

maths to save wildlife

► IF SAVING the environment is your driving force, hang on to your mathematics, the University of Melbourne's Professor Mark Burgman says.

"The best way to get a job in environmental science is to do mathematics and statistics. So few students have those skills that demand far exceeds supply," he says.

Director of the Australian Centre of Excellence for Risk Analysis (ACERA) at the School of Botany, Burgman says he had no idea what he wanted to do when starting uni.

"I did science because I got my best marks in science," he says.

A chance meeting with a Russian mathematician when doing his PhD in the US inspired Burgman to change direction.

"He was writing mathematical models for plant and animal populations, trying to evaluate if people could intervene in the environment. This notion of linking risk to the idea of conserving species made my career."

Burgman now provides data to conservation groups and governments trying to save species such as the helmeted honeyeater, Leadbeater's possum and the orange-bellied parrot.

He says the beauty of maths is it makes thinking clear.