

Investigating disease risk from Parklands bats

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New research at the University of Adelaide is studying the bat colony in Adelaide's north-eastern parklands (Botanic Park, not Botanic Gardens) to investigate the diseases they may be carrying, their ecology and where they go at night.

The researchers want to establish the prevalence of various bat viruses in the Adelaide population and their foraging behaviour and movements.

"Grey-headed flying foxes arrived suddenly from the eastern states in Adelaide in 2010 and, despite high mortality because of the hot summers, the population has grown to well over 2000 bats," says Dr

Wayne Boardman, PhD candidate with the School of Biological Sciences and wildlife veterinarian with the School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences.

"There are many unknowns about these bats — we don't know why they came to South Australia and, while they sleep in the park during the day, where do they go to forage at night and what they are eating?"

"These bats can carry viruses including Hendra virus and Australian bat lyssavirus which cause serious disease in horses and people, so it's important we fully understand their ecology and movements.

"Knowing if, when and where the bats shed viruses, and what viruses they are shedding, can help us better understand the role bats play in transmitting diseases to other animals including humans.

"It's always important to remember that bats, alive or dead, should never be handled by anyone other than trained and qualified people. If anyone is bitten or scratched by a bat they should immediately seek medical attention.

"There have been no cases of Hendra virus in South Australia to date. The black flying fox rather than the grey-headed flying fox is thought to be the source of cases in horses where it has occurred in New South Wales and Queensland but we are really not sure. There is no evidence humans can catch Hendra virus infection directly from bats. Lyssavirus infections are very rare and caused by virus penetration through bites or scratches."

The researchers will catch bats in specially designed high level nets when they come back from foraging before dawn. The [bats](#) will then be taken to Adelaide Zoo for blood sampling and swabs and some will have solar-powered GPS tracking devices attached. They will then be released back

into the parklands. This will happen twice a year over two years.

More information: Bat study FAQs: www.adelaide.edu.au/staff/docs...ions-and-answers.pdf

Provided by University of Adelaide

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