



The Sea Otter is an endangered species.

Endangered Species

There have been mass extinctions of animals five times in the history of the Earth. Each of these was caused by a natural disaster: a collision with a meteor or comet, massive volcanic explosions, glaciations and warming. Many scientists are now predicting a sixth extinction event. This time it will be caused by humans.

No one really knows, of course. But in 2002 a United Nations report stated that one-quarter of the world's mammals face extinction in 30 years. It also said that one in eight bird species is threatened and over 5,000 plants might fade from the Earth. The good news is that much of this can be prevented. The bad news is it will require that all nations cooperate.



Save the Animals. Save the World.

In May 2008, the U.S. President declared that polar bears are a “threatened species” under the Endangered Species Act. Canada’s Environment Minister responded: “Let’s be clear that there’s no doubt that global warming is a major factor and a major concern in this.” Moreover, “It’s not just global warming, but it’s human-induced global warming which is what we need to take action on.”

The problem for the polar bears is that sea ice in the arctic is receding. This reduces the habit and the food supply for polar bears. The formula is really quite simple: The Earth is warming, the seas get warmer, the ice melts, the polar bears disappear.

The polar bears are among the largest and most majestic of the Earth’s threatened and endangered species. But they have lots of company.



The Siberian Tiger is a large, rare, and highly endangered species. There may be fewer than 200 in the wild. Their habitat is reduced by deforestation and they are hunted for use in folk medicines.

Extinction is Forever



Species of large and small animals are continually disappearing from the Earth. In 2006, the International Union for Conservation of Nature issued a press release that the West African black rhinoceros is believed extinct.



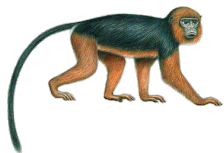
The Baiji Dolphin was also declared extinct in 2006.

The Golden Toad has not been seen in Costa Rica since 1989 and has also been declared extinct.



Are Gorillas the Next Dodos?

The flightless Dodo bird was eaten into extinction by sailors and their animals around 1662. No one seemed to care that this strange and wonderful bird went out of existence.



Apparently, the Miss Waldron Red Colobus monkey recently met the same fate. Re-

ferred to as “bushmeat”, without international intervention, it is possible that the African gorillas, bonobos, and chimpanzees may soon be eaten out existence.

What Threatens Our Animals?

The biggest threat to the Earth’s animals by far is the human species. Humans have been on Earth for around 30,000 years. Since then our population has grown to nearly 7 billion people on Earth.

The problem is the impact of all these people on the Earth’s environment. Humans burn more and more fossil fuels to generate electricity, power cars, and heat homes. This increases greenhouse gases and causes the atmosphere to warm. Resulting climate changes around the world change the habitats that animals live in. Animals that cannot adapt to these rapid changes die off.

In addition, humans clear many thousands of acres of forest daily for wood and to create farmland. This eliminates ecosystems required for the survival of some animals. Finally, humans hunt endangered species for sport, food and medicine.

What Can Be Done?

The world must stop polluting the atmosphere in order to turn back global climate change. This will require that all nations cooperate with international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol that seek to lessen the production of greenhouse gases.

Cutting down the world’s forests must also be limited. The animals need their habitat and we need the oxygen produced by the trees. More animal sanctuaries must be created and, finally, more animals that are near extinction should be included in captive breeding programs.

Endangered Species | Key Terms

bush-meat	A term used in Africa to describe meat from wild animals, including monkeys and apes.
endangered species	A population of animals or plants that is at risk of becoming extinct.
extinction	When there are no more members of species alive.
global warming	A process whereby the Earth's atmosphere, oceans and surface get warmer, often connected to increases in greenhouse gases.
greenhouse gases	Gases in the Earth's atmosphere that contribute to keeping the atmosphere and Earth warm.
habitat	An environment that is inhabited by a particular species. The habitat includes the conditions required for the species to survive.
human-induced	Something that is caused by human activity, not nature.
Kyoto Protocol	A United Nations framework for dealing with global warming.
mammal	A class of animals that give birth to live young (instead of eggs) and nurse their young. Humans, dogs, monkeys, whales and dolphins are mammals.

Discussion Points

1. There are many organizations that are concerned about endangered species. Do you know of any? Do you know what they do?
2. Animals continue to become extinct. Although there is a lot of talk about it, governments do not seem to be doing enough to protect endangered species. What do you think should be done about it?
3. Let's look specifically at the gorillas, bonobos, and chimpanzees in Africa. Although it is illegal, people still consume these closest of relatives as meat. Because of this, a reduction in habitat, and disease they are nearing extinction. How important do you feel this is? What do you think the international community should do about it?