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Subject: PABIODIV: Study warns of global warming extinctions
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From ENN - Study warns of global warming extinctions, January 8, 2004
By Rick Callahan, Associated Press

Hundreds of species of land plants and animals around the globe could vanish or be on the road to extinction over the next 50 years if global warming continues, scientists warn.

The researchers concede that there are many uncertainties in both climate forecasts and the computer models they used. But they said their prediction could come to pass if industrial nations do not curtail emissions of greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere.

"We're already seeing biological communities respond very rapidly to climate warming," said Chris Thomas, a conservation biologist at the University of Leeds in England, and the study's lead author. The findings by Thomas and 18 other researchers appear in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

They found that more than one-third of the 1,103 native species they studied could disappear or approach extinction by 2050 as climate change turns plains into deserts or alters forests. Among the already threatened species that could go extinct are Australia's Boyd's forest dragon, a tree-dwelling lizard, and Europe's azure-winged magpie.

Alastair Fitter, a University of York ecologist who was not involved in the research, said climate change could hasten the effects of deforestation and the impact of invasive, nonnative species. "I think this is going to be [the] third horseman in that particular apocalypse," said Fitter, who has documented how global warming already is allowing some spring flowers to bloom increasingly early in Britain.

The researchers assessed the habitat and distribution of plant and animal species spread across six regions that included Mexico, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, and Europe. They applied climate change models developed by a U.N. panel that predicted Earth's warming trend will increase average global temperatures by 2.5 degrees to 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

Depending on the temperature increase, the researchers found that 15 percent to 37 percent of the studied species will go extinct or be on the road to extinction by 2050. A mid-range forecast of three possible global warming scenarios would claim about a quarter of the species, they found.

Earth has an estimated 14 million plant and animal species. Conservationists estimate 12,000 are threatened with extinction, although thousands of others are probably also on the brink.

Source: Associated Press

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