

Australia's 'ugly' animals attract less study

March 7 2016



New research has found that 'ugly' animals such as bats attract less funding and investigation

Koalas and kangaroos are subject to more scientific study than Australia's twitching rodents and bats, according to new research which finds 'ugly' animals attract less funding and investigation.

The bias towards more attractive creatures means that while 'ugly' animals make up 45 percent of Australia's native fauna, they are rarely

subject to intense scientific scrutiny, said a study to be published in Mammal Review this week.

Researcher Trish Fleming said once mammals were classed as 'good' (such as kangaroos, echidnas and koalas), 'bad' (introduced species including cats and rabbits) or 'ugly' (native bats and rodents), the latter group had very little written about it.

"Australians are probably surprised to know how many species of native bats and rodents we have," Fleming told AFP Monday.

"We know so little about them, we tend to ignore them completely. But everyone knows what a koala and kangaroo looks like."

Fleming, a wildlife biologist at Western Australia's Murdoch University, said this bias had a potential impact on conservation, with an incomplete understanding of the importance of these often small and nocturnal animals on ecosystems making them more vulnerable.

"The major problem is that if you don't know anything about their biology you could manage their environment in a way that's detrimental to them," she said.

Fleming said while global and national conservation funding largely overlooked the 'ugly' species—which include hairy rodents and the carnivorous ghost bat with its oversized, fleshy ears and sharp teeth—these were the ones arguably most in need of research.

"For the majority of species, researchers have been able to do little more than catalogue their existence," Fleming said in a statement.

"We need to document observations of their diets, habitat selection, space use and reproduction in order to identify threats and management

options."

Researchers could also be discouraged from investigating obscure species for fear that the resulting papers may be too "parochial and of limited interest" to be published, she added.

With co-author Bill Bateman, Fleming has called for improved funding for the lesser known mammals.

"Since European settlement (in Australia) we have lost about 20 species of mammals, we have about another 20 odd in grave danger of extinction," Curtin University's Bateman told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

"I think it would be tragic if we ended up causing the extinction of even more without even knowing anything about them."

© 2016 AFP

Citation: Australia's 'ugly' animals attract less study (2016, March 7) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-australia-ugly-animals.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.