

Flying-fox colonies and wildlife carers are the latest victims of searing heat

Sydney – 11th January 2013 – According to wildlife carers, the continuing heat wave across NSW, Victoria and Tasmania is having a devastating effect on wildlife and the carers are confronted with unprecedented numbers of deceased or injured animals.

One of Australia's most misunderstood animals; the flying-fox, is facing a disaster of unprecedented proportions. With temperatures repeatedly reaching the high 30's, humans, livestock, pets and wildlife are facing daily threats. Flying-foxes have fallen victim to >40 degree temperatures in Bomaderry and Centennial Park. In the past 24-hours, heat exhaustion has resulted in over 2,200 flying-foxes perishing; most were babies or juveniles. However, the exact numbers may never be known.

Ilona Roberts spokesperson for NSW Wildlife Council comments: "Our volunteers are being confronted by the deaths of many wildlife species. However, the flying-fox situation is horrific – carers are reporting having to wade through mounds of dead animals in their efforts to find survivors. What is particularly distressing is that many suffering animals are out of reach. In the Bomaderry camp, some may have drowned, because they simply fell from overhanging trees, as a result of heat exhaustion, others were found impaled on barbed wire fences in creeks/dams from their attempts to skim to cool off. Last night rescuers found more than 60 dead babies in one tree alone. Many of the images will stick in the minds of volunteer carers forever. It would be a hardened soul who failed to be moved by this total devastation. The long term damage to colonies cannot be calculated, but it is known that the Grey-headed Flying-fox is classified as vulnerable to extinction.

Josey Sharrad, Native Wildlife Campaigner at IFAW (The International Fund for Animal Welfare) adds: "Flying-foxes already face so many threats from persecution to habitat loss; this latest catastrophe could be the final straw for this fragile species. IFAW is assisting in the rescue efforts, but it shouldn't be left to over-worked and under-resourced wildlife carers to Band-Aid the problem. There needs to be a concerted effort from Government and the community to secure their survival and recovery. "

Flying-foxes play an important but little recognized role in our ecosystems as long-range pollinators and dispersers of seeds of many native plants. Contrary to popular belief, they do not breed quickly; a female flying-fox usually has one young a year. The population of Grey-headed Flying-foxes is actually

in decline. Flying-foxes are vegetarians and they have exemplary hygiene. They spend hours grooming and are usually very clean. A very small number do carry the Australian Bat Lyssavirus, related to rabies, which is why only trained and vaccinated people should attempt to handle them. They are linked to the

Hendra Virus, but are not known to transmit it to humans. Their strong odour is because of chemical signals secreted by the males.

If you do find an injured flying fox, please don't try and rescue it yourself, instead find your nearest local wildlife rescue group from www.fauna.org.au or from the NSW Wildlife Council website www.nwc.org.au/resources/find-your-nearest-wildlife-carer