



## Slow Italian, Fast Learning

Ep.414: Australia: the ring-tailed possum is at risk of extinction

Italian	English
<p>L'Australia è famosa in tutto il mondo per la sua vasta gamma di piante e animali unici.</p> <p>Tuttavia, con il tasso di estinzione dei mammiferi più alto al mondo e il secondo tasso più elevato di perdita di biodiversità, gli esperti di conservazione sostengono che l'Australia potrebbe perdere molte di queste specie caratteristiche nel prossimo futuro.</p> <p><b>"Climate change combined with other threats is really sending our wildlife to extinction. We now have more than 2,300 plants, animals, and ecosystems threatened with extinction in Australia, and the list keeps growing. And unless we take some really urgent action to protect these unique plants and animals, our future generations won't be able to enjoy the unique nature that we have grown up with."</b></p> <p>Questa era la voce di Jess Abrahams, attivista nazionale per la tutela della natura dell'Australian Conservation Foundation.</p> <p>Uno degli animali in prima linea in questa battaglia contro il rapido riscaldamento globale è il possum dalla coda ad anelli lemuroide.</p> <p>Questo possum, originario delle foreste pluviali dei Wet Tropics nel Queensland settentrionale, è una delle 34 specie da poco inserite nell'elenco delle specie minacciate dell'Australia a partire da febbraio 2026.</p> <p>Steve Williams ha da poco concluso la sua carriera di professore di biodiversità e</p>	<p>Australia is famed around the world for its vast array of unique plants and animals.</p> <p>But with the highest rate of mammal extinction in the world and the second highest rate of biodiversity loss, conservation experts say Australia could lose many of these distinctive species in the near future.</p> <p><b>"Climate change combined with other threats is really sending our wildlife to extinction. We now have more than 2,300 plants, animals, and ecosystems threatened with extinction in Australia, and the list keeps growing. And unless we take some really urgent action to protect these unique plants and animals, our future generations won't be able to enjoy the unique nature that we have grown up with."</b></p> <p>That's the Australian Conservation Foundation's national nature campaigner Jess Abrahams.</p> <p>One animal on the frontlines of this battle with a rapidly warming climate is the lemuroid ringtail possum.</p> <p>The possum, native to north Queensland's Wet Tropics rain forests, is one of 34 species that have just been added to Australia's threatened species list as of February 2026.</p>

### Special Broadcasting Service

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cambiamenti climatici alla James Cook University e ha trascorso circa 35 anni a studiare queste creature.

Williams sostiene di aver candidato il possum dalla coda ad anelli lemuroide come specie in via di estinzione nel 2022 dopo aver notato un rapido declino dovuto alle ondate di calore e all'aumento delle temperature medie.

**"We've already lost about 60 per cent of the population of lemuroid ringtails in the last 15 years. And the predictions are that they're going to be almost extinct or extinct by about 2040-2050 kind of range. The increasing temperature, just the average temperatures across the whole year, decreases their reproductive biology, stops them breeding as much. And so there's sort of a double whammy. They're getting increased mortality and you're also getting decreased births. "**

Per Jess Abrahams i decenni di ricerche condotte dal professor Williams e dal suo team hanno dimostrato che i possum migravano sempre più a nord nel loro habitat per sfuggire al caldo.

**"It cannot survive under heatwave conditions, and it must climb higher and higher up the mountains to find cooler environments. But so many of our wildlife that are already living in higher altitude areas, when climate change comes, there's literally nowhere higher to climb. They're literally falling off the top of the mountain."**

Williams ha dichiarato che non aveva intenzione di concentrare la sua ricerca sugli effetti dei cambiamenti climatici, ma già nel 2003 non ha potuto fare a meno di rendersi conto della loro enorme portata distruttiva.

Steve Williams recently retired from his role as professor of biodiversity and climate change at James Cook University and has spent about 35 years studying the creatures.

He says he nominated the lemuroid ringtail possum as an endangered species in 2022 after noticing a rapid decline due to heatwaves and an increase in average temperatures.

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Jess Abrahams says the decades of research gathered by Professor Williams and his team showed the possums were constantly migrating higher and higher in their environment to escape the heat.

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Dr Williams says he didn't intend on focusing his research on the impacts of climate change but its vast destructive impacts became unavoidable to him as early as 2003.



**"I was studying rain forest animals with no intention of working on climate change. We did some analysis which showed that if things continued the way they were going, that about 50 per cent of the species that I worked on would go extinct by the end of this century. And that just completely blew my mind and I sort of thought, 'well, there's not really much point in studying anything else at this stage.'"**

James Watson è professore di Scienze della conservazione all'Università del Queensland.

Per lui la ricerca di Williams offre una prospettiva unica sulle minacce che probabilmente molte altre specie stanno subendo all'insaputa dei ricercatori.

**"The fear is obviously that the lemuroid possum is kind of the canary in the coal mine. It's well studied. But there are tons of species that we don't know are actually being affected because they're not being monitored. So we suspect there's a massive underestimate on the amount of species actually imperilled by climate change."**

Cosa si può fare, quindi, per proteggere il possum dalla coda ad anelli e migliaia di altre specie a rischio?

Jess Abrahams dell'Australian Conservation Foundation sostiene che inserirle nell'elenco delle specie minacciate della legge sulla protezione dell'ambiente e la conservazione della biodiversità sia un buon punto di partenza.

**"It becomes a matter of national environmental significance and that is protected under Australia's national environment laws. And we now have a federal Environment Protection Agency but there are also new rules and standards**

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James Watson is a Professor in Conservation Science at the University of Queensland.

He says Dr Williams' research offers us a unique look at the threats that many other species are likely experiencing without researchers knowing.

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So what can be done to protect the lemuroid ringtail possum and thousands of other at-risk species?

Mr Abrahams from the Australian Conservation Foundation says adding them to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act's threatened species list is a good start.

**"It becomes a matter of national environmental significance and that is protected under Australia's national environment laws. And we now have a federal Environment Protection Agency but**



**under these new laws, and the details of those rules are still being hashed out. But if these rules aren't strong, if they're full of loopholes, well an animal being added to the threatened species list perhaps won't give it the protection that it needs and they will still be at risk from extinction."**

Steve Williams ha dichiarato che lui e i suoi colleghi hanno dedicato decenni ad aiutare il possum dalla coda ad anelli e altre specie ad adattarsi, ma se il ritmo dei cambiamenti climatici non verrà rallentato da una rapida riduzione delle emissioni di carbonio in Australia e nel resto del mondo, tutti questi sforzi saranno vani.

**"All these adaptation actions that we take in terms of protecting refugia, keeping animals in captivity, moving them around, whatever it is we do, it is still kind of fiddling at the edges a bit. It's doing the best we can, but the main thing that needs doing is stopping the temperature going too much higher. We're already at one and a half degrees, which is already a level which all of my analysis over the last 30 years says that the impacts will start to become worse and accelerate rapidly from one and a half degrees on."**

Il professor Watson sostiene che la maggior parte degli animali possiede una capacità innata di adattarsi ai cambiamenti climatici, ma che la portata e la rapidità dei cambiamenti climatici causati dall'uomo hanno reso loro quasi impossibile stare al passo con tali mutamenti.

Watson ha dichiarato che gli esseri umani hanno il dovere di proteggere gli animali vulnerabili nel miglior modo possibile, finché la Terra non potrà iniziare a riprendersi da questi danni.

**"Every species that has evolved on earth has undergone some kind of pressure from a changing climate simply because the**

**there are also new rules and standards under these new laws, and the details of those rules are still being hashed out. But if these rules aren't strong, if they're full of loopholes, well an animal being added to the threatened species list perhaps won't give it the protection that it needs and they will still be at risk from extinction."**

Dr Steve Williams says he and his colleagues have spent decades helping the lemuroid ringtail possum and other species adapt, but unless the pace of climate change is slowed by a rapid reduction of carbon emissions in Australia and around the world, the efforts will be for naught.

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Professor Watson says most animals have an inherent ability to adapt to a changing climate, but the scale and pace of man-made climate change has made it nearly impossible for them to keep up with these changes.

He says humans have a duty to safeguard vulnerable animals as best as they can until



<p><b>climate is always changing. This climate changing event caused by humans is different. It's more extreme, it's going in the wrong direction to what the natural climate cycles are. Because we are clearing habitats, we're polluting the Great Barrier Reef, because we're having unnatural fire regimes, we're introducing invasive species and diseases, these species are losing their capacity to adapt to a changing climate. It's going to take hundreds of years for the climate to get back to normal. Even if we stop bad behaviour right now. These species are going to have to go through this kind of climate bottleneck, and we have to allow these species to have the best fighting chance."</b></p>	<p>the Earth can begin to recover from this damage.</p> <p><b>"Every species that has evolved on earth has undergone some kind of pressure from a changing climate simply because the climate is always changing. This climate changing event caused by humans is different. It's more extreme, it's going in the wrong direction to what the natural climate cycles are. Because we are clearing habitats, we're polluting the Great Barrier Reef, because we're having unnatural fire regimes, we're introducing invasive species and diseases, these species are losing their capacity to adapt to a changing climate. It's going to take hundreds of years for the climate to get back to normal. Even if we stop bad behaviour right now. These species are going to have to go through this kind of climate bottleneck, and we have to allow these species to have the best fighting chance."</b></p>
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Report by Sam Dover for SBS News.

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