

Flying Fox (Bat) Activity Safety Alert at Australian Airports (BNE, CNS, SYD)

INTRODUCTION

Seasonal Flying Fox (Bat) activity can present a significant wildlife strike hazard to aircraft operations when traversing an airfield. (The “bat season” in Australia is generally from December to June with the greatest numbers in March and April.) At certain times (*usually at sunset for roughly a 10-25 minute period*), Brisbane, Sydney and Cairns international airports experience increased flying fox activity and have implemented communication and notification procedures with the help of Airservices Australia and AusALPA to alert pilots of the real time hazard level at each airfield.

Pyrotechnics, soundwave and other dispersal methods have minimal to no effect and numbers are too large for lethal control measures.

The best control method airports have is the early detection and notification of flying fox ‘fly outs’.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE AIRPORTS

Some of the actions/procedures taken by Brisbane, Cairns and Sydney international airports include:

- Airport specific NOTAMs advising of Flying fox activity
- Nightly flying fox hazard assessments conducted at each airport
- Coordination with ATC to provide real time information on flying fox activity including numbers, height, direction of travel, areas of the airfield being traversed and start/finish times of fly outs
- Utilisation of thermal imaging for early detection
- Issue of wildlife alerts to provide operators with early notification
- Consultation with wildlife groups and Councils to locate colonies of flying foxes and gain a better understanding of flying fox behaviours
- Airport Wildlife Committees, involving AusALPA and other stakeholders, to agree mitigation actions.

Black Flying fox

Weight: 500 – 1000g
Length: 153 – 191mm



Grey headed Flying-fox

Weight: 600 – 1000g
Length: 152 – 177mm



Little red Flying-fox

Weight: 300 – 600g
Length: 117 – 155mm





Flying Fox 'fly out'

The “good news” is that bats are reasonably predictable in their behaviour and tend to leave (“fly out”) and return (“fly in”) to their camps around the same time period each day. During these periods of movement, there can be a considerable number of animals in the air.

It follows that the likelihood of a bat-strike is very high, if an aircraft continues its approach or take off during these periods and/or when a specific alert has been relayed through air traffic control or via a visual sighting.

HOW CAN I AVOID A STRIKE?

Read the NOTAMS, “Bird Watch Alerts” and be prepared for Flying Fox (bat) activity if arriving during the “fly out” time periods. (Listen to the ATIS and/or alerts from Air Traffic Control.) ***Remember, it may take up to 25 minutes for the bats to be clear of your flight path.***

Treat this threat as you would adverse weather, such as a thunderstorm or windshear.

It has been demonstrated on a number of occasions that delaying departure or discontinuing the approach, when a specific alert is given, will prevent a strike. ***Aircraft that have ignored these alerts have in many cases suffered strikes.*** Even if the damage is only superficial to the aircraft (and it could be a lot more serious), the runway will be closed for an inspection.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A STRIKE?

If you have a wildlife strike of any kind, please report it as soon as possible to ATC (runway inspection will be required) and make sure that a DNA sample is taken (if possible) before the aircraft is cleaned to prevent loss or contamination. The airports have specially trained staff, who will take the DNA sample, and send it to be identified by the experts at the Australian Museum. This detailed identification will assist in future wildlife management and control.

Therefore,

- report strike to ATC as soon as possible,
- do not clean the fuselage before collecting DNA samples,
- rely on airport’s expertise to determine species, and
- treat phenomenon like adverse weather conditions.