

Victoria's threatened species lose out to logging

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Leadbeater's possum. Credit: The Australian National University

Victoria's conservation reserves are failing to protect threatened species such as the Leadbeater's possum and the Greater Glider with the best areas for survival instead allocated to logging, new research from The Australian National University (ANU) warns.

The study, published in *Austral Ecology*, found Victoria's current reserve

system is inadequate for the protection of threatened species.

Led by Dr. Chris Taylor, the study identified areas that are important to 70 threatened forest-dependent species.

It shows areas with the highest value for wildlife were often located in [logging](#) zones rather than [conservation](#) reserves.

"This is a worrying trend, and highlights the conflict between logging and conservation," Dr. Taylor said.

"According to Australian environmental policy, the conservation reserve network should be comprehensive, adequate and representative—meaning it fairly covers all [habitat types](#) sufficiently to enable the on-going protection of the species and ecosystems that depend on them," he said.

"Our analysis of formal conservation reserves across Victoria found they did not meet these criteria sufficiently to support the many species that depend on these forests.

"Worryingly we also saw a high degree of overlap between the areas with the highest biodiversity values being allocated to timber harvesting or logging, rather than to conservation reserves."

Co-author Professor David Lindenmayer said the analysis highlights current conservation strategies for [forest](#)-dependent species in Victoria are "failing."

"Globally there has been a major push to increase the amount of land within formal conservation reserves to try to halt precipitous losses in biodiversity," he said.

"But our study shows that simply putting land in reserves is not adequate to protect most species, if the most important biodiversity areas are not included in those reserves.

"What we are seeing is a tendency to put conservation reserves on land which is the least valuable to industry.

"Reserve areas need to be determined based on those areas that are most critical to the survival of species, not simply those areas that are the least valuable to industries such as forestry, they also need to include enough land to support viable populations."

According to Dr. Taylor, many species in Victorian forests cannot survive within the existing formal conservation areas alone.

"Many [species](#) rely on the forests inside the logging zones," he said.

"Because these forests are clearfelled and replaced with very young forests, they are losing many of the features that animals depend on, like large old trees with tree hollows.

"Informal protected areas around logging zones are also very fragmented. On average wherever you are, you are only 70 meters from the edge of a zone where logging is permitted."

More information: Chris Taylor et al. The adequacy of Victoria's protected areas for conserving its forest-dependent fauna, *Austral Ecology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/aec.12805](https://doi.org/10.1111/aec.12805)

Provided by The Australian National University

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