NO NET LOSS

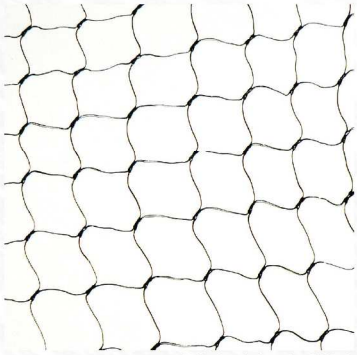
PROTECTING BACKYARD FRUIT TREES

The problem = bad netting

Backyard fruit tree netting is often put up incorrectly, leading to ineffective protection of fruit from animals and to unnecessary injury and death of native wildlife from entanglement in loose netting.

All types of netting incorrectly erected or just thrown over backyard fruit trees can be a disaster. However, the worst type is dark-coloured nylon netting, known as “Anti-bird Net” (pictured on the right). Animals find this netting hard to see and, as the fibres are so thin, they cut through the skin of entangled animals, leading to serious or fatal injuries.

Thousands of animals are rescued from backyard netting every year by volunteers from wildlife rescue groups. The many hours of volunteer work involved and the pain suffered by entangled animals can be avoided very easily by using appropriate materials for netting and by installing nets tightly over frames around trees.



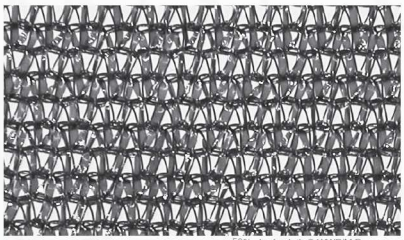
Dark-coloured nylon netting © M.Beck

The solution = good netting

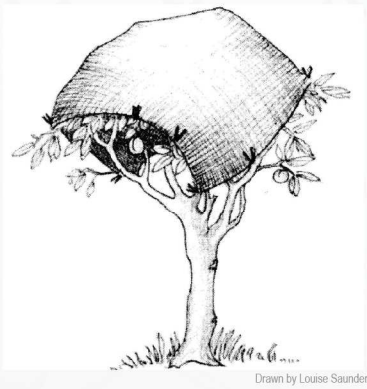
Three possible netting designs are described below. These designs ensure your fruit is protected and animals are safe.

Shade cloth - medium 50% block

- For quick, temporary cover of trees while fruiting
- Easy to put up – throw over tree or fruiting branches and peg in place



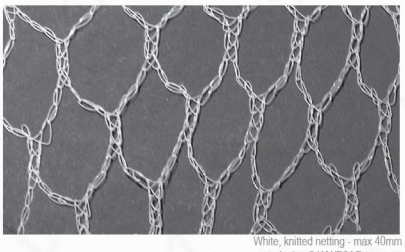
50% shade cloth © WWF/M.Bassarova



Drawn by Louise Saunders

Rectangular frame

- Make frame from PVC pipe or timber
- Stretch white, knitted netting taut over the frame and fix securely to the ground

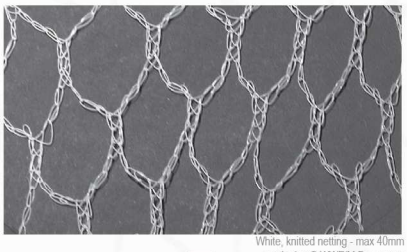


White, knitted netting - max 40mm mesh size © WWF/M.Bassarova

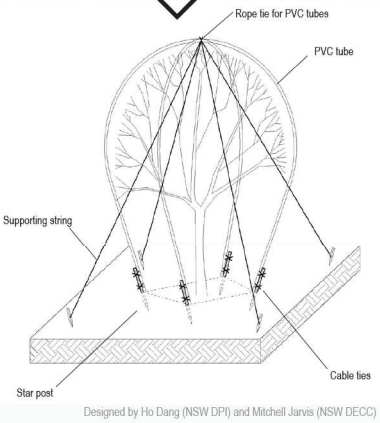
© KBCS/M.Beck

Cross frame

- Make frame from 4 PVC tubes (each arch will require two tubes connected at the top of the structure)
- Drive star posts at least 40 cm into ground and attach PVC pipes with cable tie as shown
- Stretch white, knitted netting taut over frame and secure with cable ties



White, knitted netting - max 40mm mesh size © WWF/M.Bassarova



Designed by Ho Dang (NSW DPI) and Mitchell Jarvis (NSW DECC)

The cost of entanglement

Entanglement in backyard netting occurs when trees are fruiting, mostly in spring and summer months, with most fatal injuries being caused by thin, dark-coloured nylon netting draped loosely over trees. Netting of backyard fruit trees most commonly takes place in urban areas and is reflected in the prevalence of entangled animals in and near towns and cities. Estimates from the records of wildlife rescue groups indicate approximately 50% of entangled animals die and the remaining 50% require care (often long-term) before release.

Death trap for threatened species

Flying-foxes are frequently entangled in backyard fruit tree netting. Of the four species known to be affected in NSW and Queensland, three are listed as threatened (i.e. at risk of extinction). Spectacled flying-foxes (found in Queensland) are endangered under State and Commonwealth legislation; black flying-foxes are vulnerable under NSW State legislation and grey-headed flying-foxes are vulnerable under State and Commonwealth legislation.

Records from Queensland indicate a majority of black flying-foxes getting entangled in netting. In NSW, it is predominantly the grey-headed flying-foxes that are affected. This reflects general trends in the distribution of the species. Spectacled flying-foxes are not affected by backyard netting to the same extent as black and grey-headed flying-foxes because they occur mainly in rural areas where backyard trees are not frequently netted.

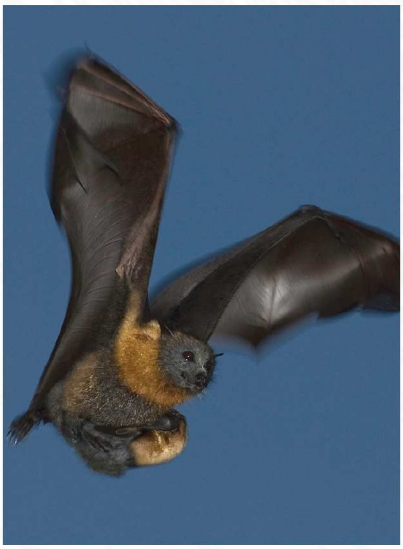
Bat stats

The cumulative impacts of the many threats faced by flying-foxes (including backyard netting entanglement, unlicenced shooting and roost disturbance, electrocution, barbed wire entanglement, death from heat stress, and habitat loss) contribute to on-going, major declines in populations. Backyard netting entanglement may contribute to over 10% of the known, direct, human-induced decline of grey-headed flying-foxes in NSW.

Data provided by several wildlife rescue groups in NSW and southern Queensland provide indicative figures of the impacts of netting entanglement on flying-foxes (these figures are an underestimate as records do not cover the entire range of the species affected). Of the 1000 or so flying-foxes rescued in 2007 to early 2008, 65% were grey-headed flying-foxes, 30% were black flying-foxes and 5% were little red flying-foxes. Injury and/or death resulted from a variety of causes, including backyard netting entanglement, electrocution and barbed wire entanglement. Rescues from backyard netting account for approximately one third of the total number of flying-fox rescues.

Backyard netting entanglement occurs predominantly in late spring through summer. The injury or death of mature female flying-foxes, therefore, often results indirectly in the death of their dependent young as they are left behind in the colony roost through November and December while mothers feed at night.

Backyard netting entanglement is one threat that can easily be avoided. As it makes up a significant component of the direct human-induced decline in flying-foxes, minimising backyard netting entanglement will contribute significantly to recovery of threatened flying-foxes.



Grey-headed flying fox © Nick Edards

What to do in case of an entangled animal

- Check trees daily - regardless of the type of fruit tree protection used
- Do not attempt to release the animal
- Cover the animal with a towel to help calm it
- Call local wildlife rescue organisation or vet

Some of the native wildlife entangled

Currawong	Brown snake
Kookaburra	Green tree snake
Magpie	Red-bellied black snake
Rainbow lorikeet	Black flying fox
Raven	Brushtail possum
Sulfur-crested cockatoo	Grey-headed flying fox
Tawny frogmouth	Little red flying fox
Bearded dragon	Ringtail possum

Contacts for wildlife rescue groups

Bat Care Brisbane – (07) 3321 1229
Bat Rescue Gold Coast – 0447 222 889
FAWNA (NSW) – 0500 861 405
Sydney Metropolitan Wildlife Services – (02) 9413 4300
WIRES (NSW) – 1300 094 737

Further information

WWF-Australia – www.wwf.org.au
DECC (NSW) – www.environment.nsw.gov.au
EPA (QLD) – www.epa.qld.gov.au
Ku-Ring-Gai Bat Conservation Society – www.sydneybats.org.au
Tolga Bat Hospital – www.wildlifefriendlyfencing.com

Threatened Species Network

Australian Government

WWF

The Threatened Species Network is a community-based program of the Australian Government and WWF-Australia.

Tolga Bat Hospital

WIRES

sydney wildlife

Ku-Ring-Gai Bat Conservation Society Inc

FAWNA

Bat Care Brisbane Inc.

Bat Rescue Inc Gold Coast