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MEDIA RELEASE

Victoria facing wave of extinctions

An alliance of leading environment groups today expressed alarm at the state of Victoria's much-loved native birds, following the release of new research which shows that in northern and central Victoria, a shocking two thirds of woodland bird species have declined dramatically over the past five years.

The research was undertaken by leading ecologists Professor Ralph Mac Nally, Director of the Australian Centre for Biodiversity at Monash University, Professor Andrew Bennett and Dr Jim Radford from Deakin University and Dr Peter Vesk from The University of Melbourne.

The extensive study was carried out across 30,000 km² of northern and central Victoria and revealed many woodland bird species, including honeyeaters, pardalotes, thornbills and lorikeets, were in sharp decline.

The scientists believe the fall in numbers is due to climate change, particularly reduced rainfall, coupled with the extensive loss of habitat in the region over more than 150 years.

"The collapse in bird numbers strongly suggests the availability of food has crashed," Professor Bennett said.

"The flowering of Red Ironbark trees, which provide an important food source for nectar-feeding birds, has become less frequent with the drought. In five of the past eight years Red Ironbark eucalypts have flowered little or not at all.

"Most worrying, species thought to be secure, such as the Red Wattlebird and the Laughing Kookaburra, have declined as much or more than species already considered endangered."

The study found little evidence of successful breeding, suggesting that there were no young birds to replace those that died. It also showed species have declined within large areas of bushland, including in national parks.

Victoria Naturally Alliance spokesperson Karen Alexander said the research findings were a dire warning that Victoria could be facing a wave of extinctions.

"We are deep in an extinction crisis and urgent action is required. This research has shown that we can no longer rely on national parks for long-term protection of our species in a drying, warming climate," she said.

"There is a critical need to improve the quality of existing habitats and restore habitats especially in more fertile areas adjacent to existing bushlands.

"According to CSIRO, 30 per cent of Victoria's animals and close to half our plant species are already extinct or threatened with extinction. And now climate change is hitting our remaining species hard.

"This research is a wake-up call for the State Government to put a major injection of funding into the protection and restoration of our natural environment."

Download the report fact sheet from www.victorianaturally.org.au

For further comment please contact:

Professor Andrew Bennett, 0447 524 580, 03 92517609 Andrew.Bennett@deakin.edu.au

Professor Ralph Mac Nally, 9905 5642, Ralph.MacNally@sci.monash.edu.au (after 11am)

Karen Alexander, Victoria Naturally Alliance Project Leader, 0439 306 829, karena@vnpa.org.au

Dr Jim Radford, now a senior ecologist with Bush Heritage Australia, 08 86728932



Victoria Naturally Alliance wants to see the state's native plants and animals protected from threats including climate change and habitat loss. The alliance is led by the Victorian National Parks Association and includes the Australian Conservation Foundation, The Wilderness Society and Environment Victoria. Greening Australia (Vic), Trust for Nature, Bush Heritage Australia, Bird Observation & Conservation Australia and the Invasive Species Council. For more information go to www.victorianaturally.org.au