Wildlife on last legs

Threat to 444 species

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SOME of Australia's much loved animals including the hairy-nosed wombat and cassowary are facing extinction, experts reveal.

Even our unique koala is battling for survival as its habitat is diminishing each day by the urban spread.

Australia is home to nearly one million animal species but also has one of the world's highest numbers of endangered species, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Currently, there are 444 species of fish, frogs, reptiles, birds, mammals, and other animals listed under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act.

According to scientists, the reasons for native species facing extinction varies from climatic changes to new diseases.

"The main threats to Australian wildlife include weeds and feral animals, clearance of native habitats and the alteration of natural water regimes, some of which may be worsened by the effects of climate change," a Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities spokesperson said.

Other endangered animals include the Tasmanian devil, pygmy possum and the bilby.

It is believed there are fewer than 70 Mary River turtles left in south-eastern Queensland and only 90 hairy-nosed wombats scattered around Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

Australia's leading wildlife crusader Bob Irwin is fighting to save some of these treasured animals.

"It's a potential disaster," he said. "Unfortunately for the turtles, they're not cute or cuddly like the koala, so they slip under the radar."

Lobby groups fear not enough is being done to protect our endangered species.

"It's almost like the federal government has to wait until there are 100 left before the system can kick in," Australian Koala Foundation CEO Deborah Tabart OAM said.

"A classic example of that is the Tasmanian Tiger. In 1936 there was one left when they listed it as endangered.

"The process they use is so broken, there is no big picture thinking. Common sense has to rule here."

ENDANGERED LIST

MARY RIVER TURTLE

DUGONG

HAIRY-NOSED WOMBAT

BILBY

CASSOWARY

GREEN & GOLDEN BELL FROG

GREY NURSE SHARK

PYGMY POSSUM

TASMANIAN DEVIL

KOALA