

1.24 Flying-fox Policy

Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release

Policy adopted 31/7/99: 1.26.1 – 1.26.19 Reviewed for adoption October 2008.

Introduction

- 1.24.1 This document covers the rescue, rehabilitation and release of Black flying-foxes *Pteropus alecto*, Grey-headed flying-foxes *Pteropus poliocephalus* and Little red flying-foxes *Pteropus scapulatus*. This document must be reviewed regularly at a time interval determined by WIRES State Council and amended when necessary.

Policy

General

- 1.24.2 A Flying-fox Coordinator or Coordinating Committee is to be elected in each branch annually and will be responsible for co-ordinating the rescue, stabilising, care and rehabilitation of each flying-fox. The Coordinator or members of the Coordinating Committee must meet the criteria for authorisation as flying-fox rescuers and rehabilitators as outlined in this policy. The Flying-fox Coordinator or Coordinating Committee will be responsible for record keeping systems that monitor the care and rehabilitation process. All Coordinators must work within the WIRES flying-fox policy and act on advice and/or direction received from the WIRES Bat Standards Team.
- 1.24.3 All flying-fox rescuers and rehabilitators must have completed a Lyssavirus Pre or Post Exposure vaccination program. Each rescuer and rehabilitator must undertake annual titre checks and maintain booster vaccinations as deemed appropriate by WIRES based on advice from the NSW Health Department.
- 1.24.4 All vaccinations, titres and booster procedures are to be registered with the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee who in turn will register them with WIRES Administration Office prior to the 30th September annually.
- 1.24.5 All flying-fox rescuers and rehabilitators must be:
- 1.24.5.1 fully trained in the rescue and care of flying-foxes by completion of an initial course and 3rd yearly refresher courses. All courses must be approved in advance by the WIRES Bat Standards Team; and
 - 1.24.5.2 vaccinated with up to date titres recorded; and
 - 1.24.5.3 financial members of and authorised by WIRES Inc.

- 1.24.6 Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release of flying-foxes must follow the methods outlined in training material approved by the Bat Standards Team.
- 1.24.7 Only in matters of emergency, such as a situation where the rescuer believes delay in consulting a veterinarian will risk the survival chances of the flying-fox and when the Coordinator or member of the Coordinating Committee can not be contacted promptly, are flying-foxes to be taken to a vet before contacting the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee. All veterinary consultation, recommendations and treatments must be reported to the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee within 24 hours.

Orphaned Flying-foxes

An orphan flying-fox rescue and rehabilitation program will consist of:

- 1.24.8 **Rescue:** Orphan rescues must only be undertaken by vaccinated and authorised flying-fox rescuers and must be reported to the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee immediately.
- 1.24.9 **Initial care / Stabilising:** All initial care (stabilising) will be supervised by the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee and follow methods and standards of care as set out in Bat Standards Team approved training material.
- 1.24.10 **Rearing:** Rehabilitators must comply with general points 1.26.3, 1.26.4 & 1.26.5 and must be prepared to obtain equipment; commit appropriate time to the rehabilitation of the flying-fox; and follow the standards of care set in Bat Standards Team approved training material.
- 1.24.10.1 All rehabilitators must communicate weekly or as required by their Branch Flying-fox Coordinator or Coordinating Committee and accept supervision of their care by that Coordinator or Coordinating Committee or an experienced person nominated by the Branch flying-fox Coordinator or Coordinating Committee
- 1.24.10.2 Rehabilitators must document weight and forearm measurements and pass that information weekly to a Coordinator or Coordinating Committee or nominated weight recorder.
- 1.24.11 **Crèching:** Crèche is the socialising stage of development for orphans and under normal birthing conditions will occur in January or early February. Variations due to seasonal circumstance, e.g. late or early births will be determined by the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee acting under standards determined by the WIRES Bat Standards Team
- 1.24.11.1 Wherever possible orphans must be crèched when they have reached an age between 12 weeks and 16 weeks as estimated from forearm measurements taken at the time of rescue. Where this is not possible (due to injury or other circumstances) alternative crèche arrangements are to be decided by the

Coordinator or Coordinating Committee acting with advice and under guidelines determined by the Bat Standards Team.

- 1.24.11.2 Orphans born under normal birthing conditions are to be crèched for a minimum of 3 weeks. Variations due to seasonal circumstance, e.g. late or early births, will be decided by the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee.
 - 1.24.11.3 There must be a minimum of five animals in a crèche. However, ten to twenty is the preferred number to adequately develop social skills.
 - 1.24.11.4 Orphans are to be crèched in cages of minimum dimensions; length 5m, height 2m, width 2m, for 5 to 20 animals.
 - 1.24.11.5 The Coordinator or Coordinating Committee will determine the location of the WIRES Bat Standards Team approved crèche.
 - 1.24.11.6 Crèche cages must incorporate dug in wire sufficient to deter digging predators and a second roof to protect flying-foxes from attacks on their feet by climbing or flying predators. The gauge and wire spacing specifications for crèche cages, to prevent damage to flying-fox feet is: roof: gauge = 3mm; spacing = 25mm; sides, front and back spacing = 25mm, gauge can be smaller.
- 1.24.12 **Release:** All orphans must be banded before release wherever possible. Criteria to determine whether this is possible include: availability of a trained and licensed bander (or one currently in training and supervised by a licensed bander); and the size and fitness of animals when the bander is available. Black and grey-headed flying-foxes must not be banded if they are under 350 grams or have a forearm less than 138 mm. Preferably they should be at least 400 grams and have a forearm at least 140 mm. In all cases, the most important point for the bander to check is that the bones of the extended nail joint must be thick enough that the band cannot slip over that nail joint.
- 1.24.12.1 Banding must be done a minimum of one week and preferably three weeks before release so that the animal can be monitored for any injuries caused by the band.
 - 1.24.12.2 A release program is to be developed between wildlife rehabilitation groups having mutually agreed arrangements with WIRES, with final decision making by the WIRES Bat Standards Team. Each orphan must spend at least 3 weeks in the cage from which it will be released to allow orientation before release and support feeding. Where the release and crèche cages are the same, the orphan must have spent at least 4 weeks in the cage. Minimum weight and forearm release measurements for Black and Grey-headed flying-fox orphans are 400 grams weight and 140 mm forearm.

- 1.24.12.3 Release cages will be of minimum dimensions; length 8 metres, height 2 and a half metres, width 2 and a half metres, Gauge and wire spacing measurements and measures to deter predators are the same as for crèche cages
- 1.24.12.4 The release program support feeding will continue until the youngest animal in the release group has reached 24 weeks as estimated from forearm measurement taken at the time of rescue. The release facility manager, in consultation with the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee in a WIRES owned facility, should also attempt to determine that the supply of food in the wild in the area of the release site is good – e.g by consulting local apiarists. Support feeding will have to be maintained if there is poor flowering of native trees in the region of the release cage in any particular year.

Flying-fox Care Principles:

NOTE: Flying-foxes are adult (i.e. fully mature) at 3 years, although some may be sexually active from 18 months. Juvenile (i.e. not yet adult) flying-foxes have 2 sub-groups. They are “infant” if they still need milk or milk replacer (under 6 months) and are “sub-adult” between infancy and adulthood. For the purposes of rehabilitation flying-foxes are treated as adult from 18 months.

- 1.24.13 All flying-foxes coming into care must be reported to the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee within 24 hours, sooner if possible. The record of the animal must be entered onto the WIRES database as soon as possible either by the rescuer or the Branch nominated statistics recorder. Case planning for each animal should include considerations such as the age of the animal, the injuries with which it presents and the need for company of this class of animal.
 - 1.24.13.1 Any animal coming into care with an injury which clearly makes it unreleasable – e.g. blind or with both thumbs missing – must be euthanased within 24 hours of intake.
- 1.24.14 All rescuers and rehabilitators must maintain awareness of the possibility of lyssavirus with every animal rescued – including isolation until the animal's usual behaviour pattern is known. In particular, any flying-fox presenting with signs of passivity or aggression not explainable by injuries or illness identified at the time of rescue must be isolated until the behaviour is explained. If, after observation, there is a high index of suspicion for lyssavirus the Coordinator or Coordinating Committee must be consulted and decisions made regarding euthanasia and Australian Bat Lyssavirus testing.
- 1.24.15 No adult flying-fox may be kept in care for longer than 3 months unless specific, case-by-case approval is given by the Bat Standards Team. An application for extension of rehabilitation time beyond 3 months should give a history of the illness or injury of the animal; a veterinary assessment of the likelihood of successful release of the animal with continued

treatment and a summary of the treatment being given. The approval for extension should be reviewed every 4 weeks with that review entailing an updated progress report on the individual animal.

- 1.24.15.1 No animal may be transferred to another Branch or organisation with the intention or motivation of bypassing this time review requirement or to circumvent the euthanasia of unreleasable animals. Any transfer must be documented and approved by the Branch Coordinator as per the relevant WIRES policy relating to all animals.
- 1.24.16 No rehabilitating flying-fox is to be housed with permanent care animals.
- 1.24.17 All adult flying-foxes, upon rehabilitation, should be returned to the colony of origin if known, or nearest colony to point of rescue. If this is not possible the flying-fox should be released into any colony where flying-foxes of the same species are found.
- 1.24.18 Due to the highly nomadic nature of Little Red Flying-foxes, they will be released at the nearest colony to the point of rescue containing other Little Reds. This may mean transporting considerable distances.
- 1.24.19 All releasable orphan Grey-headed and Black Flying-foxes rescued outside the time when an orphan release programme is running, or where the colony of origin is not known, or is unsuitable due to the colony moving, are to be transported to a WIRES Bat Standards Team approved holding facility containing animals of the same age group and are to be released the following season or, if the group is large and fit enough as a separate, earlier release group.