

Wielangta Stag Beetle

(Broad-toothed Stag Beetle) *Lissotes latidens*

The ancient Wielangta stag beetle lives only in an area centred on Wielangta Forest in eastern Tasmania. It is one of the rarest animals in Australia. It has been recorded at fewer than 40 sites, scattered across an area of 280 km², since it was first described in 1871.

It is classified as 'endangered' by both federal and state governments because they consider that it is 'facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future'.

The Wielangta stag beetle lives and breeds in moist decaying wood underneath logs on the ground. It has no wings, and probably moves no further than tens of metres throughout its life. The supply of fallen decaying logs has to be continually replenished or the beetle will die out -- old growth forest is essential for its survival. In turn, it helps ensure the survival of the forest by breaking down dead wood, releasing nutrients, and priming old logs for a succession of other plants and animals.

It is threatened by bulldozers and burning, which disturbs litter and logs on the ground, removes the old trees which will be the decaying logs of the future, and dries out the forest by opening the canopy and favouring fast-growing young trees that suck water from the soil. If the logged forest is replaced with plantations, the beetle's habitat is entirely destroyed. If the weather continues to become drier because of global warming, the future of the Wielanta stag beetle will become even more precarious.

Tasmania is a stag beetle hot spot with more than 30 species out of a total of around 950 worldwide. For its area, the island has one of the highest concentrations of stag beetles in the world. Stag beetles are an ancient lineage thought to have evolved with the dinosaurs over 200 million years ago. They survive in places like Wielangta which is a refuge against climate change -- over the centuries the stag beetle and other plants and animals survive in suitable patches of habitat, then recolonise surrounding country when the climate again becomes favourable. Wielangta is known as an 'Ice Age Refugium'.

Much of the Wielangta Forest where the beetle lives is slated for logging. In December 2004, a male beetle was discovered on Coupe WT017E; this signifies the presence of a breeding population because it is the height of the breeding season. Bulldozing of the coupe awaited the Howard-Lennon forestry pact but resumed in late May 2005. Without court intervention to stop the work, this population will almost certainly be destroyed.

The Wielangta stag beetle is already highly endangered. Logging will drive it towards extinction.

More information

The Wielangta stag beetle was listed on the Commonwealth list of threatened species on 3 December 2002.

Neither the Tasmanian nor the Commonwealth governments have prepared a recovery plan for the beetle, even though it is one of the rarest animals in Australia.

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html>

<http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/BHAN-54Q3NF?open>