

Yarra Bend Park
Flying-fox Campsite:

Review of the Management Plan



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Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite: Review of the Management Plan

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About this review

This Review is part of a set of three review papers addressing the effectiveness of the 2005 Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite Management Plan. The other two are:

- Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite: Review of the Scientific Research
- Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite: Review of the Revegetation Plan

These three Reviews have been prepared for consultation purposes and to inform the development of a new Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite Management Plan.

Executive Summary

The 2003 relocation of Melbourne's Grey-headed Flying-fox colony from Melbourne's culturally and historically significant Royal Botanic Gardens is the largest urban wildlife management project ever undertaken in Melbourne.

Grey-headed Flying-foxes started regular roosting in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (the Gardens) in 1981 and by 2003, numbers had reached around 30,000.

From the mid-1990s the flying-foxes had started to have serious impacts – causing significant vegetation damage and having an adverse effect on visitor amenity. The impact of such a large number of flying-foxes roosting in a small area and year-round was unsustainable.

In 2003 a decision was made to relocate the colony from the Gardens to a more appropriate location. The new site would provide a safe and secure roost for Melbourne's colony of nationally threatened Grey-headed Flying-foxes, have minimal impact on other users and residents and give the Gardens the chance to recover.

The Fern Gully at the Gardens is now recovering, and the flying-foxes appear to have formed a permanent camp at Yarra Bend Park, Kew. This outcome is the result of the efforts of a large number of individuals and organisations. The results of this project should now be celebrated.

In 2005, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) developed a five-year Yarra Bend Park Campsite Management Plan to "provide a clear framework for managing Melbourne's flying-fox colony at Yarra Bend Park and creating a sustainable campsite".

In 2009, the Campsite Management Plan has been reviewed to determine its effectiveness as part of the process of developing the next five-year management plan.

Three separate reviews have been prepared:

- 1 Review of the Campsite Management Plan (this report)
- 2 Review of the Revegetation Plan
- 3 Review of the Scientific Research.

This review has shown that the majority of the identified actions in the plan have been carried out successfully and all key stakeholders involved in managing the site were satisfied that the site condition has significantly improved due to those actions. In addition, good opportunities for visitors to view the colony have been created. The flying-foxes have continued to roost at the site throughout each year, and the reported impacts on surrounding amenity have decreased significantly.

The next Campsite Management Plan should be focussed on consolidation of the revegetation efforts to improve flying-fox habitat, the maintenance of existing infrastructure and enhancing the visitor experience. The flying-fox colony should continue to be monitored, and a long-term plan for ensuring ongoing availability of suitable roosting habitat within Yarra Bend Park should be prepared. Management of the campsite should be fully integrated into the overall management of Yarra Bend Park.



Background



Assessment approach

Background and purpose of the review

Grey-headed Flying-foxes started regular roosting in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne (the Gardens) in 1981, and largely as a result of influxes of immigrant animals, by 2003 there were around 30,000 roosting, mainly in the Fern Gully area.

From the mid-1990s the flying-foxes had started to have serious impacts on sections of the Gardens, causing significant levels of tree damage and adversely affecting amenity for visitors.

This posed a major conservation challenge as the Grey-headed Flying-fox is a nationally threatened species, and the Gardens are a significant cultural and historic asset for Melbourne, in addition to having a clear plant conservation charter.

In March 2003, the flying-foxes were dispersed from the Gardens as part of a strategic relocation program. A small proportion of the colony moved to Eastern Park in Geelong, and the remainder of the colony settled at Yarra Bend Park. Agreement was reached with the land manager and efforts to secure the site and ensure its long-term sustainability were put in place. This included the development and implementation of a site management plan.

Since being relocated in March 2003, monitoring at the Gardens has shown that flying-foxes have not re-established a camp at that site, and that most of the trees that had suffered serious damage are recovering. Several mature trees required removal, but the canopy of the Fern Gully area for example has continued to recover, once again providing protection to the understorey plants.

A Flying-fox Campsite Management Plan for Yarra Bend Park was prepared in 2005 to "provide a clear framework for managing Melbourne's flying-fox colony at Yarra Bend Park and creating a sustainable campsite".

Now, in 2009, the Campsite Management Plan is in the process of being renewed. To contribute to the renewal process, three reviews have been prepared. These are:

- 1 Review of the Campsite Management Plan (this report)
- 2 Review of the Revegetation Plan
- 3 Review of the Scientific Research.

This Review evaluates the goals and actions outlined in the 2005 Flying-fox Campsite Management Plan and assesses the effectiveness of the actions.

This review has been carried out to provide objective information about the 2005 Campsite Management Plan. The results will be used to identify outcomes and to develop new goals and actions for the next management plan.

At the time of its preparation there was very little precedent to inform the 2005 Campsite Management Plan. There were several plans for existing flying-fox campsites in New South Wales and Queensland, but none dealt with a newly-formed colony that had been relocated. This presented a significant challenge. In response, the Victorian Government provided the required funding and resources to develop and implement a management plan to protect the future of the nationally threatened Grey-headed Flying-fox in Melbourne and to manage and mitigate any impacts.

A range of stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of the 2005 Management Plan were interviewed separately to obtain their thoughts on its effectiveness.

Each of the goals and actions were considered and the following questions discussed:

- Have the goals been achieved?
- What difference has the plan made?
- What is working well?
- What isn't working well?
- How can we improve?

In addition, prior to finalising this review paper, an on-site meeting was held for key stakeholders involved in the planning and management of the site. The achievements of the 2005 Management Plan were a focus for the meeting.



Findings



GOAL 1

Successfully develop a sustainable flying-fox campsite in Yarra Bend Park.

Program goals and effectiveness

The 2005 Management Plan identified the following five major goals:

- 1 Successfully develop a sustainable flying-fox campsite in Yarra Bend Park.
- 2 Enhance vegetation and other environmental values in and near the campsite.
- 3 Minimise any negative impacts of flying-foxes on residents and park users.
- 4 Provide improved visitor facilities at and near the campsite.
- 5 Increase community understanding and support for flying-fox conservation.

In the following pages, each goal and its associated actions has been assessed to identify if the action has been carried out, and to assess its effectiveness.

Action 1

Formalise the responsibilities of DSE, the Yarra Bend Park Trust and Parks Victoria for implementation, ongoing management and funding responsibilities for the management area.

Assessment

Responsibilities for management of all aspects of the project and the site were formalised in two ways. First, a management plan was prepared for the campsite in careful consultation with all parties. Second, a legally binding Memorandum of Understanding was prepared by solicitors and signed by the Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Yarra Bend Park Trust.

Stakeholders all agreed that the aims of this goal had been successfully achieved. Responsibilities for managing the site were clearly outlined in the early stages of the Management Plan implementation and worked well over much of the five-year period.

Action 2

Conduct an extensive revegetation/regeneration and weed control program throughout the management area and construct a wetland and artificial roost structures at sites shown on the Master Plan, in accordance with approved engineering specifications. Ensure minimal impacts on roosting flying-foxes during construction and maintenance. Employ an expert observer during excavations to identify any sites or artefacts of cultural significance.

Assessment

A Revegetation Plan was prepared and implemented for the 26 ha campsite area. Many thousands of plants were planted and there has been extensive weed control allowing natural regeneration to begin to occur. The effectiveness of this plan has been addressed in the accompanying document Yarra Bend Park Flying-fox Campsite: Review of the Revegetation Plan.

The revegetation and wetland construction works were carried out with minimal impacts on the flying-fox colony. Reputable companies were selected to ensure that standards were met, and that the flying-foxes were not disturbed.

A Wurundjeri field representative was present during wetland excavations in early 2006 to note if any items of cultural significance were unearthed. No items of significance were recorded during the excavations.

A point was raised that maintenance could not be carried out in areas of the campsite that had not been specifically identified for works. It was agreed that works could be carried out anywhere across the site, if they were needed, and that the next Management Plan should make this clearer.

Early in the Management Plan implementation phase, it was agreed that the artificial roosting structures would not be constructed. This was due to prohibitive costs, the high risk and untried experimental nature of the project, the visual intrusion and the relatively small number of roosting spaces that may be able to be provided. It was agreed that it was preferable to monitor the response of the vegetation before incurring the expense and effort of constructing artificial roosts.

Additional research was proposed to include measuring current flying-fox roosting arrangements at the site (such as branch thickness, distance flying-foxes are apart etc.) in order to assess the viability of installing artificial roosting structures. The data (in the accompanying Review of the Scientific Research describing the research results) shows that in order to reduce the impact of one-fifth of the flying-fox colony, more than 3 km of roosting space would need to be provided as an alternative for the animals. To provide and maintain this amount of roost would be logistically very challenging. The conclusion of the research is that the artificial roosts would be impractical on a large scale, but may have some uses in very particular circumstances on a smaller scale.

Findings



GOAL 1

Successfully develop a sustainable flying-fox campsite in Yarra Bend Park.

Action 3

Undertake ongoing monitoring of the flying-fox colony and campsite and adapt management practices in response to changing circumstances. Include fortnightly population counts and mapping, annual assessments of the success of habitat improvements and the impact of the colony.

Assessment

Monitoring of the flying-fox population has been ongoing and is discussed in detail in the accompanying Review of the Scientific Research describing research results. To ensure the most reliable population results, both static counts (at least twice per month) and evening fly-out counts (once per month) have been carried out at Yarra Bend Park since the colony established there. Population data has been mapped.

Other monitoring includes reproductive output of the flying-foxes, male and female sex ratios, heat-related mortality and assessment of roost and camp conditions.

It was agreed by stakeholders that this monitoring was valuable and should continue. The population assessment was considered a good investment, being relatively inexpensive and aligning well with similar counts around Australia. Population data provided on coloured maps has been particularly helpful, and Parks Victoria staff at Yarra Bend indicated that they would like to be provided with the information more regularly, to allow for adaptive management at the site. Other types of information are also being collected and should be presented to all key stakeholders at least every six months.

It was noted that future research could include documentation of tree species that the flying-foxes were choosing to roost in, humidity data from the wetlands, and more about the role of the Geelong colony and its numbers.

Action 4

Ensure that the colony remains in the identified management area. If other colonies form in the Park or elsewhere in Melbourne, consider the merits of these sites in consultation with the land manager. Undertake appropriate management actions to provide for sustainable roosting at the site, or undertake dispersal of the colony where appropriate and practicable.

Assessment

The goal of ensuring the flying-foxes remain in the identified management area has been very successful to date. Wetlands and other construction and planting works at the site were specifically carried out to encourage the colony deeper into the management area and away from residents. Some stakeholders felt that these works have already started to increase the attraction of other parts of the site. There was a comment that flying-foxes may be moving further north on the west side near the pump-house, a section of the park that is within the 26 ha management area.

When flying-foxes occasionally and under extreme circumstances spread

to nearby areas for short periods they were successfully moved back to the core area by specialist contractors.

Researchers have advised that it is likely that the flying-foxes will move along the river if some trees become less suitable for roosting over the next decade. This potential movement must continue to be planned for. Such movement may even allow previously used trees to recover.

Although it is possible that the current colony could leave the area, or split into two colonies, managers must continue to be aware that the colony may, over the medium to long-term, move around within the Yarra Bend Park campsite area. The need for long-term planning for any of these potential occurrences was identified in the 2005 plan and must also be built in to the new management plan for the campsite.

In the context of this action, it is important to be aware that the key goal of management at the site must be to continue to provide suitable roosting areas for the flying-foxes into the future.

On two occasions a small population attempted to roost at Springvale crematorium. They were moved to prevent a colony establishing at an inappropriate site. If any colonies form elsewhere in Melbourne in the future, DSE will assess the suitability of that site.

Action 5

At the end of the five-year management plan, a strategy will be prepared for the continued management of the flying-fox colony in Yarra Bend Park.

Assessment

This document forms part of the first step toward renewing the Campsite Management Plan. With the other two reviews of scientific research and revegetation and regeneration works, this Campsite Management Plan Review will be used in a consultation process to prepare a new Plan for the ongoing management of the site.

Findings

GOAL 2

Enhance vegetation and other environmental values in and near the campsite.

Action 1

Implement the program of works identified in the Revegetation Plan, including extensive weed control and indigenous planting as specified in the planting schedules. Construct wetlands to provide increased habitat diversity and treat road runoff.

Assessment

The program of works identified in the Revegetation Plan have been implemented successfully. These works included extensive planting and weed control. Wetlands were constructed as outlined in the 2005 Campsite Management Plan.

Revegetation appears to have worked very well at the site. The effectiveness of the works is explored further in the accompanying Review of the Revegetation Plan. Schedules have been modified as necessary to cope with the drier conditions (for example, autumn plantings rather than spring plantings).

A range of contractors were used for the works. They have each brought their own approaches to the project. For example there have been varying definitions of 'local provenance'. This requires clarification in the new plan. Re-planting and weed control will be ongoing maintenance tasks.

Wetlands were constructed and vegetated. Although there hasn't been significant rain over the past five years, the wetlands appear to be working well. The first big down pour resulted in scouring, which has now been resolved. At this stage the wetlands do not hold water for very long, and several of the key stakeholder groups interviewed suggested that lining the wetlands would be an important task to consider for the next Management Plan. It was noted that the wetlands are planned to be replanted this year. It was also observed that re-lining the wetlands may damage them and that vehicle access would be difficult. The suggestion of filling wetlands with water prior to hot days may be a point to consider in the next Management Plan.

The wetlands were created for a range of purposes including the increase of habitat diversity, to provide benefits for waterfowl, other birds and wetland flora, and also to potentially create a more humid environment for flying-foxes. There were a range of opinions about whether the creation of the wetlands had attracted the flying-foxes or not. It is possible that examination of the potential benefits of the wetlands for flying-foxes in hot weather could be addressed through future research.

Action 2

Monitor Red Fox numbers and increase control measures if numbers increase in the management area.

Assessment

It was originally feared that the presence of flying-foxes could have lead to an increase in Red Fox numbers in the park. This does not appear to have been the case.

The Parks Victoria annual fox control program has been coordinated with the City of Boroondara and the City of Yarra. There are a small number of fox dens in the area, but there does not appear to have been an increase in the number of foxes caught. Parks Victoria also regularly controls rabbits, which probably ensures that fox numbers stay low.

In relation to the future of the fox control action in the next Campsite Management Plan, there were a range of responses. There was discussion about whether or not the fox monitoring should continue to be focused specifically around the campsite. It was agreed that fox control was costly to resource, and needs justification if it is to continue specifically at the campsite.

Action 3

Involve the community in clearly identified components of the revegetation work to increase involvement and ownership of the project.

Assessment

It was originally intended that the community be involved in the revegetation of the 26 ha flying-fox management area, but this did not occur. There have been no community planting days held specifically at the campsite area. This is partly because there were some concerns about large groups of people and noise disturbing and dispersing the colony. To ensure efficiency, and that specific standards were met, it was agreed to use contractors to carry out revegetation works.

Most of the volunteer effort at the site has focussed on the monthly evening fly-out counts. This has been a really successful program involving more than 260 volunteers from Melbourne and also from other states and countries. There has also been involvement by animal welfare groups on heat-event days. It was generally agreed by the key stakeholders that attempting to engage the community in vegetation management at the campsite is no longer appropriate, and that works at the site should continue to be carried out by contractors.

It was noted that if any volunteer programs are proposed in the new Management Plan, they should be fully resourced to cover coordination costs.

Action 4

Monitor and assess progress and adapt management to ensure successful weed control and regeneration and revegetation.

Assessment

Ongoing monitoring has been carried out in those areas identified for works in the Campsite Management Plan. It was noted that the contractors involved in the project have been very conscious of alerting Parks Victoria staff to any relevant management issues, even outside the management area. The monitoring and adaptive management approach has been working well. An example is that small weed outbreaks have been identified and controlled promptly.



Findings



GOAL 3

Minimise any negative impacts of flying-foxes on residents and park users.

Action 1

Continue to monitor the size and location of the colony within the management area and take specified management actions to minimise any negative impacts on nearby private properties (through a variety of methods).

Assessment

There was general agreement that the re-establishment of the large colony of flying-foxes in an urban context has been very successful and has resulted in minimal impact on most Melburnians. However, it is acknowledged that a few individual residents are being severely impacted upon from time to time by the presence of the flying-foxes. Those residents, while very few, have genuine concerns that are important to address. DSE is committed to minimising any impacts on residents living in close proximity to the flying-fox colony at Yarra Bend Park.

As the colony settled in to the new site, dispersal was required from time to time to ensure the colony remained in the park. Initially a dispersal program was carried out every day, with a contractor on call for residents over the summer as the colony spread out.

Residents were assisted in a variety of ways:

- They were provided with advice about reducing garden attractiveness through watering options and landscaping.
- Residents were advised that overhead sprinkler systems created a microclimate which appeared to be preferred by flying-foxes. They were advised that drip systems could reduce the chances of visitation by the flying-foxes.
- Landholders were provided with wildlife authorisations and a protocol for moving animals away from their gardens using noise.

Important actions like these continue to be supported by DSE and will be funded in the next Campsite Management Plan. In addition, on severe heat days, a commitment will be made to ensure that any dead flying-foxes are collected quickly, as described in more detail in the Protocols for Management of Grey-headed flying-foxes during severe adverse weather events.

Action 2

Undertake supervised pruning of a section of trees from a point near the Bellbird Picnic Area toilet block to prevent the southward expansion of the colony.

Assessment

The action to undertake selective pruning of trees was not carried out. It was agreed by most of the stakeholders that the action would damage the trees and may not be effective anyway. One stakeholder argued that the action should be kept as a back-up option to break-up any potential roosting area. Any movement of flying-foxes will continue to be monitored. It was suggested that any wording relating to this action in the next Management Plan could be changed to reflect it as an option if deemed appropriate by DSE or Parks Victoria.

Action 3

Establish a reference group and continue to liaise closely with councils and other key stakeholders on flying-fox management.

Assessment

The reference group was established early in the project and met twice during the early development and implementation of the Campsite Management Plan. It has not met recently as there have been no major issues to address. Regular meetings of the group may no longer be required, as there are now other processes in place.

Action 4

Work cooperatively with the Yarra Bend Park Trust to inform golfers about the significance and value of flying-foxes and the need to protect them.

Assessment

Golfers have been informed of the significance of flying-foxes in a number of ways:

- Informative signage has been installed at points throughout the course
- Score cards with ecological and compliance information about flying-foxes have been developed
- Two flying-fox trophies have been presented each year to positively promote the flying-foxes co-existence with golfers.

All of the stakeholders agreed that this information provided for golfers appears to have been effective and has been well received. It would seem that permanent signage has resulted in a significant decrease in incidents with golfers. The presence of the colony does not seem to be interfering with or negatively impacting on the golfers. Club members have advised that the trophies are highly sought after and valued. It is proposed that the donation of trophies should continue as a means of promoting the flying-foxes, their needs and co-existence at the golf course.

Action 5

Continue to provide readily accessible information on flying-foxes, including health issues. Include signs, publications, the DSE website and letter drops for local residents.

Assessment

Detailed interpretative signs about flying-foxes have been provided for visitors in key areas of the park. Letter drops were used very early in the project, but have not been conducted recently. General information for the visiting public was also provided. The DSE website has a large amount of information on flying-foxes and the Yarra Bend Campsite. Local park brochures also have some information about the flying-foxes. It was suggested that the website could be reviewed and updated, and that a brochure specifically about the flying-foxes at Yarra Bend could be developed.

Findings

GOAL 4

Provide improved visitor facilities at and near the campsite.



Action 1

Install orientation and interpretation signs in the Bellbird Picnic Area to orient visitors and encourage appropriate behaviour near the flying-fox colony.

Assessment

Six orientation and interpretation signs have been installed at the viewing platform, along the track to the wetlands and also at the jetty. All interviewed stakeholders commented that the signs appeared to be very effective and that they had not experienced much vandalism since installation. Parks Victoria commented that there are definite benefits from providing information, and that people now view the site as a destination to come and observe the flying-foxes. Rangers regularly patrol the site at weekends, and provide reports to the Ranger in Charge.

Action 2

In conjunction with the site managers, install direction signs to the campsite at the boathouses, and information/interpretation signs at the golf course.

Assessment

Signs have been installed at the golf course, but not at boathouses. Signs at the boathouses could be considered in the future. It should be investigated if there is a comfortable walking track to the campsite from Studley Park. There are signs along the Yarra River for canoeists. It was noted that there are no brown (tourism) signs, and that people could be directed by additional signs at Chandler Highway (Kew) at the start of The Boulevard, and on Studley Park Road pointing to Slip Road on The Boulevard. These opportunities may be considered in the preparation of the next Campsite Management Plan.



Actions 3 & 4

Construct a gravel walking path beside the entry road to the Bellbird Picnic Area. Realign and upgrade walking tracks from the Bellbird Picnic Area to the lookout point, north to Yarra Boulevard (subject to discussions with the Yarra Bend Park Trust) and along the river flats around the colony. Use signs and fencing as necessary to regulate access to the main roost area near the wetland.

Assessment

The gravel path and walking tracks were all constructed early in the implementation of the Campsite Management Plan. All stakeholders agreed that they were effective, but that some ongoing maintenance would be needed.

These new paths have replaced informal and degraded tracks and have greatly improved the amenity and safety for visitors. In addition, people have been successfully diverted away from under the main flying-fox roost areas, minimising disturbance to the colony. The path along the entry road has resulted in better regulation of foot traffic and reduced the potential for accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles.

It was noted that some sections of track need small amounts of maintenance after heavy rain, and that some of the timber edging may need to be replaced with something stronger. Some stakeholders suggested that sections could be upgraded in the future. Installation of handrails could be considered for some areas.

Action 5

Monitor levels of recreational use of the river and Bellbird and Wills Street parking areas and take appropriate action in response to any impacts.

Assessment

There has been very little monitoring of visitor use. DSE monitors the levels of use during predicted heat event days to ensure no additional stresses for the flying-foxes. There is some monitoring of the launching of boats at the jetty (regulations are being prepared to control the use of power/motor boats on the river). Parks Victoria conducts very general monitoring (general levels of busyness) of the Bellbird car park. It is possible that the main picnic area is being used more: it is over-crowded on weekends. Weekday use is light. Some of the stakeholders suggested building in some kind of a trigger to identify when more monitoring is needed.



Findings



GOAL 5

Increase community understanding and support for flying-fox conservation.



Action 1

Provide ongoing information on flying-fox management and the Yarra Bend Park campsite in media releases, publications, information services, the Internet and at the local level.

Assessment

A range of media releases have been prepared relating to the launch of the platform, implementation of the Campsite Management Plan and compliance issues. Talks have been presented by Parks Victoria and DSE to schools, university and community groups. Only limited communication activities were carried out in 2008 and 2009. On some occasions, the site and the works were demonstrated to groups of Parks Victoria staff. The Parks Victoria and DSE websites both provide information relating to the Yarra Bend Park campsite. It was suggested that the campsite area should continue to be promoted and that it would be good to raise its profile. The Yarra Bend Park Campsite has an important role in biodiversity conservation and threatened species recovery as well as providing a unique wildlife viewing opportunity close to Melbourne's centre.

Action 2

Install a viewing platform, robust binoculars and 5 or 6 thematic interpretive signs, and consider opportunities to provide face to face interpretation near the campsite.

Assessment

The viewing platform was installed in the first year of the project. It was officially opened by Elaine Carbines, the Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, in August 2006. The platform is being well used and has had minimal vandalism.

The installation of binoculars was investigated earlier in the project, but the task was a low priority and it was not carried out. Some stakeholders wondered if it was still worthwhile to consider installing binoculars as there are plenty of close wildlife viewing opportunities. It was also suggested that binoculars may be vandalised.

Face to face interpretation has not been considered as a priority over the past five years. It is resource intensive and would require identified funding. The extensive informative signage provides good opportunities for interpretation.

Actions 3 & 4

Integrate the Campsite into educational visits to the Park and encourage use related to wildlife management. Integrate the campsite into promotional material for the Park and other natural and wildlife attractions near Melbourne and consider further opportunities to encourage visits to the Park.

Assessment

Educational visits have been low key, mostly student groups, with no targeted curriculum material being developed. A private sector venture ran tours to the site for a short time, but this was not found to be sustainable.

Parks Victoria refers to the campsite in their website but to date no specific brochures have been prepared. A Parks Victoria Parknote may be produced for flying-foxes at Yarra Bend Park. Such a Note could be updated as necessary and printed off by park users as needed.

DSE provides information about flying-foxes and the campsite on its website, and have considered promoting fly-out talks. It was suggested that *Lonely Planet* guide books may be able to include a section on the Yarra Bend Park as a flying-fox campsite (it previously included information about the Royal Botanic Gardens campsite). Tourism Victoria and the City of Melbourne were also proposed as possible organisations to approach for assistance with promoting the colony and flying-fox viewing opportunity.

It was suggested that some kind of pilot study relating to sustainable tourism opportunities, as well as the potential for a communications and education program could be identified in the next Management Plan.

Action 5

Engage the reference group in discussions regarding flying-fox management across Greater Melbourne.

Assessment

The reference group was successfully engaged during the relocation phase of the project. It may no longer be needed for discussing management issues across Greater Melbourne. The flying-foxes have not dispersed beyond Yarra Bend Park and Geelong. Broader management issues may be addressed as part of the renewal of the Campsite Management Plan, however DSE is considering the preparation of a Victorian strategy to address issues relating to known Grey-headed Flying-fox colonies in the state.



Discussion



Recommendations

The Vision – how did we go?

In 2005, the Yarra Bend Flying-fox Campsite Management Plan identified the following vision.

Vision

In 2009, the flying-fox colony at Yarra Bend Park is widely acknowledged as a successful example of wildlife management in an urban environment. The management area provides a safe and secure location for flying-foxes and potentially detrimental impacts on the Park have been ameliorated by extensive vegetation works and the provision of wetlands and artificial roost structures. The local community and park visitors have an improved understanding of the role, importance and threatened status of flying-foxes and recognise the achievement of consolidating the campsite away from the Royal Botanic Gardens, high-density residential areas and other unsuitable sites across Melbourne.

Improved facilities in and near the Bellbird Picnic Area provide for improved informal recreational uses and the campsite has become a popular destination for day visitors, tourists and education groups who appreciate the opportunity to see and learn about an important wildlife species in a natural setting close to a major city.

The question now, in 2009, is has this vision been achieved? The Department of Sustainability and Environment wants to know what you think. Has the implementation of the Campsite Management Plan over the past five years achieved this vision?

What do you think?

Is this a successful example of wildlife management in the city?

Is it a safe and secure location for the Grey-headed Flying-foxes?

Have the potentially detrimental impacts been addressed?

How do the local community and visitors feel now?

Have the facilities improved, and is the site becoming more popular for wildlife viewing?

General comments and suggestions

A number of other comments and suggestions have been collated during discussions with key stakeholders. They cover a range of issues related to the following themes:

- celebrate this unique example of wildlife management in a city
- provide positive messages to the community and continue education
- new opportunities for promoting the park
- future management arrangements
- on-ground works
- heat events.

We want to know what you think

Can you offer any suggestions for the ongoing management of the site around these themes?

Do you have any other ideas that could be considered?

Recommendations for the next Management Plan

This topic has been briefly discussed with stakeholders involved in managing the site. They agreed that the next Campsite Management Plan should be focussed on:

- the maintenance of existing habitat and infrastructure
- enhancing the visitor experience, and
- consolidation of the revegetation efforts.

It was recommended that:

- the population of flying-foxes should continue to be monitored, and
- a long-term plan for ensuring ongoing availability of suitable roosting habitat (such as mature Silver Wattle patches) should be prepared.

We want to know what you think

Do you agree with these recommendations?

Are there any others that you would like to add?





Conclusion

The majority of the actions described in the 2005 Campsite Management Plan have been successfully carried out.

The 26 ha area including the flying-fox campsite at Yarra Bend Park has benefited from the installation of improved walking tracks, a viewing platform and informative signs as well as significant revegetation and weed control.

Following careful consideration, two of the proposed infrastructure actions were not carried out:

- installation of roosting structures and
- the installation of binoculars at the viewing platform.

Also, it was identified that some of the works may need further attention. These include the wetlands and some sections of track.

Selective pruning of mature trees and the action relating to community involvement in replanting were not implemented. All revegetation works were contracted out to allow for greater controls over the end result and to minimise the potential impacts on the flying-fox colony. A large number of volunteers have been involved in the site through regularly assisting with evening fly-out counts.

All key stakeholders were satisfied that the site condition has significantly improved due to the implementation of the Management Plan, and that the visitor experience of the site is greatly enhanced.

The flying-foxes have continued to roost permanently at the site throughout each year, and although two households continue to have genuine concerns, the reported impacts on surrounding amenity have decreased significantly.

This is the largest urban wildlife management project ever undertaken in Melbourne – the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne now have the opportunity to regenerate, and the flying-foxes appear to have formed a permanent camp at Yarra Bend Park. This outcome is the result of the efforts of a large number of individuals and organisations. The results of this project should now be celebrated.



