

Feathertail Glider Identification

Feathertail Gliders occur in eastern Australia where their distribution extends from far northern Queensland through to south-eastern South Australia. Feathertails were previously thought to comprise a single species *Acrobates pygmaeus*. In 2013, the *Field Companion to Mammals of Australia* (Van Dyck *et al.* 2013) recognised two species of Feathertail Gliders: the Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider *Acrobates pygmaeus* and the Broad-toed Feathertail Glider *Acrobates frontalis*. According to the distribution maps in the *Field Companion to Mammals of Australia*, both Narrow-toed and Broad-toed Feathertails could occur in the Greater Blue Mountains region. Unless seen in the hand, the two Feathertail species are difficult to distinguish. Identifying features are:

- 1. Tail tip.** Broad-toed Feathertail has underside of tail with 3-4 mm at tip unfurred and prehensile; Narrow-toed Feathertail has tail furred on underside to tip and lacks a prehensile section.
- 2. Tail margin.** Broad-toed has feather-like tail fringe usually lacking a distinct pale outer margin; Narrow-toed has feather-like tail fringe with a distinct pale outer margin.
- 3. Pads on toes 4 and 5 on hindfoot (the two toes furthest from the body are toes 4 and 5).** Broad-toed has terminal pads on toes 4 and 5 on hindfoot which are broad, heart-shaped and with a well-developed terminal groove; Narrow-toed has terminal pads on toes 4 and 5 on hindfoot which are narrow (compared to Broad-toed Feathertail), rectangular and with a weakly developed terminal groove.
- 4. Belly fur.** Broad-toed has belly fur which is usually cream from tips to bases, rarely with grey bases over lower abdomen; Narrow-toed has belly fur which is cream at tips but usually with grey bases over lower abdomen.

To date, we have records of only the Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider in the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It will be interesting to learn if the Broad-toed Feathertail also occurs in the Greater Blue Mountains and how the above combination of identification features hold when examining animals in the hand.

Reference: Van Dyck, S., Gynther, I. and Baker, A. (2013). *Field Companion to the Mammals of Australia*. New Holland Publishers, London.

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