Wildlife finding safety in parks

Brian Williams

The pivotal role of national parks in saving Australian wildlife has been highlighted in a study by WWF and University of Queensland researchers. It found an alarming 606 or 72 per cent of 841 nationally threatened species were in decline. But those with more habitat inside national parks and nature reserves tended to be more stable or even recovering in numbers.

The three states with the highest levels of land clearing—Queensland, NSW and Tasmania—also had the most threatened species in decline.

UQ researcher Hugh Possingham said there had been growing skepticism about the value of national parks for biodiversity but the paper showed national parks delivered compared with other conservation activities, such as less secure forms of protected areas.

WWF scientist Martin Taylor said the message was clear. If endangered species were to be saved, their habitat had to be put in a national park or habitat destruction had to be stopped by law.

“Anything else is risky,” Dr Taylor said.

“Governments may be tempted to slash parks budgets in hard times. This research shows that this would be a short-sighted mistake.

“National parks are not only critical tools for saving our threatened wildlife but also bring in more than $19 billion in foreign exchange from tourists every year.”

The Federal Government has promised to increase protected areas 25 per cent by 2013.

He said increased levels of investment by all levels of government was needed to reach this target and to arrest the alarming decline in wildlife and plants.

The co-authors were Paul Sattler, former senior Queensland Environment Department parks planner, and UQ researchers Professor Possingham, Richard Fuller, James Watson and Megan Evans.

Native wildlife saved by national parks

- Northern hairy-nosed wombat
- Bridled nailtail wallaby
- Gilbert’s potoroo

Threatened species with little protection

- Julia Creek dunnart (Qld)
- Carpentarian rock-rat (Northern Territory)
- Yellow-spotted bell frog (NSW)
- Red-tailed black-cockatoo (Vic)
- Blunt wattle (WA)
- Greater stick-nest rat (SA)
IN DECLINE: The yellow-footed rock wallaby.