

# Media Release

Photos and speakers available - see below  
Embargoed 28 Nov 2018



## Australian threatened bird populations drop by half in 30 years on average

On average, populations of Australia's threatened birds have decreased by half since 1985, according to Australia's new Threatened Bird Index.

According to Lead researcher Dr Elisa Bayraktarov from the University of Queensland, some bird species have decreased by more and others by less, but that is the average trend across species for which data is available.

Threatened migratory shorebirds have suffered the largest decrease, dropping by 70% on average in the last 30 years.

The Threatened Bird Index was launched by the Australian Government's Threatened Species Commissioner Dr Sally Box in Brisbane this week. It is a joint initiative of the Threatened Species Recovery Hub and BirdLife Australia and pulls together data from monitoring programs across the country.

"The objective of the index is to enable policy makers, the public and conservation groups to better understand how threatened birds are faring," Dr Bayraktarov said.

"For a long time Australia has been able to track the health of the economy with things like the All Ordinaries Index, which tells us how the stock market is performing, but we have not had tools to do this for threatened species.

"While we have had monitoring data on many individual species, until now we have lacked the ability to combine this information to tell us about the bigger picture.

"Compiling this data has been a huge accomplishment, which was made possible by support from more than 70 research, government and conservation groups.

"So far the index combines data from 180,000 individual surveys, from 35 monitoring programs on 43 bird species and subspecies, and we are constantly adding new data as it becomes available.

James O'Connor, Head of Research for BirdLife Australia, says the index is an important tool to draw attention to the state of our threatened birds, and which groups and regions are doing better or worse.

"The results show us that on average there has been a significant decrease in Australian threatened birds over the last 3 decades and they need our help," said Dr O'Connor.

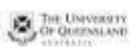
"In particular threatened migratory shorebirds numbers have suffered very large decreases.

"But it isn't all bad news, for example, although Victoria suffered a lot of historical declines due to habitat loss, since 2000 land-based birds have been relatively stable in Victoria.

"With sufficient resources and commitment, conservation programs work and can halt declines and even lead to improvements for some species.

"Great examples of conservation working are the programs on the Helmeted Honeyeater in Victoria and the Kangaroo Island Glossy Black Cockatoo in South Australia.

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub is supported by funding from the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Programme.



Development of the index was supported by the Australian Government’s National Environmental Science Program.

Dr Sally Box, the Australian Government’s Threatened Species Commissioner, said the index would be a valuable tool to assist policy makers in understanding how threatened birds are faring.

“The creation of the first Threatened Species Index is a significant achievement. It will provide a one stop shop for researchers across the country to share, aggregate and analyse data on threatened species trends”, said Dr Box.

“Science informs policy and investment and I welcome the development of new tools that can help us better understand threatened species trends and focus our efforts.”

Dr Bayraktarov said that so far the index includes data on about one third of Australia’s threatened birds.

“This is enough to see some trends, but as we add more data it will become an even more powerful tool.

“We can only add monitoring data where it has already been collected, and most monitoring has occurred in south-eastern Australia and coastal areas.

“We’d like to add more data for inland and desert regions. If anyone out there has long-term monitoring data from these areas we want to hear from them.

Threatened birds are also just the beginning. The team are already assembling monitoring data for threatened mammal and plant indices. The long-term goal is an overall Threatened Species Index.

People can find out more about the index at: [TSX.org.au](http://TSX.org.au)

The Threatened Species Recovery Hub is a collaboration of 10 leading Australian universities and the Australian Wildlife Conservancy to undertake research to support the recovery of Australia’s threatened species.

**Available for interview:**

Dr Elisa Bayraktarov, The University of Queensland, 0401 676 881, [e.bayraktarov@uq.edu.au](mailto:e.bayraktarov@uq.edu.au)  
James O’Connor, BirdLife Australia, 0437 740 660 [James.OConnor@birdlife.org.au](mailto:James.OConnor@birdlife.org.au)  
Dr Glenn Ehmke, BirdLife Australia, 0447 286 488 [glennehmke76@gmail.com](mailto:glennehmke76@gmail.com)  
Sean Dooley, BirdLife Australia, 0407 789067 [sean.dooley@birdlife.org.au](mailto:sean.dooley@birdlife.org.au)

**Additional media inquiries:**

Jaana Dielenberg, TSR Hub Communication Manager, 0413 585 709 [j.dielenberg@uq.edu.au](mailto:j.dielenberg@uq.edu.au)

**Video**

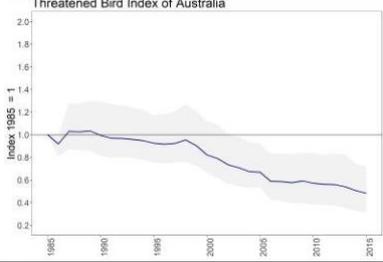
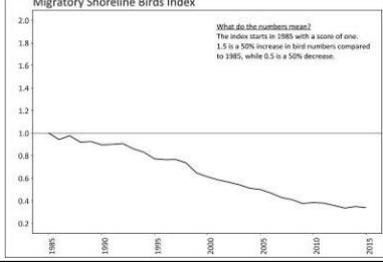
A three minute animation about the video is [available in YouTube](#).

**Photos and figures:** [available in dropbox](#) to accompany this story. Photographers must be credited.

**THUMBNAILS of PHOTOS/FIGURES**

Image	Credit	Suggested Caption/more information
	Glenn Ehmke / Birdlife Australia	Eastern regent parrot. Vulnerable.  Eastern regent parrots are one of the threatened bird species in the index. The index includes over 70 data sets on the parrot which is found in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.



	<p>Glenn Ehmke / Birdlife Australia</p>	<p>Gouldian finch. Endangered.</p> <p>The Index includes over 50 sets of monitoring data on Gouldian finches. The average length of time each data set covers is 14 years.</p>
	<p>Glenn Ehmke / Birdlife Australia</p>	<p>Australian fairy tern. Vulnerable</p> <p>Australian fairy terns are one of ten species of threatened marine birds with data in the Index. The index includes over 50 monitoring data sets on fairy terns.</p>
	<p>Glenn Ehmke / Birdlife Australia</p>	<p>Malleefowl. Vulnerable.</p> <p>Malleefowl are one of 25 land birds with data in the index. The index includes over 80 data sets on malleefowl, which are classed as Vulnerable under Australian environmental law.</p>
	<p>Glenn Ehmke / Birdlife Australia</p>	<p>Far eastern curlew. Critically Endangered.</p> <p>The far eastern curlew is one of 6 threatened migratory shorebirds with data in the index. The index includes over 900 sets of monitoring data on the far eastern curlew.</p>
	<p>Mark Gillow <a href="#">CC BY 2.0 Flickr</a></p>	<p>Helmeted honeyeater</p> <p>The critically endangered helmeted honeyeater has been monitored for 26 years, giving us a good understanding of how it is faring.</p>
	<p>Threatened Species Recovery Hub</p>	<p>The national index shows that the average trend for threatened birds was a decrease by half (52%) between 1985 and 2015.</p> <p>This is based on available data which covers one third of all Australian threatened bird species.</p>
	<p>Threatened Species Recovery Hub</p>	<p>The index for threatened migratory shoreline birds shows that on average migratory shorebird populations decreased by 70% since 1985. Within this group some species declined more and others by less.</p>