

# Media release

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## **Animals disappearing from Queensland's Wet Tropics much faster than previously forecast**

*While the international community negotiates targets for nature, climate change and heatwaves cause rapid decline in unique possum populations*

In the forests of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area of Far North Queensland (FNQ), one of Australia's unique animals, the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum, is disappearing so quickly that it has jumped from being a species of Least Concern to being classified as Critically Endangered. The next classification is Extinct.

A recent study by James Cook University Professor Stephen Williams and PhD candidate Alejandro de la Fuente has prompted the change in the status of this possum, whose eye shine is yellow, making them easy to identify as they feast on flowers and leaves high up in the forest canopy at night.

The study found that the warming climate and heatwaves during summer are causing rapid declines in the populations of the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum as well as another three species of ringtail possums and 13 species of birds.

As the climate warms, the possums are being forced to move to higher, cooler altitudes to survive.

The eastern forests of FNQ are among the 20 priority places listed in the Threatened Species Action Plan recently launched by the federal government. The plan outlines how government intends to protect, manage and restore Australia's threatened species and important natural places.

The plan incorporates a commitment to preventing new extinctions – urgent action is needed to save the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum. Professor Williams recommends that curbing emissions will help to reduce extinction rates and funding for research to understand how the possums can adapt to a changing climate is critical.

Ensuring connectivity between pockets of suitable habitat will also be important to support the survival of the possums.

The South Endeavour Trust is a not-for-profit organisation that has been actively building connectivity across this fragmented landscape since the mid-2000s. The trust currently manages five reserves on the Atherton Tablelands where the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum is found.

The trust's CEO, Tim Hughes, said intensive replanting and construction of possum bridges over roads have been underway for almost 10 years to create corridors connecting what would otherwise be isolated islands of high altitude rainforest.

"Private land conservation is playing a vital role in this landscape, filling in the gaps between national parks.

"The biodiversity values in this region are of international importance. Our sole purpose is to care for our precious environment through the protection and active management of habitat," Mr Hughes said.

The change in the status of the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum comes just as the international community meets to negotiate a set of global targets for nature at COP15 in Montreal.

Along with its zero new extinctions target, the Australian government has also recently committed to protecting 30 per cent of land and 30 per cent of sea by 2030 domestically. How it proposes to deliver this will require more work – but target setting is an important start.

Similarly ambitious goals, targets and investments from other countries will be essential outcomes of the COP15 meeting if the global extinction crisis is to be halted.

As well as the Australian Government Delegation, representatives from various environmental organisations including the Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) will be attending COP15 in Montreal.

ALCA is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage and restore nature on privately managed land.

Dr Jody Gunn, ALCA CEO, said the strong Australian presence at the meeting highlights the significance of this moment and the urgent response that our natural environment demands.

“The natural world is facing collapse. Just like the climate crisis, the nature crisis needs international agreement and action.

“At COP15, it is critical that measurable targets are agreed, that accountability is enshrined and that finance is mobilised.

“We will be adding our voice – the voice of the private land conservation sector – to the many calling for an internationally unified outcome that will transform society’s relationship with nature,” Dr Gunn said.

For the Lemuroid Ringtail Possum and the other animals, plants and ecosystems at risk in the Wet Tropics and globally, the international community needs to agree to ambitious goals, to take action and to be held accountable, delivering better outcomes for the planet and for people.

### **About South Endeavour Trust**

South Endeavour Trust was established in 2007 as an independent, not for profit, charitable trust with the sole purpose of contributing to nature conservation in Australia.

South Endeavour currently owns and manages twenty conservation reserves.

### **About ALCA**

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance is the peak national body representing organisations that work to conserve, manage and restore nature on privately managed land. We represent our members and supporters to grow the impact, capacity and influence of private land conservation to achieve a healthy and resilient Australia.

ALCA member land conservation efforts stretch across over 3 million square kilometres with more than 4,000 landholders. We have over 70,000 supporters and our combined annual turnover exceeds \$260 million.

Together ALCA and its members address some of the most pressing conservation issues across the country, including restoring endangered ecosystems, building the protected area estate, tackling invasive species, expanding private conservation finance and funding, and using nature-based solutions to tackle climate change.

Through their active land management, ALCA member organisations are deeply embedded in regional communities and economies, providing jobs, securing significant regional investment, and safeguarding remaining native habitat, with its many positive spillover effects for community,

wellbeing and food security. We seek to demonstrate the role and value of private land conservation as a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

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Images are available [here](#).

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