

Australia's threatened species need more protection, study shows

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A new article in the international scientific journal *Conservation Biology* shows that Australia's most endangered species are extremely poorly represented in the nation's protected area system.

The UQ-led study is understood to be the most thorough investigation into the level of protection of Australia's threatened species to date.

It examined the distributions of 1320 nationally listed species on Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act and assessed how well the nation's 9000 plus [protected areas](#) (which covers almost 12 per cent of Australia) protects them.

The study found that while a few species have a large level of protection, over 80 per cent of the species analysed were inadequately protected, with 166 (12 per cent) of all threatened species existing completely outside the national reserve system.

Lead author Dr. James Watson of The University of Queensland said that the paper showed that “how we choose new protected areas has failed in one of its fundamental aims – securing those species that are most endangered”.

“The study shows that the current placement of the protected area is barely better than a completely random placement, which is a poor outcome,” Dr. Watson said.

The paper examined the relationship between the level of the threat the species faced and whether this affected their level of coverage by protected areas.

“We found that the one-fifth of species considered critically endangered had no formal protection, a somewhat incredible finding considering these are the most vulnerable to extinction,” he said.

The paper ascertained how much additional land needs to be placed in the protected area estate to overcome its current shortcomings.

“The good news from this research is that if the protected area estate is planned efficiently from now, we would need to place 17.8 percent of [Australia](#) in well managed protected areas to secure all threatened species,” Dr Richard Fuller, a co-author based at CSIRO and The University of Queensland said.

"This is not a large increase when you consider countries like Israel have 20 per cent of their country protected."

Study co-author Professor Hugh Possingham, Director of The Ecology Centre at UQ and a Commonwealth Environmental Research Facility, said that while the results of this study were alarming for threatened species, it was not impossible to now plan to meet the needs of threatened species.

"A more focused approach to the expansion of a protected area system which considers the needs of threatened species could ultimately protect much more biodiversity," Professor Possingham said.

“We can do this if we start to plan for threatened species in a cost-effective manner when we consider future additions to the national reserve system.”

More information: Access to the publication at:
[doi:10.1111/j.1523-1739.2010.01587.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2010.01587.x)"
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