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the ground or reintroducing it, fencing and revegetating areas and controlling foxes and other pest species,' said Sally Dye, MCMA Board Member.

According to Professor Iain Gordon from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, the ground-nesting birds are indicator species, so protecting their habitats should strengthen total biodiversity, better equipping the ecosystems to adapt to climate change.

Although pleased with the early signs of success of NestEgg, Professor Gordon feels that the community as a whole has not yet grasped what is at stake with biodiversity decline.

'While climate change and drought have focused people on the environment, very little attention has been paid in comparison to the alarmingly high loss of species.

'Climate change is a major threat to biodiversity, but focusing on climate change alone does not address the other threats to biodiversity such as habitat destruction and invasive species. Conserving biological diversity gives us the best chance of adapting to our rapidly changing world.'

With September having been nominated by the Australian Government as 'biodiversity month', Professor Gordon is keen to remind Australians that the clock is ticking for biodiversity and that solutions need to be delivered sooner rather than later.

'The threats to biodiversity are intensifying, and we have not yet arrived at a national consensus on how to conserve what we have, recover what will soon be lost and increase the benefits we gain from our unique biodiversity resource, in terms of the ecosystem services and aesthetic value it provides.'

● Larissa Cordner

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The bush stone-curlew relies on a ground cover of fallen branches and trees for breeding.

Jacques Croizer, iStockphoto

Farmers bid for funding to protect Murray catchment biodiversity

Through NestEgg, a collaboration between the NSW Murray Catchment Management Authority (MCMA), landholders and CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems Division, farmers are being paid to create the right conditions for birds to breed on their properties.

With its long skinny legs, large yellow eyes and habit of freezing in the face of danger, the bush stone-curlew is an endearingly strange bird.

Most at home in 'untidy' landscapes littered with branches and fallen trees, curlews build their nest in wooded areas next to fallen logs, making it harder for foxes – a major threat to the species – to find.

As a result of habitat destruction and predation by feral animals, the bird's range in New South Wales and Victoria has dramatically decreased, confining it to grassy woodland and farmland along the Murray River. Here, sightings on private land have declined from four pairs to one pair per property in the last 30 years.

Now thanks to the NestEgg habitat

improvement program involving payments to local farmers, the bird's future may turn out to be a little more assured.

The program is also focused on two other bird species apart from the bush stone-curlew – the plains-wanderer, and the brolga (listed as vulnerable).

NestEgg requires farmers to estimate the cost of work they are willing to undertake on their properties to meet the birds' required breeding conditions. They then bid for funding in an 'auction' process. Bids are evaluated by MCMA and funding is allocated to bids that benefit bird habitat and offer best value for money, not necessarily the lowest bid.

Successful landholders then receive an upfront payment from the auction and ongoing payments over three years if their habitat meets performance benchmarks based on the birds' needs. They also receive bonus payments if the bird is present at the critical breeding time.

'Farmers can be paid for reducing stocking rates or strategically grazing vital areas of habitat, leaving fallen timber on