



NATIVE BIRDS NEED NATIVE VEGETATION

We need at least ten per cent native vegetation coverage in Victoria if we want to sustain native animals according to new research in landscape ecology from Deakin University.

Fortunately the research also shows that revegetation is contributing to part of the solution.

Much of Victoria has less than ten per cent native vegetation coverage and that's had an impact of wildlife. However many landholders are now revegetating their properties to protect soil and water quality and improve farm productivity.

"Although it's great to see revegetation occurring across Victoria, unfortunately we are still losing native vegetation, little by little, through clearing or degradation" says Professor Andrew Bennett, from the School of Life and Environmental Sciences.

But is this revegetation also helping wildlife?

Andrew's research team looks at the impact of the loss of remnant vegetation on native wildlife, and the extent to which revegetation can provide substitute habitat.

"What we've discovered is a threshold of ten per cent native vegetation - below which the number of woodland bird species collapses," says Andrew. "But if we want our landscapes to support the full range of native species, then we need more like 30 to 35 per cent native vegetation coverage."

Andrew and his team have found that revegetation by landholders, even though it is often done in small patches, does contribute to landscape value in an important way.

Species diversity (the number of species in an area) increases as the proportion of native wooded vegetation, including revegetation, increases.

They found that remnant vegetation (that is, pre-existing vegetation that has never been cleared) is the most valuable habitat, as it contains older trees, which have broad canopies and nesting hollows, and fallen logs, which provide habitat for small native species. Some species, like the crimson rosella, are much more likely to be found in remnant vegetation than in revegetated areas. Yet, revegetated areas do provide habitat for many species, and in time (although it will take decades) they too will become mature woodlands.

"Because the revegetated sites are not as valuable to wildlife as remnant vegetation, we are still losing habitat quality," says Andrew. "But the encouraging news is that the landholders' revegetation efforts are having a positive impact on wildlife."

To maximise the effectiveness of revegetation efforts, Andrew says that landholders can:

- » use native plants indigenous to the area
- » revegetate adjacent to, or connected with, existing remnant vegetation, to build connected networks of habitat for wildlife
- » revegetate along waterways, because these sites have the highest species diversity and the revegetation will also reduce erosion and improve water quality.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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Professor Andrew Bennett



'If native vegetation drops below ten per cent, the number of woodland bird species collapses.'