Plants and animals in danger

- Tropical rainforests grow in just a tiny part of Australia, but they contain most of Australia's endangered plants and animals.

- The Wet Tropics World Heritage Area covers less than 1% of Australia, but it is home to a third of Queensland's endangered plants and 82 rare and endangered animals.

- If an animal or plant is endangered it means the whole species is in danger of extinction – there are so few of them left they may disappear forever.

- Plants and animals are described as rare when there are only a small number of them, or they are found in only a small area or type of habitat.

- Some of the famous endangered animals in this region are the Cassowary and the Mahogany Glider.

- Many other animals are also endangered, but they are not as well known. They include the Spotted-tailed Quoll and the Northern Bettong.

- Even less well known are small animals like frogs and insects. Sometimes they only just get discovered by a scientist before they disappear – sometimes forever.

- Often, very little is known about endangered plants and animals. Scientists help us to find out more about where endangered species live, their life cycle, and why they are disappearing.

- People often focus on animals, and forget that plants can also be endangered. Over 2,800 plant species are found in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

- More than 700 plant species are found nowhere else in the world. Over 350 plant species are considered rare or threatened.
• Even though many of these animals and plants aren’t famous, they’re part of the complex web of life in north Queensland. Every time a piece of the web is removed, the whole structure is weakened.

• These days one of the main causes of animals and plants becoming endangered is because humans have altered their natural habitat. This often happens accidentally, and people don’t realise until it’s too late.

• **Weeds and feral animals** compete with native animals and plants for food and space.

• **New diseases** like skin-eating fungus and tuberculosis affect animals, and microorganisms and diseases affect plants.

• **Habitat is cleared** for houses and farms. Powerlines and roads divide the forest into little patches where animals can’t survive.

• Some ferns, tree ferns, cycads and orchids are seriously threatened by collecting for plant nurseries, florists and private gardens. Collecting even threatens common plants like grass trees and staghorns.

• In some places, plants and animals need occasional bushfires to keep their habitat functioning properly, just as it did for thousands of years when Aboriginal people regularly set fire to it. Now those areas don’t get burned often enough.

**What can we do?**

• It’s true that humans cause some of the problems, but we’re also helping to fix them.

• Farmers and community groups are **planting trees** along creeks to create wildlife corridors between patches of forest.

• **Rainforest seedlings**

• **Spread the word** to family and friends about endangered animals.

• **Report sightings** of endangered species to your local park ranger.

• If you see an orphaned or injured animal, contact your nearest **Wildlife Rescue** volunteers.
• Get your garden plants from nurseries, not the forest. If you see people stealing plants or damaging the environment, immediately contact your local park ranger.
• Make sure garden plants don’t escape into the forest and become weeds which choke our native plants.
• Keep your cats inside at night, and keep your dog in a fenced yard.
• Don’t tip aquariums into streams or rivers – the plants and fish can become major pests and compete with native species.

Definitions

• **Extinct**: Species are presumed extinct if they haven’t been found in the last 50 years despite thorough searching.
• **Endangered**: When species are at serious risk of disappearing from the wild within 10-20 years if current pressures continue.
• **Vulnerable**: Species are not currently endangered but are at risk of becoming endangered because of long-term population decreases, or because they are found in areas which are likely to experience changes in land use.
• **Rare**: Species may have a large population restricted to a small area, or may have a small population spread over a wide range.
• **Poorly known**: Species which are suspected of belonging to the above categories, but there’s not enough information about them.