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Sir David Attenborough backs move to protect Leadbeater's habitat

Iconic naturalist and filmmaker Sir David Attenborough has lent his support to the proposed Great Forest National Park to help save the Leadbeater's (or Fairy) Possum.



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The proposed Great Forest National Park will add 355,000 hectares to existing national parks and reserves. It will stretch from Kinglake across the Yarra Ranges to Mt Baw Baw and north up to Lake Eildon, protecting forests around the tourism hubs of Healesville and Warburton.

‘The maintenance of an intact ecological system is the only way to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity, safeguard water supplies and provide spiritual nourishment for ourselves and future generations,’ says Sir David.

‘It is for these reasons, and for the survival of the critically endangered Leadbeater’s Possum, that I support the creation of the Great Forest National Park for Victoria.’

Thirty environment, conservation, recreation and scientific groups, representing more than 50,000 Victorians, released a joint statement calling on all political parties and candidates contesting the November Victorian state election to commit to the creation of the park in the Yarra Ranges and Central Highlands on Melbourne’s eastern outskirts.

The groups – including the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, the Victorian National Parks Association and the Royal Society of Victoria – also released new polling showing that 89 per cent of Victorians support the proposal for a new national park in the Yarra Ranges.

The Great Forest National Park would take in the Yarra Ranges and the Central Highlands, home to the world’s tallest hardwood trees, the Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), some almost 100 metres tall. These forests are also the only home of the endangered Leadbeater’s Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*), the state’s faunal emblem.

‘There is overwhelming support for national parks in the community – a new national park less than 90 minutes from Melbourne will protect forest dependent wildlife such as gliders, owls, parrots and bats, as well as Leadbeater’s Possum,’ says Amelia Young from the Wilderness Society.

‘Sir David Attenborough’s support for the Great Forest National Park shows the global interest in the plight of Victoria’s animal emblem, the Leadbeater’s Possum.’

The Royal Society of Victoria is joining the calls for urgent action to save Leadbeater's Possum.

‘This is an issue that goes to the heart of the Royal Society's role in advocating for a scientific approach to the preservation of biodiversity in Victoria,’ says Society President, Dr Bill Birch AM.

‘The society strongly supports the establishment of a new national park that preserves the required habitat for this critically endangered animal.’

National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Chief Executive Martin Purslow comments, ‘These mountain ash forests include the largest trees on the Australian mainland and some of the largest in the world and should be protected for the future’.

Friends of Leadbeater’s Possum President Steve Meacher notes that ‘the science is clear’ that the best way to prevent the extinction of Leadbeater’s Possum is to create the new national park, ‘so we are calling for a commitment from all political parties and candidates to do it without delay.’

Yarra Riverkeepers spokesperson Ian Penrose points out that the park would have catchment-wide benefits. ‘The forested catchments supply more than 90 per cent of Melbourne’s drinking water. The Great Forest National Park will secure Melbourne’s domestic water supply catchments as well as the headwaters of the Goulburn and Broken rivers.’

Environment Victoria Chief Executive Mark Wakeham adds: ‘These forests have significant carbon value that will be protected if logging ceases. There is potential for a Forest Carbon Project to secure the environmental and economic benefit of the rich carbon value of these forests.’

Source: Victorian National Parks Association

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