**Native vegetation clearance** is the major cause of past, present and future loss of biodiversity.

**At least 30 to 35 per cent of the landscape should be covered by natural vegetation to maintain sustainable populations of woodland birds.**

**Many areas today only have up to 5 per cent cover.**

**Revegetation is necessary and should be between 10 to 100 hectares in size and consist of multiple species and age classes.**

**Not only will revegetation save our environment but it combats soil erosion, salinity, protects existing vegetation and maintains nutrient cycling and other ecosystem services.**

**If we can put this kind of habitat back we have a very good chance of reversing the declines.**

**Action must be taken and fast to guarantee that we do not lose Scrub-robins from our Murray Mallee forever.**

**The principal objective is to study the ecology – how they live in their environment – of the remaining Scrub-robins to find out what they need as far as habitat is concerned and why they could be disappearing.**

**My work includes following Scrub-robins around and recording their behaviour, what shrubs and vegetation they like, where they eat, how big their territories are and how many birds live in a group.**

**When we compare this data with how well they rear their young we can get the very good picture of what these animals need to live and produce future generations.**

We also see which habitat is poor and causing high mortality, particularly among the young birds. This is crucial to avoid extinctions.

Next, we have to look at recreating the good habitat by revegetation. What my results show is that Scrub-robin home ranges should have between seven and eight key shrubs, such as acacia and tea-trees, per 100sq m across a home range, which may vary in size between 1 and 2ha.

If we can put this kind of habitat back we have a very good chance of reversing the declines.

By putting more habitat back – and let’s face it, we owe the Scrub-robins some – we’ll be giving the younger Scrub-robins somewhere to live, a shrub over their heads as it were, when they decide to move out of home at around 12 months of age.

**Andrew Barker is a PhD student in the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Adelaide. To find out more about the 10 Big Questions, go to: http://uwa.edu.au/sciences/10bq**

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**THE 10 BIG QUESTIONS WITH ANDREW BARKER**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE**

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**Q**

**HOW will we conserve species diversity?**

**A**

**MANY species have been lost already. An important thing to do is to look at what species are stable, which are already extinct and which are in danger of disappearing.**

It is the latter group where we are concentrating conservation efforts, a bit like a hospital emergency room triage.

Take, for example, the Southern Scrub-robin – a ground dwelling, insectivorous bird living in the South Australian Murray Mallee between the River Murray and the Victorian border.

Their favourite habitat – shrubby sand dunes – also happens to be great for agriculture, so this land has been preferentially cleared, depriving the Scrub-robins of anywhere to live.

Over the past three years, we have witnessed all isolated groups of Scrub-robins disappear, including from a national park.

Consequently, these birds are now confined to just one 2000ha farm, in a region where they are once thought to have occupied an area 170,000ha in size. That’s only about 1 per cent remaining habitat.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

* Native vegetation clearance is the major cause of past, present and future loss of biodiversity.
* At least 30 to 35 per cent of the landscape should be covered by natural vegetation to maintain sustainable populations of woodland birds.
* Many areas today only have up to 5 per cent cover.
* Revegetation is necessary and should be between 10 to 100 hectares in size and consist of multiple species and age classes.
* Not only will revegetation save our fauna but it combats soil erosion, salinity, protects existing vegetation and maintains nutrient cycling and other ecosystem services. If not, we face desertification and total biodiversity loss.

**Battle to survive**

**HOMELESS:** The Southern Scrub-robin is facing extinction with its favoured home, shrubby sand dunes, having been taken over as farmland.