

Spending to save: what it will take to end extinction

Factsheet

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Cassowary | Photo: PaVan, Flickr CCBYSA2

What we know:



Australia is losing more species of plants and animals than any other developed nation.



Countries that spend more money on conservation lose fewer species. Australia spends much less than is required to ensure the recovery of our species at risk of extinction.



Australians can choose to adequately fund the recovery of species to save those on the edge of extinction.

Australia's species are unique.

Many are found nowhere else in the world.

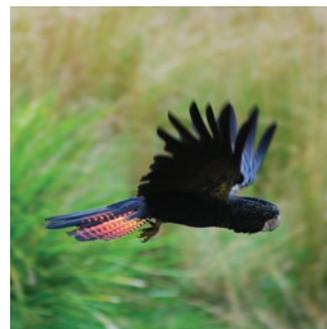
From the shy eastern barred bandicoot to the friendly Red-tailed black cockatoo to the stunning corroboree frog, our species are valued and loved in Australia and worldwide.

But Australia is losing more of our diverse plants and animals than any other developed nation.

Rapid destruction and degradation of good habitat, and introduced species like cats, foxes, pigs and deer are the primary causes of extinction in Australia. Climate change is a growing risk to species.



Eastern barred bandicoot | Photo: JJHarrison, CC BY SA 3.0



Red-tailed black cockatoo
Photo: Peter Campbell, CC BY SA 4.0



Northern corroboree frog
Photo: Australian Alps, Flickr CC2.0

Spending to save: what it will take to end extinction

Australia has 1,890 species and ecosystems listed as extinct or threatened with extinction under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

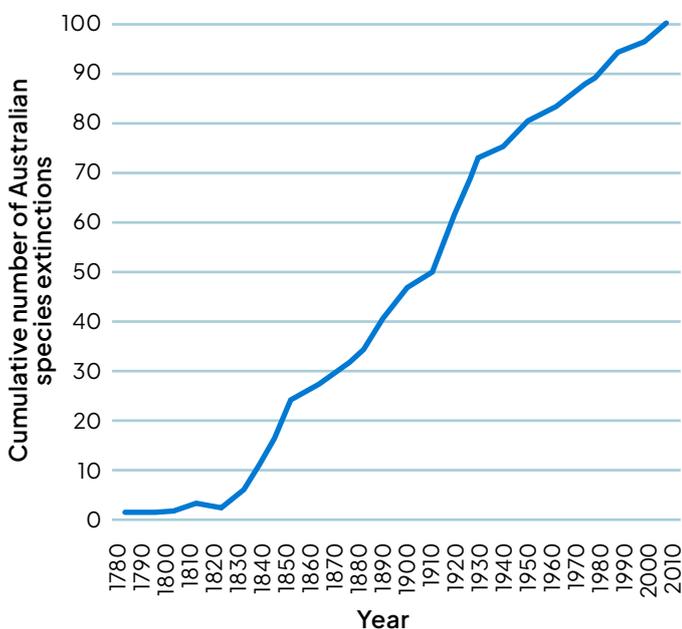
This figure is likely to be severely underestimated.

Most of Australia's species at risk of extinction are natives found only in Australia. This means their survival depends entirely on the extent and success of our conservation actions.

However, the past decade has seen a rapid decline in funding for environmental management in Australia. More than a third of the funding for environmental investments in the Australian Government budget has been taken away since 2013.

Relative to other countries of comparable wealth per person, Australia significantly underspends on biodiversity conservation.

The decline in expenditure and the ongoing loss of species have drawn sharp criticism from national and international communities for over a decade.



Australia's ongoing species loss: The estimated cumulative number of extinctions of Australian endemic plant and animal species since 1880 (Wintle *et al.* 2019).

It's time to invest in the future of Australia's unique species

Obtaining a clear picture of actual spending on threatened species recovery in Australia is difficult.

There is a lack of specific reference to threatened species spending in government budget papers and very little reporting on conservation expenditure for individual threatened species.

A new approach to estimating spending on threatened species found that in the 2018–19 financial year, the Australian Government's targeted funding allocated to threatened species recovery was about AU\$49.6 million. Newly released figures for 2019–20 show a slight increase to approximately AU\$55 million.

Across state, territory and commonwealth jurisdictions, combined investment in targeted recovery of species in Australia is about AU\$122 million per year.

It sounds like a lot – but is it enough?

Spending to save

It is clear from the ongoing species loss and the increasing number of species being identified as threatened that the current level of government funding is inadequate. Overall declines in biodiversity also means that more species are becoming threatened all the time.

But how much should Australia spend if we are to prevent further species loss and maximise the chance that species at risk of extinction recover?



The golden-tailed gecko is listed as Near Threatened in Queensland due to ongoing declines | Photo: Dave Flemming, wikimedia CC BY 3.0



Research demonstrates that the more a country spends on conservation, the fewer species it loses

The United States provides a strong example of how fewer species are lost when spending on conservation increases.

Money spent strategically on endangered species in the United States has significantly improved the status of these species.

The country's track record for species recovery far exceeds Australia's, with 39 species no longer considered endangered due to recovery and strong recovery trends observed in many species, including the iconic grey wolf, grizzly bear and bald eagle.

The United States has a similar number of species listed under comparable endangered species protection legislation over an equivalent land area. We can compare the number of different types of species – such as birds, mammals and plants – to figure out what each group will cost to save. In this way we can use the United States as an example to predict how much Australia should spend to protect our species facing extinction.

From 2011 to 2016, the United States Government spent the equivalent of at least AU\$1.93 billion (US\$1.45 billion) per year on targeted endangered species conservation and recovery, equating to about AU\$1.2 million (US\$903,000) per species per year.



Bald eagles were removed from the US endangered species list in August 2007 because their populations had recovered sufficiently

How much is enough?

Investing in saving Australia's at risk species and ecosystems would give back to our economy – through tourism, clean water, healthy soils, pollination and much more. And it would make our communities healthier, happier and more resilient. But it will take concerted effort and investment to reap these benefits.

To match the level of funding that the United States invests to save their species, Australia would need around 20 times as much funding compared with what we spend now.

A preliminary 2019 estimate of the targeted funding required to recover Australia's listed threatened species ranges from AU\$911 million to AU\$1.69 billion per year – most likely closer to the upper end of this range. That is approximately \$1.9 billion in 2022 terms.

\$122
MILLION

2018-19 funding on endangered species recovery in Australia

\$1.69
BILLION

What we should have been spending to save our species at risk of extinction

~OVER
93%

THE SHORTFALL



Where to from here?

The recovery of Australia's unique wildlife, plants and ecosystems largely rests on the level of funding we are willing to commit.

Like in the United States, people in Australia can choose to adequately invest to save those species on the edge of extinction.

To protect and recover our species at risk of extinction, Australia urgently needs:

- adequate investment
- transparent reporting of funding on protecting species
- legislation and strong governance for species recovery
- monitoring systems that can tell us when species are declining and show how they are recovering
- robust regulation, and
- adequate management of underlying threats such as habitat loss, climate change and introduced species.



Investment and international cooperation have brought the humpback whale back from the brink and allowed it to recover | Whit Welles, CC BY 3.0 wikimedia

We can prevent a legacy of extinction.

We can meet our international obligations to protect our unique wildlife, plants and natural systems.

We can deliver on our commitments to future generations of Australians.

But to do so, we need to spend to save our species from extinction.

READ MORE

Wintle BA et al. (2019) [Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis?](https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12682) *Conservation Letters*, doi: 10.1111/conl.12682. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12682>



Spiny daisy | Melburnian, CC BY SA 3.0

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The Biodiversity Council has been established to connect Australian communities and decision-makers with knowledge and solutions to protect our unique biodiversity. It is founded by 11 universities including its host the University of Melbourne, with support from The Ian Potter Foundation, The Ross Trust, Trawalla Foundation, The Rendere Trust, Isaacson Davis Foundation, Coniston Charitable Trust and Angela Whitbread.