

National assessment shows Australians must work abroad to save their birds

Title [A newly published study](#) shows Australians must work with international partners if they are to save all of Australia's birds. Charles Darwin University Research Fellow Dr Judit Szabo and lead author said research showed that the status of Australian birds was declining faster than elsewhere in the world. "The main reason is a rapid decline in migratory shorebirds coming here from Asia and ongoing threats to oceanic seabirds." The Australian Research Council funded study, done in conjunction with BirdLife Australia and published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, reports on changes in the Red List Index for all Australian species and subspecies of birds since 1990. The Index is used by the world's governments to assess performance under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The new study is the first time the Index has been applied at a national level. "The Red List Index can be considered the Dow Jones index of birds," said another of the paper's authors, Professor Possingham from The University of Queensland. "It is important that we track it so that we can determine the impact of past and future policies on Australia's biodiversity, an asset that generates billions of dollars a year for the economy," he said. BirdLife International's Dr Stuart Butchart and developer of the Red List Index said that the status of birds in Australia would have been much worse if it weren't for the work being done to prevent extinctions. "Nearly 30 species are better off than they would have been if it weren't for effective investment of time and money into threatened species conservation," Dr Butchart said. "The analysis shows that targeted investment can produce measurable improvement." The analysis also compared States and Territories. While the Index has declined in all jurisdictions, the Australian Capital Territory has the best score and Tasmania the worst. Tasmania is also the place where bird status is declining fastest. CDU's Dr Szabo said that Island species, even those on islands as big as Tasmania, are always worse off than mainland species. "Small oceanic islands have been the hardest hit," she said. "However these are also areas where investments can really pay off – a big rat and rabbit eradication program on Macquarie Island could even turn the Red List Index around next time we calculate it." The biggest causes of decline in Australian birds have been invasive species, like rats and cats, and changes in fire regime. Overseas the losses have been caused by ongoing coastal development in Asia and deep sea fishing. **Subscribe to The BirdLife Pacific [Quarterly E-Newsletter](#)**