



Helena Forde, del. et lith.

From a photograph from life by Victor A. Prout.

THE FLYING FOX.
(*PTEROPUS POLIOCEPHALUS.*)

Sydney, N. S. W.—Thomas Richards, Government Printer.—1869.

The Flying Fox.

(PTÉROPUS POLIOCÉPHALUS.)

TWENTY-FIVE species of Bats are known to inhabit Australia, five of which are Fruit Bats, or "Flying Foxes." The last-mentioned animals have not yet been found in any other part, except on the east coast, where they range from Cape Howe to Cape York. The figure represents the most common one—the grey-headed Fruit Bat, or "Flying Fox," which is peculiar to the New South Wales coast districts.

The food on which the "Foxes" principally rely, when garden fruit is not in season, consists of honey-bearing blossoms, and the small native figs, abounding in the coast-range scrubs. They pass the day suspended from the branches of gigantic fig-trees, as shown in our figure, and in this position they feed. The number of these creatures is almost incredible; they swing in clusters and festoons, like swarms of bees, holding on one to the other, and the weight of their bodies frequently brings down great limbs, killing many, but not appreciably diminishing them. Thousands may be noticed, at dusk, silently winging their way to some orchard, which they invade in spite of the farmers' guns, and destroy more fruit than they eat. The ground is strewn in the morning with bushels of half-devoured fruit, because they are rather dainty, and drop every pear or peach they have tasted, if it is not sufficiently sweet. The "Foxes" appear only during certain seasons in the cultivated districts, and after a few weeks' sojourn retire to the mountain forests. During this period they select a regular camping-ground, where the day is spent; and when such a place is discovered, a general battue takes place and they are killed in large numbers. These Bats are found on the east coast only, but during very dry seasons they occur as far west as the neighbourhood of Melbourne. The vegetation on the plains of the interior does not appear to suit them, as they are seldom seen west of the coast range.

The general colour is a glossy, grizzly black, with the exception of a broad rusty-red collar, covering the back of the head, neck, breast, and shoulders; the face is light grey; the ears and wing-membrane are black.

The skull is thin, almost transparent, and very light, as in all animals formed for flight; it is provided with very powerful canine teeth, which are grooved, and differ in this respect from the smooth canines of real carnivorous animals. It is highly probable that the Flying Fox is able to subsist on insects as well as on fruit. Too little, however, is known of the economy of these animals to prove this; they are observed only when fruit is plentiful, and how they subsist in the dense mountain forests can only be conjectured. The fruit of the fig-trees, and some sweet blossoms, must form their principal food at that time. The dentition consists of incisors $\frac{2-2}{2-2}$, canines $\frac{1-1}{1-1}$, premolars $\frac{2-2}{2-2}$, molars $\frac{3-3}{4-4}$ = 34 teeth. The number of young seldom exceeds one at a birth.

The name of Vampire Bat has been given to this fruit-eating animal, and many dismal tales of its blood-sucking propensities have been rife among the ignorant, but there is of course not a grain of truth in these statements. The largest species occurs in the island of Java, where it is known by the name of "Kalong," and is much esteemed as an article of food. The flesh of our "Flying Foxes" has been represented to be palatable food; it is necessary, however, to steep the males for some hours in vinegar, to take away any unpleasant smell. The following table will show the number of Bats and their habitat in Australia:—

FAMILY OF BATS.

CHEIRÓPTERA.

(a.) Fruit-eating Bats, Kalongs or "Flying Foxes":—

Common Flying Fox. *Pteropus poliocephalus*. Brushes of New South Wales.

Spectacled Kalong. *Pteropus conspicillatus*. North Australia.

Funeral Kalong. *Pteropus funereus*. North Australia.

Cape York Kalong. *Pteropus scapulatus*. Cape York.

Dwarf Kalong. *Petalia*. (?) North-east Coast. (Not larger than a common Bat.)

(b.) Insectivorous Bats:—

- Australian Molossus. *Molossus australis*. Victoria.
 Wilcox's Molossus. *Molossus wilcoxi*. East coast of Australia.
 Australian Taphozous. *Taphozous australis*. Northern Australia.
 Great-eared horse-shoe Bat. *Rhinolophus megaphyllus*.
 Fawn-coloured horse-shoe Bat. *Rhinolophus cervinus*. Cape York.
 Orange horse-shoe Bat. *Rhinolophus aurantius*. Coburg Peninsula.
 Geoffroy's long-eared Bat. *Nyctophilus geoffroyi*. West Australia.
 Gould's long-eared Bat. *Nyctophilus gouldi*. New South Wales.
 Tasmanian long-eared Bat. *Nyctophilus unicolor*. Tasmania.
 Timor long-eared Bat. *Nyctophilus timoriensis*. West Australia.
 Australian long-eared Bat. *Nyctophilus australis*. New South Wales.
 Gould's short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus gouldi*. Southern Australia.
 Chocolate-coloured short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus morio*. Southern and Western Australia.
 Small-toothed short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus microdon*. Australia.
 Pied short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus picatus*. South Australia.
 Queensland short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus nigrogriseus*. Queensland.
 Grey's short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus greyi*. Port Essington.
 Small short-eared Bat. *Scotophilus pumilus*. New South Wales.
 Great-footed Bat. *Vespertilio macropus*. South Australia.
 Tasmanian Bat. *Vespertilio tasmaniensis*. Tasmania.



Krefft, Johan Ludwig Gerhard. 1871. "The Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), and general account of Australian Bats. [Plate I]." *The mammals of Australia : illustrated by Miss Harriett Scott, and Mrs. Helena Forde, for the Council of Education; with a short account of all the species hitherto described* 1–2.
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.314730>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/228743>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.314730>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/314730>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.