

They're hungry, cranky and in our backyards

Bats invade Mackay gardens in search of food

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HUNGRY flying foxes are invading Mackay backyards in search of food – and their cranky disposition has been linked to a spike in bat bites in our region.

“They’re sick and injured, they’re not healthy. People with good intentions in mind are picking them up. But...like all wildlife they don’t see humans as friendly, they see them as a potential threat,” Wildlife ranger Ross Monash said.

In the last week seven people have

been scratched or bitten by the bats (also called flying foxes). Some of the people were attacked while trying to rescue the creatures from fences. They are now all being treated with injections to prevent them from contacting the deadly lyssavirus carried by bats.

Mr Monash suspects the bats are searching for food in people’s gardens because the unusually cold, wet weather has meant less native plants are flowering, depriving them of their primary source of food.

About 70 bats had been found dead in the Mackay region recently.

Although the Environmental Protection Agency – which is the overarching body for Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service – expects the cold, wet weather to be the cause of the deaths they are also testing the dead bats for the lyssavirus.

The lyssavirus is endemic among flying fox populations across Australia. In 1998, Mackay woman Monique Todhunter died of the virus about two years after she was bitten by a bat.

Tropical Population Health Unit

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THIS male, adult black flying fox is similar to those found in Mackay backyards.
Picture: PETER HOLT. 110707/390