

Tropical Factsheets

Megabats

- The megabats are vegetarians, and feed mainly on nectar and fruit.
- They lick nectar with their long tongues and then carry pollen on their fur to other flowers.
- They also distribute seeds by eating fruit and spitting the seeds out at other places.
- Many other animals depend on the trees which are pollinated and distributed by megabats.
- Megabats don't use sonar or echolocation. They depend on vision and an excellent sense of smell.
- They roost in daylight.
- They wrap their wings around themselves.
- They don't hibernate.
- They have two claws on their forelimbs.



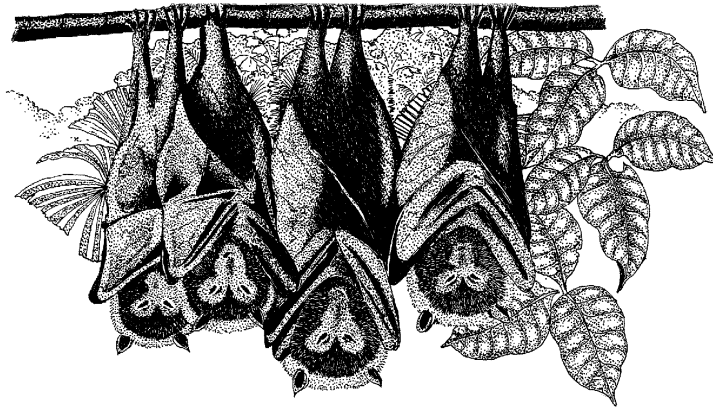
Spectacled flying fox

Some Wet Tropics megabats

Spectacled flying fox (*Pteropus conspicillatus*)

- Flying foxes (genus *Pteropus*) are the best known tropical bats because of their huge size.
- They have wingspans that can reach up to 1.6 metres.
- They are called **flying foxes** because their large eyes, pricked ears and long snouts make them look like dogs or foxes.
- They have pale, **straw-coloured fur** around their eyes that look like a pair of spectacles.
- They fly at 40 km/hr with an average of 120 wing beats per minute.
- They travel up to 50 km each night.
- Even though colonies of flying foxes produce strong smells, these megabats are **very clean animals**. They constantly groom their fur and wing membranes when they rest. When they need to urinate or defaecate, they turn themselves head-up.
- They are mainly rainforest bats, but they are also the most common bat in the Cairns Central Swamp and other **Melaleuca** (Paperbark) swamps.

- They spend the day in permanent **tree-top communal camps**. These camps are found in the upper canopy of tall trees in rainforest, freshwater swamps and mangroves.



Flying fox camp

- They have a complex **social system**.
- Old males guard the boundaries of the camp, and keep a look-out for eagles and pythons which are their main predators.
- Crocodiles also catch and kill flying foxes as they swoop over water to drink.
- Mating occurs in March/April and one young flying fox is born to each female between October and December.
- They use **more than 20 different calls** for communication.
- As night falls millions of flying foxes leave their tree-top camps and fly in huge groups across the sky. Pale flowers open in the canopy and forest trees increase the supply of nectar to their flowers. These events are linked. **The bats and the trees need each other.**
- White or pale flowers are easier for the bats to see at night. The bats land on the flowers and while feeding, they collect a load of pollen on their fur to be transferred to the next flower.
- Flying foxes are the main pollinators of a number of important rainforest trees.
- Because of the great distances which these bats fly (up to 50 km in one night) they allow cross-fertilisation between distant trees.
- Flying foxes also **distribute the seeds** of many rainforest trees.
- The seeds are inside the fruit they eat. They deposit the seeds while they are flying, helping to regenerate forest in areas which have been cleared.
- Often flying foxes carry away large fruits to stop other hungry bats from stealing their food. These large seeds are then dropped some distance from the parent tree.



Eastern tube-nosed bat (*Nyctimene robinsoni*)

- This bat has tubes 3mm long protruding from its nose. The tubes make these bats look very strange. (This bat was used as the model for the movie **Gremlins**.)
- The tubes probably act as **snorkels** to allow the bat to breathe while feeding on pulpy fruit.
- This bat is well **camouflaged** by the white and yellow spots on its brown wings and ears, blending with sun-dappled foliage and dead leaves.



Eastern tube-nosed bat

Queensland blossom bat or northern blossom bat (*Macroglossus minimus*)

- This bat is smaller than a mouse and weighs only 15 grams.
- It has a pointed nose. Its long, thin tongue is very specialised for licking nectar in flowers.
- It likes to visit any trees with **shaving-brush flowers**.
- It is an important pollinator of the **Bumpy Satinash** (*Syzygium corniflorum*.)

Little red flying fox (*Pteropus scapulatus*)

- This is the most widely distributed flying fox in Tropical North Queensland.
- Huge numbers of this wandering bat move to coastal areas in years of inland drought and poor eucalypt flowering.
- Their camps may be as large as 100 000 bats.

Black flying fox (*Pteropus alecto*)

- Camps of up to hundreds of thousands of these bats are often found in mangrove and paperbark swamps.

Bare-backed fruit bat (*Dobsonia moluccensis*)

- This bat is found in northern Cape York, including Black Mountain near Cooktown.
- This is the only Australian megabat to roost in the semi-darkness of caves.
- It is also the only fruit bat which can fly backwards.