

Climate change 'forcing species to move'

February 10 2016



Sea urchins, some fish and octopus have moved south in parts of Australia, according to a conference organiser

Warming temperatures are causing about half of the world's plants and animals to move location, an international conference in Australia heard Wednesday, with every major type of species affected.

Camille Parmesan, an expert from Britain's Plymouth University on how climate change impacts wildlife, said data on thousands of [species](#) found that many had shifted their ranges towards the poles or up mountains

over the past century.

"The global imprint of warming on life is evident in hundreds of scientific studies," Parmesan told the Species on the Move conference, which is focused on how species are responding to climate change.

"While about half of all studied species have changed their distributions in response to recent climate change, we are starting to see negative impacts for the most [vulnerable species](#)."

Other changes had been observed such as plants flowering earlier or migratory birds arriving sooner in the year than previously, she added.

Parmesan said areas most at risk included sensitive systems such as polar regions dependent on sea ice and mountainous forests.

"Recovering these vulnerable species under a changing climate may not always be possible," she warned.

Parmesan said studies showed that about half of species have moved their geographical ranges poleward and/or upward while about two-thirds of species studied have shifted towards earlier spring breeding, migrating, or blooming.

Every major group has been impacted including trees, herbs, butterflies, birds, mammals, amphibians, corals, invertebrates and fish.

In Australia, tropical mountain areas were home to a range of species which were unique to those regions and vulnerable to changing temperatures.

"Tree possums have already been heavily impacted by the recent climate change and they are expected to be highly vulnerable to [climate change](#),"

Parmesan told journalists.

The professor said that globally there were also many species which were unable to move, for example when hemmed in by urban development.

The University of Tasmania, which is jointly hosting the conference in Hobart with the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, said that in Australia heat stress and drought had impacted koalas, wetland birds and platypus.

Conference organiser Greta Pecl said in southeastern Australia, sea urchins had also moved south down the east coast while the populations of some fish and octopus were also observed in greater numbers further south.

"Populations shift and change naturally... and it's very hard to actually determine when a population has had a large move in distribution," she told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ahead of the conference.

"And some of the things we are seeing now are because we've started looking.

"But we do have a significant number of data sets that does show conclusively that animals are shifting."

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Climate change 'forcing species to move' (2016, February 10) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-02-climate-species.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.