



▶▶▶ Status of Australia's Biodiversity

Australia has a diverse natural heritage that makes it unique in the world. We are the custodians of some of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet. Our continent is one of the world's 12 biologically 'megadiverse' regions, with a high proportion of species that are found nowhere else in the world. This richness of different ecosystems and different species, and the genetic variety they exhibit, represents the native biodiversity of Australia. It is a scientific, cultural, spiritual and economic inheritance that is distinctly Australian, and one that we must conserve and manage for future generations.

What is the state of biodiversity in Australia?

- 85% of our flowering plants, (including 98% of our eucalypts), are found nowhere else
- 90% of our freshwater fish are found nowhere else
- 13% of our tropical inshore marine fish are found nowhere else
- 85% of our temperate inshore marine fish are found nowhere else
- 84% of our mammals are found nowhere else
- 45% of our birds are found nowhere else
- 89% of our reptiles are found nowhere else
- 93% of our frogs are found nowhere else

Table 2: Total number of endangered, vulnerable and extinct species under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

	Estimated number of species	Endangered	Vulnerable	Extinct
Mammals	369	29	45	27
Birds	825	33	61	23
Reptiles	633	11	38	–
Amphibians	176	15	12	4
Fish	4,150	13	17	–
Invertebrate	200,000	–	4	–
Vascular plants	20,000	516	649	64
Non-vascular plants	22,000	1	1	unknown
Ecological Communities		23	–	unknown
Totals	Unknown (possibly more than one million species)	618 (23 Ecological Communities)	824	181

More biodiversity status facts

Mammals

- One in four mammal species are extinct, endangered or vulnerable to extinction
- Nearly half of Australia's marsupials are extinct, endangered or vulnerable to extinction

Birds

- 30 to 90% of bird species across the continent have declined in number
- More than 1 in 10 bird species are believed to be threatened with extinction
- 250 (50%) of land-based bird species are predicted to become extinct by 2100, if current rates of land clearing and habitat decay continue
- CSIRO has warned that "50% of birds in agricultural areas face the threat of extinction over the next 50 years... probably 70 to 80 species"





- Examples of threatened birds include the Regent Honeyeater (only 500-1500 left) and the Orange-bellied Parrots (less than 200 mature adults left)
- 7.5 million birds are killed each year from land clearing
- 1,000 to 2,000 birds lose their habitat for every 100 hectares of woodland cleared

Reptiles

- 200 reptiles are killed per hectare of mallee cleared
- Land clearing is believed to be responsible for the disappearance of two species (a small dragon and a legless lizard), as well as the decline of nine other reptile species from the agricultural areas of central NSW (CSIRO, 2000)

Frogs

- One in seven frog species is now threatened with extinction
- Of the estimated 220 species of native frogs in Australia, 31 (14%) are now extinct or threatened with extinction
- 11 frog species have declined or disappeared since 1985 from the QLD central coast, and the Cape York and Wet Tropics regions

Freshwater Fish

- One third of freshwater fish species are rare, endangered or vulnerable (SOEAC, 1996)

Invertebrates

It is unknown how many species of Australian invertebrates have become extinct during the last 200 years. If a species goes extinct, other species that interact with it and depend on it are, in turn, threatened. For every plant species that becomes extinct, 15 animal species can be expected to follow. There are 76 extinct species and 301 endangered species of vascular plants in Australia. There could be 1,140 species of extinct animals (most of which would have been invertebrates) and 4,515 species of threatened animals.

Native grasslands

- More than 99% of temperate lowland grasslands in south-eastern Australia have been destroyed

Production demands on biodiversity

- During the last 50 years we have cleared as much land as in the 150 years before 1945
- In the last 100 years (1900 – 2000) Australia's population has grown by a factor of five, but our demands on natural resources have increased many times more. Energy demand is 33 times greater; our cropland area is seven times greater; and wheat production is 17 times higher. Cattle and wool production are both three times higher now than 100 years ago

Sources:

Community Biodiversity Network, (2001). Facts of Life – Australia – April 2001.

www.cbn.org.au/member/cbn/projects/FactsofLife/

2001 State of the Environment Report: www.deh.gov.au/soe/2001/fact-sheets/biodiversity/html Glanznig, A., (1999) An overview of recent native vegetation clearance in Australia and its implications for biodiversity, Biodiversity Series, Paper No. 6 Biodiversity Unit. Table from (www.biodiversity.environment.gov.au/wildlife/lists/threatsp/index)