



MEDIA RELEASE

Flying fox study gets airborne

In a Northern Territory first, a collaborative project involving a team of scientists is tracking the travels of flying foxes, via radio and satellite transmitters.

Little red flying foxes from Flora River National Park, 80 kilometres south west of Katherine and the NT Rural College of the Charles Darwin University, near Katherine, have recently had the transmitters attached on their bodies.

Project co-ordinator and scientist with the NT Parks and Wildlife Service's Biodiversity and Conservation Unit, Carol Palmer, said the innovative project hoped to reveal more about the lifestyle of the red flying fox.

"We know little red flying foxes travel distances in search of food and for breeding, but exactly how far and where, is what we hope to learn," Ms Palmer said.

"The placement of radio and satellite transmitters will allow the research team to accurately plot the distances the red flying foxes travel and find out what they eat - because in the end that is why they have travel and roost in different places."

Ms Palmer said the collaborative project had seen scientists from interstate and overseas travel to the NT.

"This project has resulted in scientists from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and the University of California, Davis in the United States take part in the recent transmitter placement program," Ms Palmer said.

"Two female flying foxes were captured, fitted with the transmitters and released at Flora River National Park," she said.

"A further seven transmitters were fitted to flying foxes that make up the colony of 15,000 who reside at the NT Rural College of CDU, near Katherine.

"Hopefully, we can discover where the flying foxes go, what they eat and hopefully what the cues are that make them shift colonies."

Ms Palmer said the larger and more mature flying foxes at the NT Rural College, were better suited to being able to fly with the transmitters, which are attached via a sheepskin/leather collar around their neck.

"Although the transmitter is small, weighing 20grams, we were cautious about placing too much extra weight on the flying foxes," she said.

"Generally, the transmitter doesn't weigh more than five per cent of the body weight of the animal that will wear the transmitter."

NT Rural College, Director, Brian Heim hoped the monitoring program could explain the recent influx of flying foxes at the college.

“Having a research team investigating their behaviour will eventually lead us to an understanding of why they came to the college,” Mr Heim said.

“For the time being we will have to enjoy the mixed blessing of having 15,000 guests on our campus.”

Ms Palmer said similar research on the black flying fox, both in the NT and by Queensland’s Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, had shown the flying foxes could travel more than 80 kilometres in less than six hours.

“Studies have shown a decline in flying fox numbers, changes in their behaviour and animals coming to roost in urban setting – hopefully this project will provide some explanations as to the animals’ behaviour,” she said.

Ms Palmer said initial aerial tracking via helicopter conducted this week only located three of the flying foxes fitted with transmitters.

“We located two at Flora River National Park and one at the rural college – but at this stage six are unaccounted for,” she said.

“We are confident of locating the missing ones, but this is all part of the research process.”

Ms Palmer asked anyone in the Katherine or Kakadu region who believes they may know of the location of colonies of little red flying foxes to contact her with location details on 8944 8477.

Media note: For more information contact Parks and Wildlife’s Carol Palmer on 8944 8477 or 0407 437 752. Alternatively, CDU’s Brian Heim on 0428 738 301.

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Ends.