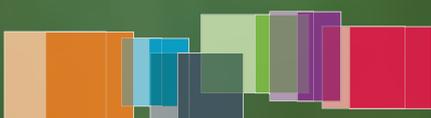
The flying fox is also an important seed disperser and can carry large fruit and seeds over considerable distances, helping to spread seeds throughout the landscape.

## ***But they smell. And they are noisy.***

A lot of people think the smell of a flying fox roost is because of their droppings; but actually, flying foxes tend to defecate at their feed sites, not at their roosts.

The smell around a flying fox roost is the scents of male flying foxes who are marking their territory and trying to attract a mate. Juvenile flying foxes also have a unique smell which is thought to help their mothers identify their offspring when returning from foraging.

Roosts are typically noisiest at sunset when flying foxes are waking up and preparing to leave the roost to forage for the night, and at sunrise when they are returning from foraging to sleep. This is because flying foxes are very social creatures and they are calling to each other and checking up on each other. They can also get noisy when they feel their roost is under threat or if they are disturbed.





### ***There are so many of them!***

Flying fox numbers have actually declined in the last century due to widespread clearing of native bushlands and forests. And this is a concern for the pollination of our forests. The reduction in habitat has forced flying foxes to find other places to roost, including patches of bushland in urban areas. Their choice of urban roosting sites may be linked to historic connections with the site prior to development and is also influenced by the availability of water and food.

### ***But flying foxes carry diseases. Is my family safe?***

In Queensland, all four common species of flying fox, and at least three species of insectivorous microbat, can carry the Australian Bat Lyssavirus (ABLV). However, Queensland Health surveys of flying fox populations have indicated that fewer than one per cent of the animals

actually carry the virus. In sick and injured flying-foxes, around seven per cent have been found to carry the virus.

There have only been three known cases of ABLV infection since records began. In comparison, there were 389 deaths from influenza and pneumonia in 2010 alone (*data source: Queensland Health 2014*). ABLV can only be transmitted to humans from bites or scratches, so people are warned not to handle bats and if bitten or scratched, to seek medical attention immediately.

### ***I want to help. What can I do?***

It is not 'normal' behaviour for a flying fox to be hanging by itself during daylight hours, and away from the rest of its colony. In most cases, an animal doing this is injured or unwell in some way. If you find a sick or injured flying fox or microbat, DO NOT handle it. Instead, contact RSPCA on 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625) so that a trained and vaccinated rescuer can come to assist.

A few tips to help you get along with your new temporary neighbours:

- ***Park your car under cover and don't leave washing out at night.*** In an effort to conserve energy and fly faster and higher, flying foxes will sometimes offload unnecessary weight. This means they may poo on your freshly washed clothes or on your car as they fly overhead!
- ***Avoid disturbing roosts.*** Disturbing roosts will most likely scare them and they will make noise to alert others in their roost of potential danger. It may also cause them to split into a number of smaller colonies, which will create many more, smaller roosts.
- ***Plant roost trees away from houses.*** If you have property that allows for it, perhaps consider a long-term solution of planting roost trees on your property away from houses so you can support these important animals.

**Please feel free to contact Council on 1300 307 800 for any enquiries.**