

What's the overlap?



IMAGE BY DAVID SALT

Indigenous land in central Australia is home to many threatened species.

Indigenous land and threatened species conservation

Indigenous people govern and manage just over half of all of Australia's terrestrial land. Are these Indigenous lands important when it comes to conserving threatened species? Dr **Anna Renwick** led a team of researchers from CSIRO, Charles Darwin University and University of Queensland to carry out this analysis and found the answer was a resounding yes. Here she explains why.

Indigenous lands are extremely important for biodiversity. Compared to the rest of the country, Indigenous lands are largely unmodified and lightly populated. Consequently, on the whole they are ecologically intact and rich in species.

The national Threatened Species Strategy aims to halt the decline of threatened species, however there is a lack of understanding of how local-scale Indigenous land management can link to this national strategy. The first step in identifying viable options for partnerships is to identify the overlap between Indigenous land and biodiversity value. The aim is to maximise outcomes for biodiversity, while also providing opportunities to augment Indigenous livelihoods.

We compared the distributions of 272 threatened native vertebrate species across Australia with the location of various Indigenous land tenures across Australia (see Figure 1). Indigenous land was found to contain almost an equal proportion per hectare of the ranges of threatened vertebrate species as non-Indigenous land. Almost three quarters of Australian threatened vertebrate species have at least part of their range on Indigenous land.

Across Australia's 89 (terrestrial) bioregions, Indigenous lands in northern, eastern and southern Australia are of highest importance for threatened species.

Indigenous land is essential for the persistence of many threatened vertebrate species as they occur predominantly on Indigenous lands or the opportunities for conservation on other parts of their range are limited by threats and human activity. The overlap is especially high for the priority mammals and birds listed in the national Threatened Species Strategy.

Because there is such a high overlap, this analysis highlights the need for an intercultural approach in the challenge of threatened-species conservation on Indigenous land. Indigenous people need to help guide appropriate goals and strategies to develop threatened-species conservation action plans that accommodate different interests.

Recognition of the importance of Indigenous lands to threatened species conservation can also hopefully assist Indigenous people in gaining support for threatened-species conservation that aligns with their own local priorities, including opportunities to expand their portfolio of income sources.

Finally, this information can assist policy makers to engage strategically with Indigenous people whose land supports large numbers of threatened species and to guide funding programs focused on supporting Indigenous land management.

For further information:

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Key messages

Almost three quarters of Australian threatened vertebrate species have at least part of their range on Indigenous land

Indigenous land is essential for the persistence of many threatened vertebrate species

Number of threatened species

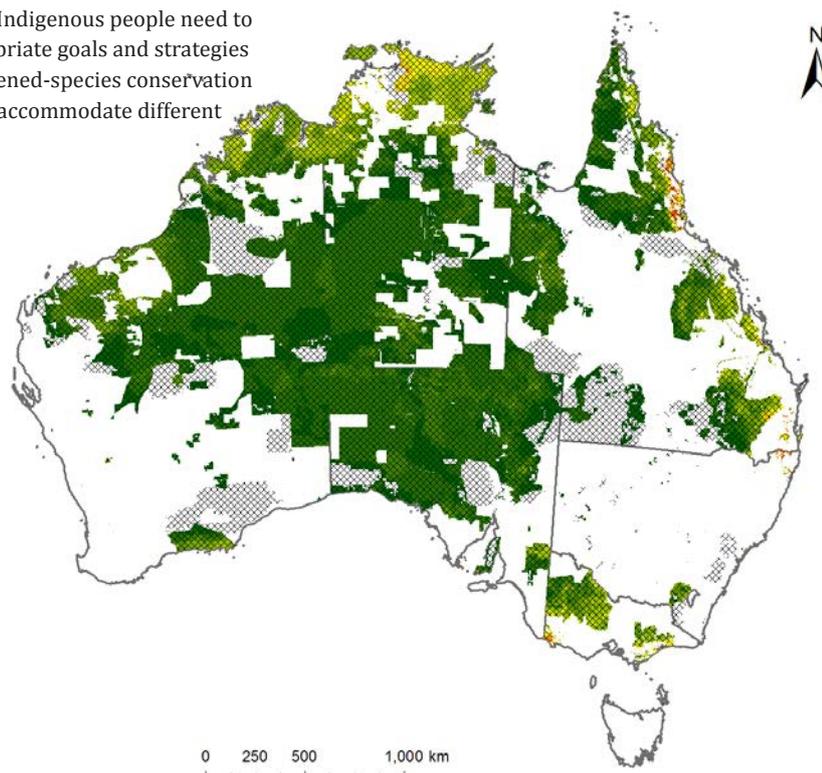
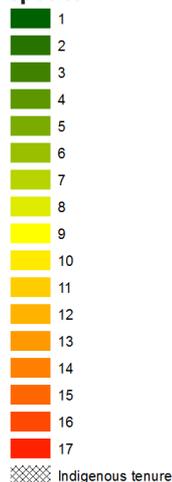


Figure 1: Numbers of threatened vertebrate species within each 10km² of Indigenous land across Australia. White areas on the map is land that is not formally recognised as being under Indigenous tenure. See <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0173876>