

The National Flying-fox Monitoring Program

Report on the May 2019 survey

Background

The National Flying-Fox Monitoring Program (NFFMP) is a collaborative program that brings the community and local, state and the Commonwealth governments together to provide quarterly snapshots of the size and distribution of flying-fox populations in Australia. The data collected provides unique insights into the ecology and dynamics of flying-fox populations and represents an essential underpinning for their conservation and management.

Monitoring of flying-foxes is useful for a variety of reasons but is especially important because flying-foxes are so often in conflict with humans while at the same time being of conservation concern. Two mainland species, the grey-headed flying-fox (GHFF) and the spectacled flying-fox (SFF), are listed as threatened under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) and legislation in some states. The NFFMP provides key data for decision making not just for flying-fox conservation but also to inform responses to public concerns about the impact of flying-foxes on industry, amenity and public health.

The May 2019 Survey Results – an early summary.

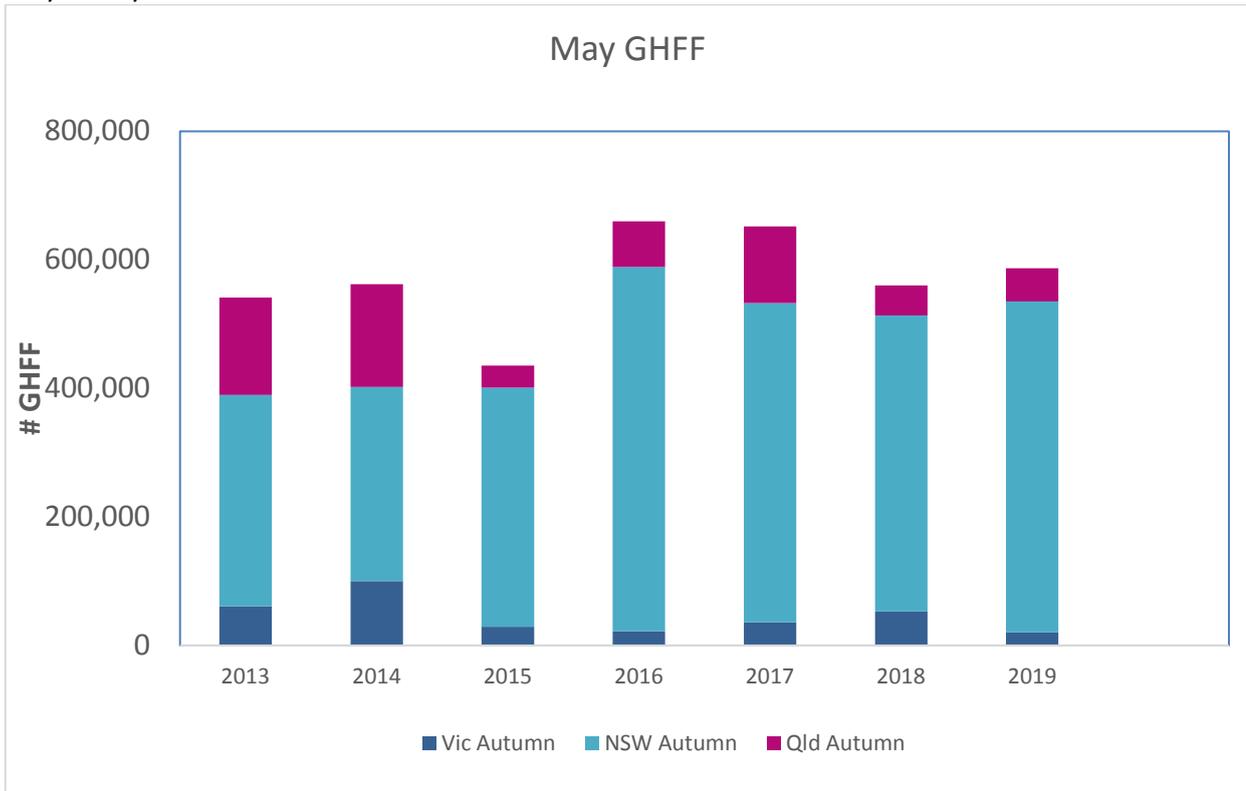
The May 2019 survey was the 27th quarterly count since the project's first survey in November 2012. During this survey all the main camps and a large proportion of the secondary camps were counted in Qld, NSW, Vic, ACT & SA. There has been a holdup with much of the Victorian data, so this report is mostly based around Qld, NSW & ACT.

In this round 280 camps were surveyed, 145 in NSW, 128 in Qld, 6 in Vic and one in ACT. Of these there were 69 active camps in NSW, 21 in Qld, 2 in Vic and one in the ACT. There were 514,000 GHFF in NSW, 51,000 in Qld and at least 21,000 in Vic. The total of 586,000 is just above the May average for the NFFMP, with some more data to come. There were camps greater than 30,000 animals recorded at Nambucca, Woolgoolga, Kempsey, MacLean and Wingham.

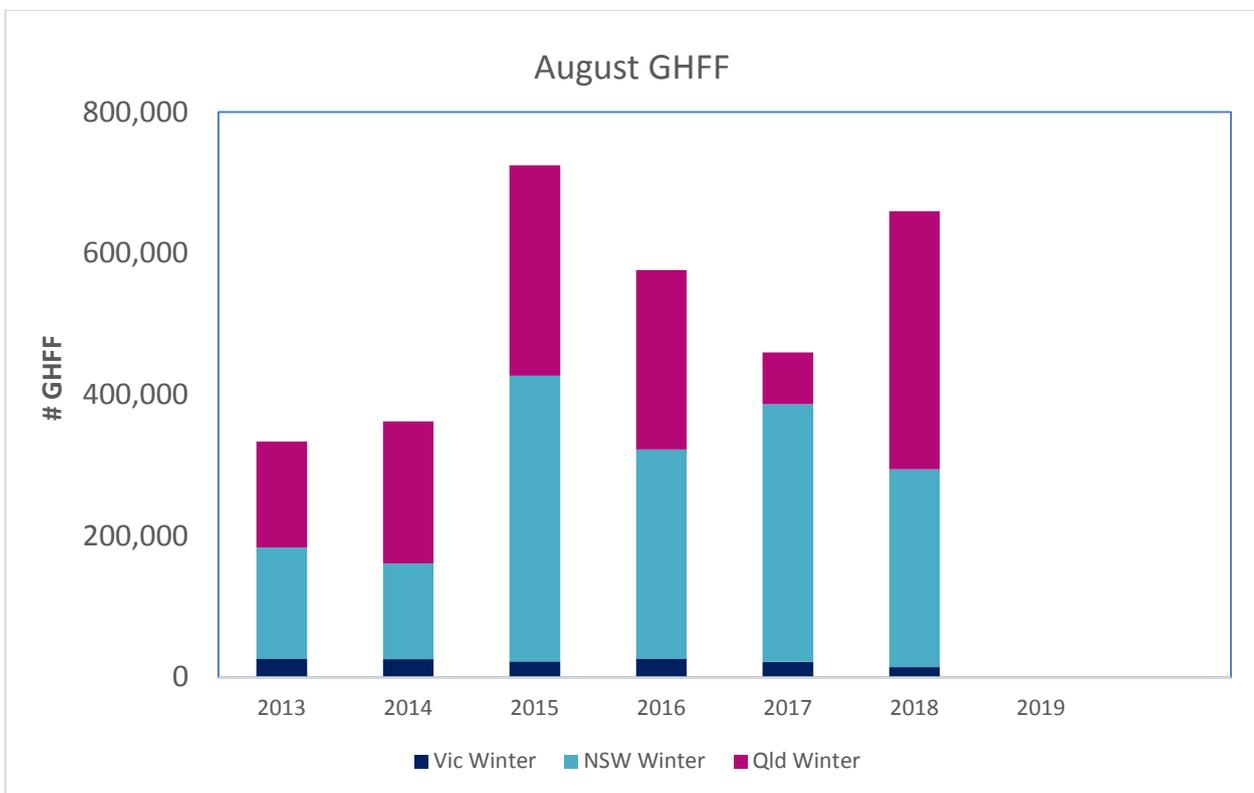
In the Wet Tropics there were 38,000 SFF recorded. Telemetry data from collared animals helped to locate 5 new camps in the Gordonville-Innisfail area, however these all had small numbers of animals.

The NFFMP covers only a part of the ranges of the black flying-fox (BFF) and the little-red flying-fox (LRFF). Only 110,000 LRFF were recorded at 14 camps, almost all in Qld. These numbers are fairly standard for this time of the year as these animals tend to move out of the surveyed regions. Interestingly LRFF were recorded at Kyabrum in Vic, and Parkes in NSW; this is rather late in the year for them to still be so far south. BFF were mostly in the northern part of the range, with 200,000 of the 236,000 recorded being in Qld. 50,000 of these were recorded at Coalstoun Lakes, which is a 1ha patch of dry vine forest east of Gayndah in Qld, they must have been really packed in.

The graph below shows that the numbers and distribution of GHFF are in line with previous May Counts for May surveys.



We predict that by the August survey we will see many of the GHFF in NSW in May to move into Qld.



We previously have believed flying-foxes will roost on anything, except cactus. The photo below from Coalstoun Lakes proves us wrong.



As we don't have a complete dataset for this survey we haven't produced distribution maps for this report.

The NFFMP

A map of the camps covered in the NFFMP surveys can be viewed at <http://www.environment.gov.au/node/16393>. Clicking on a camp icon will show a plot of species composition and numbers recorded at that camp during NFFMP surveys.

The aim of the program is to establish a reliable baseline estimate of the flying fox populations and over time to estimate trends. This will take a number of years since each quarterly count will be subject to various factors which will influence the results, making assessment of population size more difficult. A report reviewing the data from the first phase of the program can be viewed at the Australian Government Department of the Environment's website at <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/status-and-trends-australias-epbc-listed-flying-foxes>. This analysis suggests that while the GHFF population appears to be at approximately 700,000 individuals, the population of the SFF has declined by as much as 50% over the last decade to approximately 100,000 individuals.

In order to achieve the best possible estimate it is important that surveys are performed using the methods correctly. We are continuing to conduct training sessions and the CSIRO urges any counters who have any questions or concerns about count methodology to contact David Westcott at david.westcott@csiro.au or Adam McKeown at adam.mckeown@csiro.au.

Thank you to all the counters who put in the hours to assist the program. Your effort is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to participate please contact:

New South Wales – Mike.Roache@environment.nsw.gov.au

Queensland – wildlife.management@des.qld.gov.au

If you know of additional camps or have questions about the counts please contact:

david.westcott@csiro.au or adam.mckeown@csiro.au

Additional information about the program can be found at:

www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/flying-foxes-monitoring-program.html

The National Flying-fox Monitoring Program is a collaboration between the Australian Government, the South Australian, Victorian, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland governments, CSIRO, local governments and volunteers in New South Wales and Queensland. This project is funded by the Commonwealth of Australia, the State of New South Wales, the State of Queensland and CSIRO.