

Koalas, penguins at risk of extinction: study

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Two of over 130 northern koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus adustus*) pictured at the world's largest and oldest-established koala haven: Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary near Brisbane in 2005. Climate change threatens the survival of dozens of animal species from the emperor penguin to Australian koalas, according to a report released Monday at the UN climate summit.

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Rising sea levels, [ocean acidification](#) and shrinking polar ice are taking a heavy toll on species already struggling to cope with pollution and shrinking habitats, said the study from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an intergovernmental group.

"Humans are not the only ones whose fate is at stake here in Copenhagen

-- some of our favourite species are also taking the fall for our [CO2 emissions](#)," said Wendy Foden, an IUCN researcher and co-author of the study.

The report details how climate change undermines the viability of 10 species, including the leatherback turtle, the beluga whale, clownfish, the [emperor penguin](#) and salmon.

Australia's iconic bear-like koala faces malnutrition and ultimate starvation as the nutritional quality of eucalyptus leaves declines as CO2 levels increase, the report added.

Polar species are especially hard hit.

The ringed seal is being forced further north as sea ice it relies on for rearing its vulnerable pups retreats every decade.

The emperor penguin, remarkably adapted to thrive in harsh Antarctic conditions, faces similar problems. Reduced ice cover makes it harder to mate and raise chicks, and has caused a sharp decline in the availability of krill, a major food source.

As once-frozen tundra gives way to forest, the common red fox has moved northward, where it hunts and competes with its far rarer arctic cousin.

The beluga whale is doubly threatened by global warming: loss of sea ice makes it tough to find prey, and the rush to open new maritime routes is likely to result in deadly ship strikes, as happens elsewhere.

"For a large portion of biodiversity, [climate change](#) is an additional and major threat," said Jean-Christophe Vie, deputy head of the IUCN's Species Programme.

In tropical regions, more than 160 species of staghorn corals -- and the tens of millions of people that depend on healthy coral reefs for their livelihood -- are dying off due to ocean acidification, a direct result of warming seas.

For clownfish, brought to the screen by Hollywood in the animated blockbuster "Finding Nemo", the changing ecosystem impairs sense of smell, which they use to find the sea anemones they rely on for protection.

Salmon stocks are dropping off not just from overfishing but because lower oxygen levels resulting from increased water temperatures boost susceptibility to disease and disrupt breeding.

The United Nations climate talks are tasked with forging a durable solution to global warming and helping poor countries cope with its consequences. They are set to end with a summit on Friday with around 120 leaders attending.

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