

Researchers find half of budgets for species conservation is used for monitoring, not protecting

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Researchers from Carleton University and Environment and Climate Change Canada studied recovery plans for more than 2,000 endangered

species across the United States, New Zealand and New South Wales, Australia. Surprisingly, they found that half of species recovery budgets were allocated to research and monitoring rather than action. More of this funding needs to go to direct action because when research and monitoring receive a higher proportion of budgets the endangered species tend to fare worse. The study is published in *Nature Communications*.

"Threatened [species](#) need fast action to avoid extinction and, as a researcher, discovering how few of our precious resources are being budgeted for action has been a wake-up call," said Carleton's Rachel Buxton, lead author and post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Biology.

"In some ways, it's like we're counting the deck chairs on the Titanic. We need robust research and monitoring to make informed decisions, but given the ongoing biodiversity crisis, we need to focus on gathering only the information needed to support action."

Given their limited budgets, agencies involved in helping [endangered species](#) recover are often hesitant to act when the outcomes are uncertain, so the motivation to collect more data is understandable. In many cases, new scientific information is necessary to design and implement useful conservation actions. However, the study suggests that when the focus is almost exclusively on research and monitoring, the funds available for action are reduced and critically endangered species are unlikely to be helped.

"As scientists, we love to collect data," said Joseph Bennett, study author and professor in the Department of Biology, "But it is more important to protect species from extinction. We want to make sure we are being wise with our resources, achieving the right balance between getting more data and using the data to act so we can save species from extinction."

The team stresses that tools exist in business and economics to help better balance resources between gathering information and doing things that help prevent extinction.

"We're losing species faster than ever and the time to act is now," said Buxton. "So far, our efforts to save threatened species are failing—we need all hands on deck, support from the public and bold approaches if we're going to protect endangered wildlife."

Spending half of conservation budgets on research and [monitoring](#) of threatened species is a much higher proportion than in other sectors. In the [private sector](#), the top 10 largest corporations, including Amazon and Apple, spend closer to 10 percent of their annual revenue on research and development. This disproportionate conservation spending amplifies a larger problem—that activities aimed at saving biodiversity and threatened species are underfunded and undervalued.

More information: Rachel T. Buxton et al. Half of resources in threatened species conservation plans are allocated to research and monitoring, *Nature Communications* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-020-18486-6](#)

Provided by Carleton University

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