

The gray-headed flying fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*), pictured asleep on the front cover, inhabits many of the eucalyptus forests in southeastern Australia. Despite its foxlike face, the gray-headed flying fox is actually not a fox at all. Nor is it a marsupial (pouched) mammal like kangaroos and most of the other native mammals of Australia. As you may have guessed, it is a bat, one of many species descended from ancestors that made their way to this island continent from the north. Although Australian marsupials called "sugar gliders" and North American "flying squirrels" can glide from tree to tree, bats are the only mammals that can truly fly. And the gray-headed flying fox is a strong flyer indeed. Using wings of skin that extend from the sides of its torso and legs to the elongated "fingers" of its forelimbs, this animal can propel itself through the air at 25-30 km/hr for hours at a time. Unlike most bats, flying foxes have excellent vision; they are able to see well both day and night and do not use echoes of emitted sounds (echolocation) to find their way around. No one would accuse a flying fox of being blind as a bat!

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ISBN: 080536627X

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ISBN 0-8053-6626-1



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