

A photograph of a colony of flying foxes (Pteropus) hanging from a tree branch. The bats are upside down, with their wings folded against their bodies. They have dark, leathery wings and lighter-colored fur on their faces and chests. The background is a soft-focus view of other branches and more bats, suggesting a large colony. The lighting is natural, possibly during dusk or dawn.

WILDLIFE
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30 Years of Flying Fox Rescue in Victoria

Megan Davidson, CEO Wildlife Victoria

Doug Gimesy Photography

- ▶ I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.

Balayang the Bat - brother of
Bunjil the Eaglehawk



Wildlife Victoria

- ▶ Since 1989
- ▶ Largest wildlife rescue organisation in Victoria
- ▶ Provides a state-wide Wildlife Emergency Response Service
 - ▶ >88,000 requests for service annually
 - ▶ >44,000 cases created
 - ▶ ~50,000 animals assisted
- ▶ Network of rescue, care and veterinary volunteers

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Flying Foxes in Victoria

Geelong Advertiser, Saturday 27th February 1875

“...flying foxes, are very numerous here at present... It is now about four years since they visited Colac before...”

Vampire bats, or as they are commonly called flying foxes, are very numerous here at present, and go in for making very unwelcome raids on our local orchards. It is now about four years since they visited Colac before, and they are never known to leave the sea coast and come inland except in very hot seasons, when there is a great scarcity of food.



Flying Foxes in Victoria

“Many years ago, it is understood that there were hundreds of them on the National Park ridge at Upper Gully”

Mountain District
Free Press, Thurs 20th
December 1951

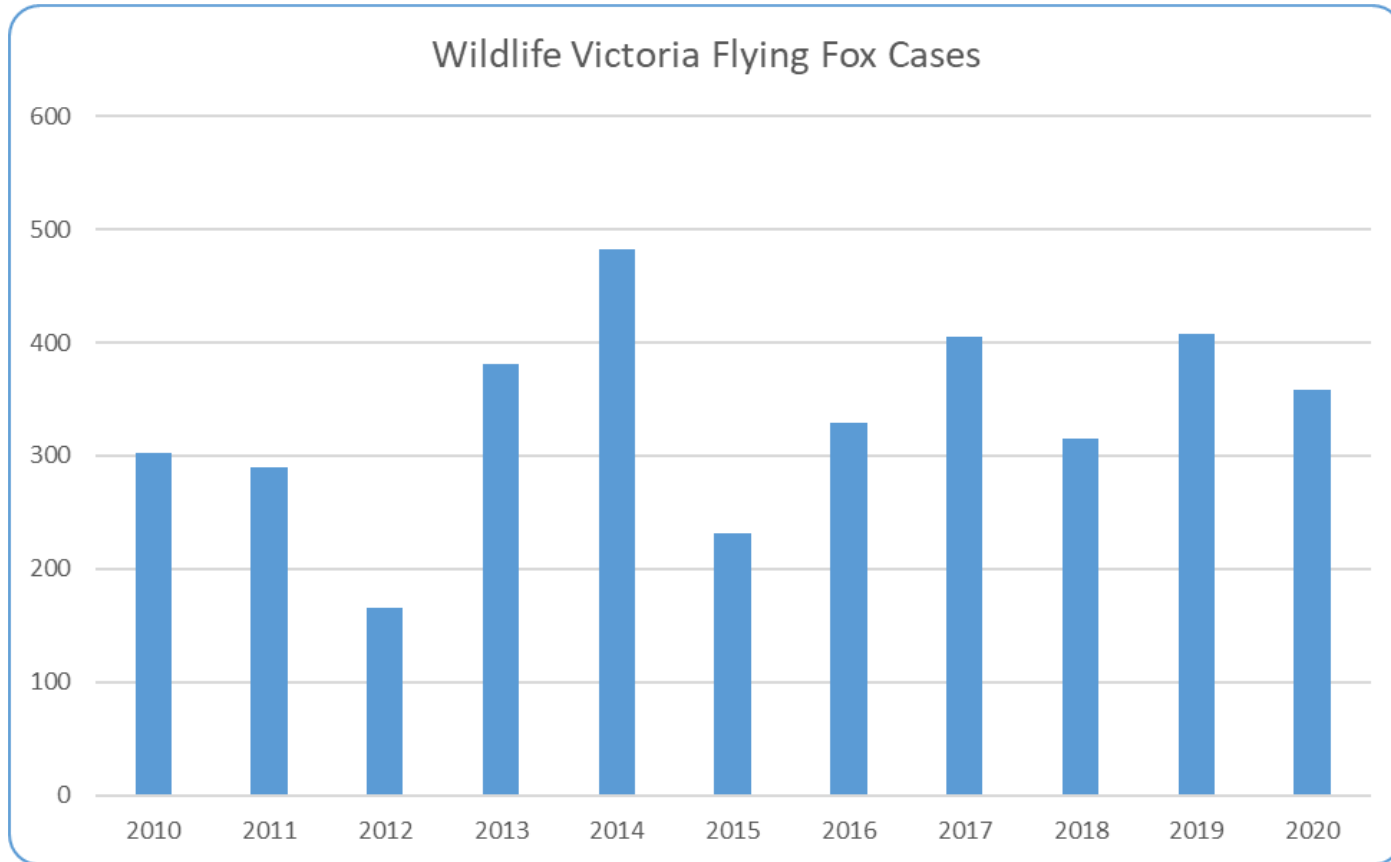
Flying fox killed at Ferntree Gully

A flying fox was killed at Upper Fern Tree Gully last Thursday night. This is the first reported in the district for some time. Many years ago, it is understood that there were hundreds of them on the National Park ridge at Upper Gully.

The resident who killed the flying fox gives us details as a warning to home and other fruit growers.



WV Annual stats



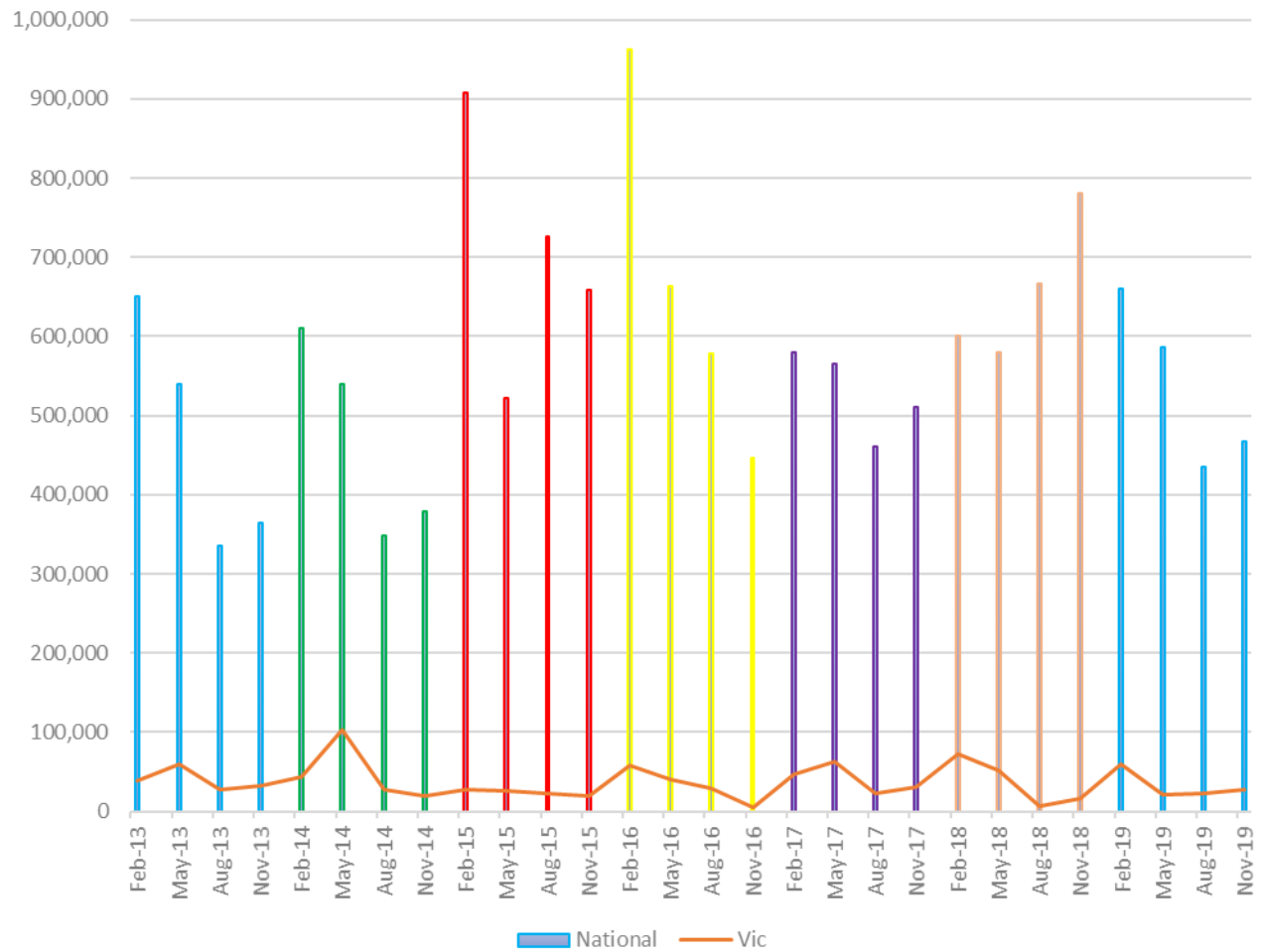
Total = 3,719 cases

Few pre 2010
stats (not shown)

2020 up to 31st October



National and Victorian GHFF Counts

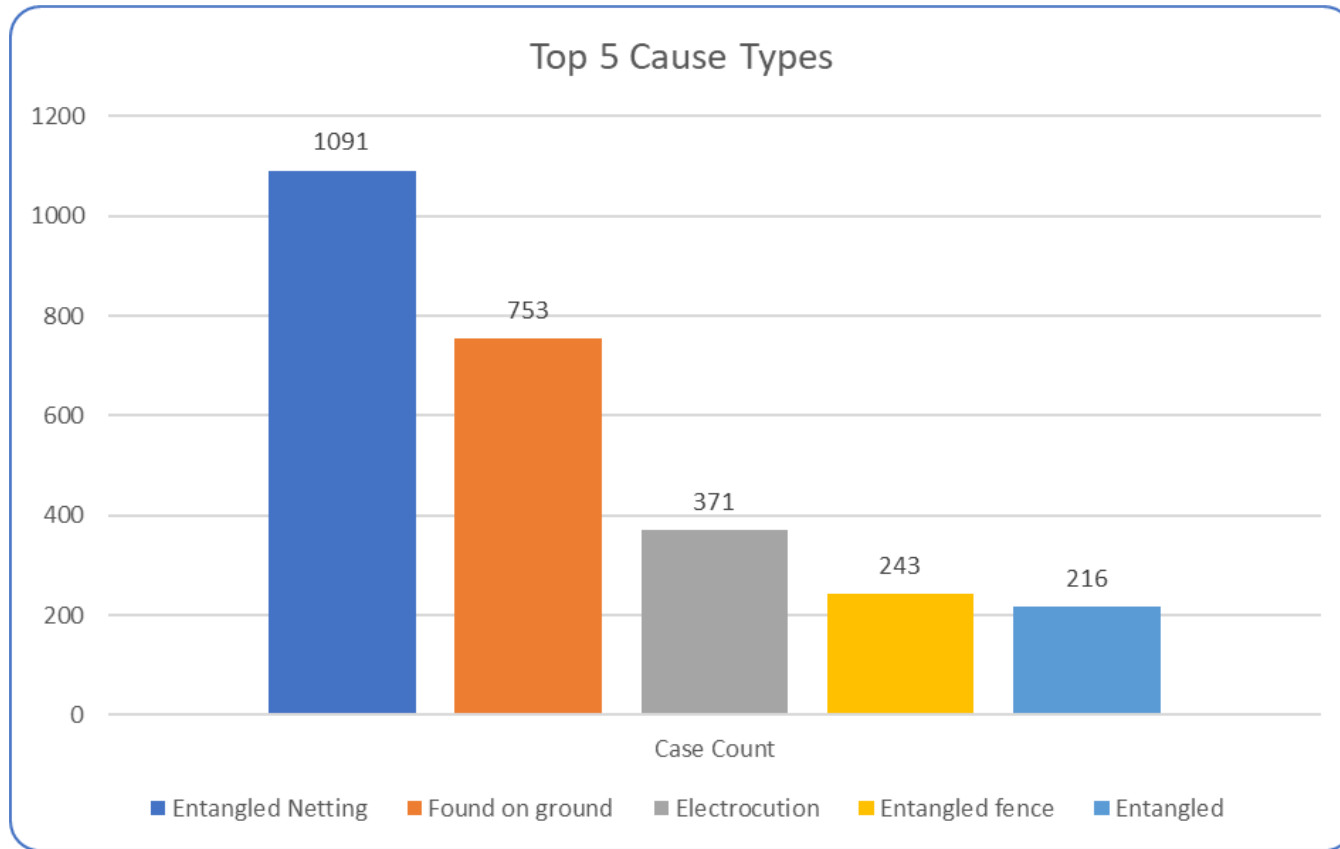


Victorian proportion of GHFF population ranges from <1% to about 20%



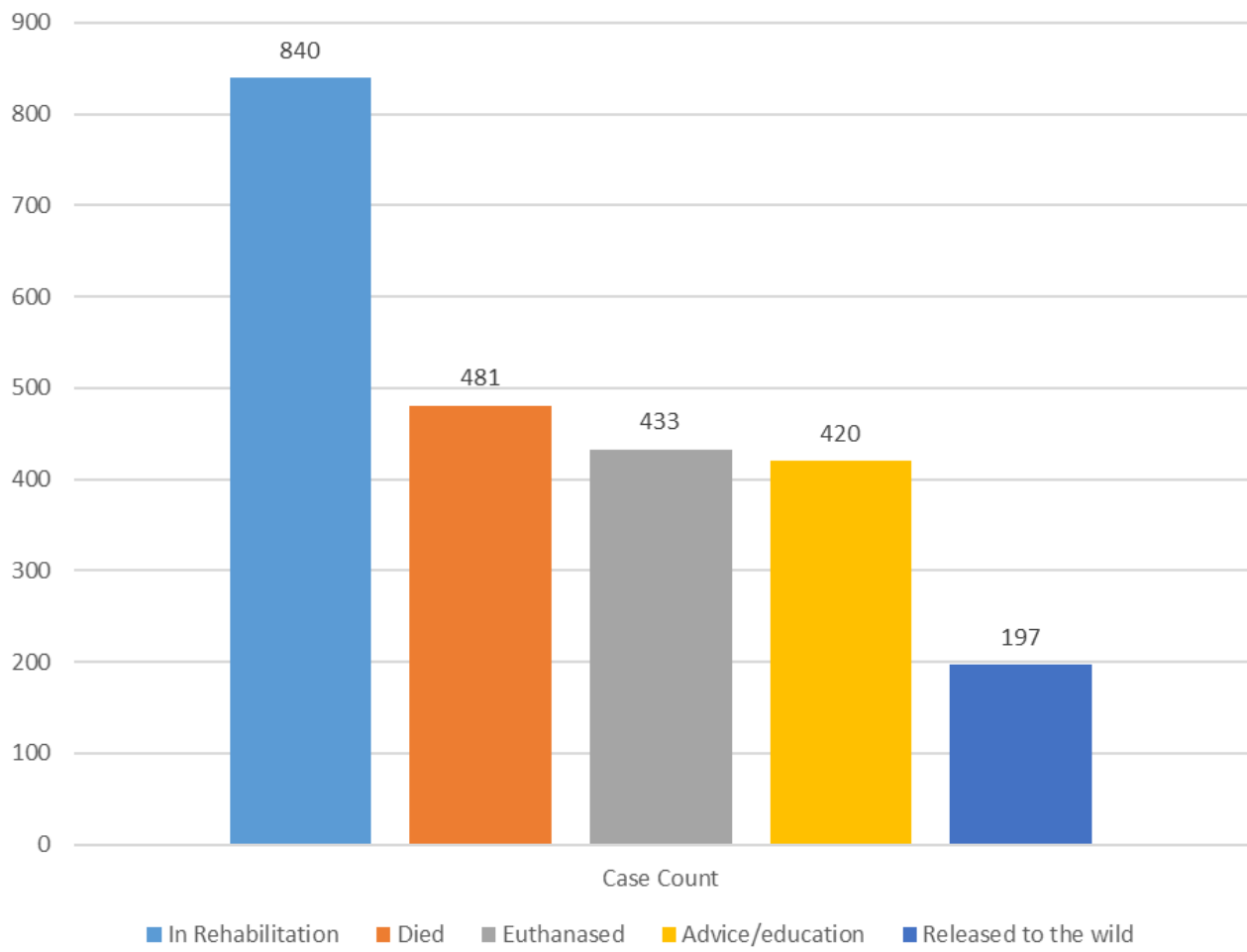


Top 5 causes



From 2012 “Entangled” category replaced by Entangled - netting, fencing, fishing line and rubbish

Top 5 Final Fates



Major cause types & outcomes

Cause type	Cases (%)	Animals	Cases with known outcome (%)	known cases fatal (%)	known cases to rehab (%)
All	3,719 (100)	4,556	2,791 (75)	914 (33)	864 (31)
Entanglement (all types)	1,574 (42)	1,656	1,188 (76)	306 (26)	534 (45)
Entanglement (netting)	1,091 (29)	1,166	758 (70)	183 (24)	402 (53)
Found on ground	753 (20)	795	570 (76)	234 (41)	151 (27)
Electrocution	371 (10)	417	320 (86)	174 (54)	21 (7)



Comparison of top 3 causes

	Cause 1	Cause 2	Cause 3
Wildlife Victoria (2010-2020)	Netting (29%) All entanglement (42%)	Found on ground (20%)	Electrocution (10%)
NSW rehab groups* 2011/12, 16/17	All entanglement (26%)	Heat Stress (18%)	Orphaned/ dropped pups 16%
Zoos Victoria** (2000-2014)	Netting (37%) Barbed Wire (12%) (combined 42%)	Unknown trauma (28%)	Electrical wire (5.5%)
AZWH*** (2006-2017)	All entanglement (51%)	Orphaned/dependent young (23%)	Hit by car (10%)

* Mo, M., Roach, e M., Hearing, R. & Kwok, A. (2020). Using wildlife carer records to identify patterns in flying-fox rescues: a case study in New South Wales, Australi. *Pacific Conservation Biology* <https://doi.org/10.1071/PC20031>

** Scheelings, T.F. & Frith, S.E. (2015). Anthropogenic factors are the major cause of hospital admission of a threatened species, the Grey-headed Flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), in Victoria, Australia. *PLoS ONE* 10(7) : e0133638 doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0133638

*** Taylor-Brown, A., Booth, R., Gillett, A., Mealy, E., Ogbourne, M. Polkinghorne, A. & Conroy, G.C. (2018). The impact of human activities on Australian wildlife. *PLoS ONE* 14(1): e0206958. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206958>



Comparison of mortality

	Overall Mortality	Mortality - entanglement
Wildlife Victoria (2010-2020)	33%	24% (netting)
Zoos Victoria (2000-2014)	59%	38% (netting)
AZWH (2006-2017)	43%	42% (all types)



Limitations

- ▶ Little accessible/searchable data pre-2010
- ▶ No data from other rescue groups
- ▶ Cause type unknown for 5% of cases
- ▶ Final fate unknown for 25% of cases



Entanglement

- ▶ Threatening process
- ▶ Risk for human-bat interactions



Reducing the Netting threat

- ▶ Following a long advocacy campaign domestic fruit tree netting regulated in Victoria under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019 (from 1 Sept 2021)

Division 2—Sale and use of netting for fruiting plants

13 Selling and use of fruit netting

- (1) A person must not use fruit netting for the purposes of covering household fruit-trees, vegetable gardens and other fruiting plants unless it complies with subregulation (3).

Penalty: 15 penalty units.

- (2) A person must not advertise or offer for sale fruit netting for the purpose of covering household fruit trees, vegetable gardens and other fruiting plants, however labelled, unless it complies with subregulation (3).

Penalty: 15 penalty units.

- (3) For the purpose of this regulation, fruit netting must have a mesh-size of 5 mm x 5 mm or less at full stretch.



Rehabilitation and release

eraidsun.com.au

Herald Sun, Monday, November 21, 2005

Going batty? No, just going to school



Kelly Ryan

HER bag is packed and Peaches is ready to fly.

She's off to Sydney to attend Australia's only "bat school".

The little orphan will join a creche of baby bats — or batlets — to learn how to eat fruit and fly under her own steam.

Wildlife carer Bev Brown will accompany Peaches north — at her own expense.

In Sydney, Peaches will stay at the Wambina Flying Fox Research Centre, run by Gwen Parry-Jones.

"It's just like the first day at school when a new bat joins the creche," she said.

"Some are sooky and hide by wrapping their wings around themselves, others are quick to make new friends and play around."

Batlets are slowly introduced to fruit, starting with banana smoothies and progressing to stewed apples.

Once they master their large wingspans, they are microchipped and released.

Peaches was orphaned about a week after she was born.

The grey-headed flying fox was found by a man walking his dog. She was huddled next to her mother, believed electrocuted on power lines.

Ms Brown has been



Wildlife carer: Bev Brown with the little orphan.

mum to Peaches for five weeks, feeding her cow's milk every four hours.

"She calls out when it is feeding time. She gets very excited as she is hanging on to me while I prepare her bottle."

At 200g, Peaches will have to add another 100g before she is considered ready for her big

trip in about a month. "Having got her through so far, it will be good to see her settle in to her new home in preparation for release."

Ms Brown is one of only 20 Wildlife Victoria carers trained to handle flying foxes and Peaches is only the second Melbourne bat to be sent to bat school.

Packed and ready: Peaches will soon head to a Sydney bat school. Pictures: CRAIG BORROW

2005: first hand-reared orphans went to NSW for creche and release

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Youngster rescued from Bass Strait oil rig A bat out of hell

A BELEAGUERED bat rescued in extraordinary circumstances from Bass Strait was happy on terra firma yesterday.

Kelly Ryan

Dubbed Baz (as in Bass Strait), the bat hung casually by one leg as he munched watermelon and fixed beady brown eyes on some of the humans who had helped save his life.

"If he is comfortable to just grip with the one leg and eat his fruit, it means he is a pretty happy little batty," Wildlife Victoria volunteer Linda Sauvaren said.

With furry cheeks stained with grape and cantaloupe juice, the flying fox appeared to relish his caged retreat after a harrowing start to life as a young adult.

About seven months old, Baz is believed to have been recently kicked out of his Geelong waterfront home as his mother prepared to mate again.

"Fending for himself, he is likely to have been caught in stormy weather on Sunday and blown up to 100km straight out to sea.

Landing on a remote Esso oil rig, the flying fox was lucky to be seen and saved by scaffolder Brett Ellis. Allowed to rest on the rig for two days and fed well, he was flown by Esso helicopter back to Victorian turf on Tuesday afternoon.

Mr Ellis yesterday drove the bat from Traralgon to Melbourne where he will be cared for by Wildlife Victoria volunteer Bev Brown.

But he was sorry to have to hand the plucky mammal over.

"I'd love to be able to

keep him a bit longer," he said. "He is very foxy. But it will be nice to know he has gone back to his mates."

Finding and keeping a bat on a rig 77km offshore had been a first for Mr Ellis and fellow crew members. They found it an interesting education.

Melbourne bat expert Lawrence Pope said the bat probably came from Eastern Beach, which boasts one of only two of Victoria's protected grey-headed bat populations.

"When juvenile and travelling together, they can be a bit all over the place," Mr Pope said.

"But contrary to the public perception that the species are a burgeoning pest, there are only about 300,000 nationally and the numbers are in decline because of habitat loss and persecution."

Mr Pope said flying foxes were "ecological solid gold" as one of very few animals capable of spreading pollen from forest to forest.

Wildlife carers yesterday praised Esso staff for rescuing the bat.

Mr Ellis said the Esso helicopter pilot eased the bat's stress by making only one rig stop on the flight home.

"And the helicopter baggage handler was very careful to pack my bag with the bat in it in the middle of the chopper's boot with all the other bags around it to prevent it moving in flight."

Although in good health, the bat will be allowed to rest a few more days before it is released.



Saviours: Brett Ellis and Bev Brown.

Upside to everything: the rescued flying fox. Pictures: MARK SMITH

Unusual rescue situations - Bass Strait





First Soft
Release
Enclosure at
Yarra Bend Park
2007-2016

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2017 new soft release enclosure at Yarra Bend Park

<https://www.wildlifevictoria.org.au/wildlife-information/historical-data>

