

Extinction threat for 45 Australian species

March 23 2011, By KELLY DOHERTY , Associated Press



In this undated photo provided by the Northern Territory Government, a Spotted Tree Goana is shown. Up to 45 rare and endangered animal species in an Outback region of northern Australia could become extinct in the wild within 20 years unless urgent action is taken to control introduced predators, a study released Wednesday, March 23, 2011 said. (AP Photo/Northern Territory Government, Alaric Fisher, HO) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

Up to 45 rare species of wallaby, bandicoot and other Australian animals could become extinct within 20 years unless urgent action is taken to control introduced predators and other threats, scientists warned Wednesday.

Dozens of mammals, birds, lizards and other vertebrates in the remote

northwestern Kimberley region are at risk from hunting by feral cats and from destruction of their [native habitat](#) by wild donkeys, goats and fires, a study of the conservation needs of the area shows.

"We're in the midst of a massive extinction event in Australia and the north has really been the last stronghold for many species of birds and mammals and reptiles," said Tara Martin, a co-author of the report by the government-funded Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization.

Nearly 30 percent of the endangered species identified in the study are unique to the Kimberley region, while others, like the golden bandicoot and golden-backed tree rat, have found the area to be their last refuge after being pushed into extinction elsewhere in the country.

"The Kimberley is really their last chance on Earth," Martin told The Associated Press.

The report says immediate funding of \$96 million (95 million Australian dollars) is needed to start a range of conservation programs, and that annual funding to protect the region's native animals should be doubled to \$40 million (AU\$40 million).

It says the most effective ways of combating the threat of extinction are to reduce the number of wild donkeys and goats that are competing with [native species](#) for scarce food and water, and to do more to combat wildfires that scorch the landscape.

It says attacks by feral cats should also be reduced by educating the community about the threat pets pose to small native animals, building fences, and by ending the poisoning of dingoes in the region.

Martin said some benefits from the proposed conservation efforts would

be seen relatively quickly, while others would take several generations.

Richard Hobbs, an ecologist at Curtin University in Western Australia state who did not participate in the study, said it was the first time a wide range of reliable information about the problem in the Kimberley has been compiled, and that the findings back smaller studies of individual species.

"The position for the Kimberley is that, at the moment, we are ahead of the [extinction](#) curve," he said. "However, if we let things continue unabated, there is little doubt that the same wave of loss of [species](#) will occur in the Kimberley as has occurred elsewhere, particularly in southern parts of Australia."

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