

10-year bird status update reports major declines but some hope

Birds Australia, Charles Darwin University and CSIRO Publishing launched *The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010* on Friday. The Action Plan is the third in a series produced at the start of each decade. It analyses the status of all the species and subspecies of Australia's birds to determine their risk of extinction.



Credit: John Manger

Based on the latest research and consultation with leading ornithologists and conservation biologists around the country, the result is the most authoritative account yet of the status of Australia's birds. The publication also includes recommendations on conservation action.

This Action Plan lists 27 taxa as Extinct, 20 as Critically Endangered, 60 as Endangered, 68 as Vulnerable and 63 as Near Threatened as at 31 December, 2010. Of bird taxa known to have been present or to have occurred regularly in Australia when Europeans settled in 1788, 2.2 per cent are Extinct and a further 11.8 per cent are threatened.

The research was supported by an Australian Research Council linkage grant to Charles Darwin and Queensland Universities. BirdLife International, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Biosis also provided support.

'At one level this book describes a tragedy,' said Dr Graeme Hamilton, CEO of Birds Australia, 'That in the 200 short years since Europeans arrived in Australia we have so diminished our natural capital that 234 Australian birds are either Extinct, threatened with extinction or Near Threatened, is a national disgrace'.

But this is not a book of lost causes. It is a call for action to keep the extraordinary biodiversity we have inherited and pass the legacy to our children. Every one of Australia's threatened birds can be saved.

‘We do not need to lose any more Australian birds,’ said Barry Baker, President of Birds Australia. ‘This book describes the populations of species at greatest risk and outlines ways we can turn them around.’

There is much reason to hope. We would have lost far more had there not been enormous effort over the last few decades. After all, it is only 20 years since all the information available on Australia’s threatened birds was compiled in the first Action Plan for Australian Birds.

The status of some birds has improved over the last two decades as a result of dedicated conservation management. Some may not have improved their lot but at least they are holding their own. Many, however, are continuing to decline and a distressing number are new to the list.

Since the 2000 Action Plan was released, the conservation status of seven taxa will be downlisted (improved) as a result of effective conservation management. But for the same period, 39 taxa have been uplisted to a more threatened category because they are faring worse than they were a decade ago. This includes four taxa that are now Critically Endangered.

‘Sadly, over the last decade, threatened species conservation appears to have gone out of fashion with government policy makers and public funding bodies’. According to Dr Hamilton, instead of species conservation, emphasis is being placed on landscapes without the necessary attention to the precious detail those landscapes contain.

‘We at Birds Australia do not share that view,’ he said. ‘We, like the majority of the public, believe that a vital role for conservation agencies is the prevention of species loss.’

Most of the additions to the list in 2010 are migratory waders, numbers of which have plummeted, largely due to reclamation or degradation of habitat along their migratory pathways in East Asia.

Most threatened or extinct taxa continue to be on islands. Introduced predators and habitat destruction have taken a heavy toll. At sea, despite progress in developing and implementing mitigation techniques, all albatross taxa and several petrels continue to be threatened by high rates of mortality associated with fishing.

On the mainland, land clearance and habitat fragmentation will continue to cause species declines for decades as biodiversity pays its extinction debt. Grazing by domestic and feral herbivores, and changes in fire management are also major threatening processes.

[The Action Plan for Australian Birds 2010](#) is published by CSIRO Publishing.

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