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Media release: Calls for culling bats are irresponsible and ill-informed

Bat Conservation & Rescue Qld has rejected calls for flying-fox culls and dispersals as ill-informed and irresponsible – likely to escalate health risks and cause needless animal suffering.

BCRQ President Louise Saunders says wildlife rescuers are saddened by the death of the 8-year-old boy from Australian Bat Lyssavirus and feel a great deal of sympathy for his family.

“But killing and dispersing flying-foxes won’t help keep people safe and may increase the risk of contact between people and bats as well as being terrible for flying-foxes and the environment. People in prominent positions really need to check their facts and ensure their advice is based on medical and scientific fact rather than prejudice and gut instinct,” Ms Saunders said.

“Australian Bat Lyssavirus is an extremely rare disease in humans. Only two people are known to have caught it from flying-foxes and one from a micro-bat. The latest case is the first in more than 14 years.

“As long as people do not handle flying-foxes, having them roost near homes or feed in gardens or parks is safe. If people are bitten or scratched, the disease can be prevented by a vaccination.

“People are at most risk of a bite or scratch if they try to remove or rescue flying-foxes entangled in backyard netting over fruit trees or caught on barbed wire fences.

“It’s vital that people call a wildlife rescue organisation rather than try to help flying-foxes themselves. Sadly, thousands of flying-foxes each year suffer a cruel death in backyard nets or on barbed wire fences.

“Culling and dispersing bats will only increase the risks of entanglement and therefore the risks of people handling flying-foxes and being bitten or scratched.

“Wildlife care groups perform an essential animal welfare and human health service by their voluntary service.

“A high priority for governments should be education about flying-foxes and support for the work of voluntary community groups who rescue and rehabilitate flying-foxes. In Queensland, there are about 30 groups that care for several thousand injured and orphaned flying-foxes each year.

“Killing and dispersing flying-foxes is also not a solution for Hendra virus, which humans catch only from horses. As Biosecurity Qld has advised, harassing flying-foxes could increase their shedding of Hendra virus.

“Again, Hendra is a very rare disease and it can be prevented by a horse vaccination and simple hygiene measures.

“People and flying-foxes can live safely together,” Ms Saunders concluded.

Rules for human safety and flying-fox welfare

1. If you see a flying-fox in trouble, immediately call the 24 hour hotline 0488 228 134 or 1300 ANIMAL (1300 264 625).
Call if you see a flying-fox entangled in backyard netting, caught on barbed wire, on a powerline, alone in a tree during the day, or on the ground.
2. Do not touch flying-foxes. It is safe to be near flying-foxes but Australian Bat Lyssavirus can be transmitted through a bite or scratch.
3. If you find a flying-fox on the ground, move it without touching it (eg. gently with a shovel or broom) to a safe place away from traffic or dogs and cover it with a towel and a weighted box.
4. If you find a flying-fox entangled on barbed wire or in a net, cover it with a towel to keep it cool and calm.
5. Even if a flying-fox on powerlines is dead, call a rescuer because it may have a live baby.
6. To safely protect your backyard fruit from birds and flying-foxes, only use netting with a weave smaller than 1 cm. If you can poke your finger through a net, it is deadly to wildlife.

Contact for interview

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Images are available including of flying-foxes entangled in backyard netting, orphaned baby flying-foxes and rescued adults in care.