

Endangered Species

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OS24



Ever since I was a little kid, wild animals, particularly exotic animals, have fascinated me. My mom used to take me to zoos all the time and we would spend hours looking at the different exhibits. Every summer I would go to zoo camp to be up close to these animals on a more intimate level. As I grew older, I began to realize that most of the animals that interested me the most were endangered and could go extinct. It saddened me as a kid. Now that I am older I want to learn more about the different species and why their very existence is threatened and how we can stop them from becoming extinct.

Seven animals interest me the most. They are: the Prevost's Squirrel (*callosciurus prevosti*), Broad-striped Malagasy Mongoose (*galidictis fasciata*), Red Panda (*ailurus fulgens*), Tiger (*panthera tigris*), Ethiopian Wolf (*canis simensis*), Barbary Lion (*panthera leo leo*), and Thylacine (*thylacinus cynocephalus*). They also happen to correspond to different levels on the endangered species scale, which gives us the basic information of how high of a threat these species have of disappearing in the future or if they have already become extinct in the wild.

The endangered species scale is pretty easy to follow because thankfully it is organized with different colors representing different codes. "Least concerned" is green with white writing. "Least concerned" means that the species does not qualify for a more at risk category. It is widespread and abundant, like the Prevost's Squirrel. "Near-threatened" is represented with green with light green writing. The species is close to qualifying or is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future. The Broad-striped Malagasy Mongoose is a good example of an animal that is "near-threatened". "Vulnerable" is yellow with white writing. These animals are considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild like the Red Panda. "Endangered" is portrayed in orange with white writing and they are considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild like the Tiger group (some subspecies are more endangered). "Critically endangered" is red with white writing. These animals, like the Ethiopian Wolf, are facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future. Then there are two categories of extinct. "Extinct in the wild" is represented with black with white writing and these animals, like the Barbary Lion, are only known to survive in captivity or as naturalized populations well outside their native range. Finally, there is "extinct" which is represented in black with red writing. There is no reasonable doubt that the last known individual has died, like in the case of the Thylacine, more commonly known as the Tasmanian tiger or wolf.

Prevost's Squirrels, sometimes know as the Asian Tri-colored Squirrel, are like most other tree squirrels other than their coloration. They have sharp eye site and teeth that consist of a single pair of chisel shape incisor teeth instead of canines, which grow continually but are worn back by use. Tree squirrels in general have short fore limbs with a small thumb and longer hind limbs. The Prevost's Squirrel can be found in Southeast Asia where they make their nests in trees. They are nocturnal tree squirrels and they are well adapted for moving about the trees. The tail even serves as a



balance when it jumps, runs, and climbs, acting like a rudder when the squirrel is in the air. The tail is also a way to communicate to other squirrels. Unlike ground squirrels, tree squirrels do not hibernate. Though we commonly know squirrels to primarily feed on nuts, seeds, fruits and plants, they actually eat some insects and have been known to feed on reptiles and young birds. Though it is not considered threatened, they are being subjugated to the illegal pet trade, which for an undomesticated species could end in disastrous results.



The Broad-Striped Malagasy Mongoose lives on Madagascar, an island off the south-east coast of Africa. Like all mongooses, they are a quick and agile small predator. Scientists believe mongooses are the oldest carnivorous mammals. They hunt with their excellent sense of smell and eyesight, and capture their prey with fast and precise movements. Mongooses eat everything from snakes and small rodents to insects and scorpions. Their fast pace even allows them to hunt the poisonous cobra. The Broad-Striped Malagasy Mongoose

is a solitary hunter that likes to conduct its hunts in the evening or at night, unlike most mongooses that hunt in the daytime. These mongooses live in pairs and give birth every summer to one offspring. The reason why this normally successful predator is in the “near-threatened” category is because Madagascar’s unique forests are being cut down for wood. For products we use everyday like paper and furniture.

We all know and love the Giant Panda but we are less familiar with the Red Panda. It is sometimes called the Fire Fox because of its red colorations and its bushy tail. In actuality, it is more of a small bear with a long fluffy tail. They are rather adorable and sometimes, there are popular videos of Red Panda babies on YouTube. They act like a small carnivore but they prefer to eat only the most tender shoots and leaves of bamboo. Because they eat bamboo they are predominantly found in Northeastern India and China. They seem to be very lazy animals because their food choice does not provide enough energy and their metabolisms are very slow. In fact they only cover 650 to 1,000 feet of their home ranges daily. That is only about 25% of their home ranges per month. Thick fur covers their entire body including the soles of their feet. This allows them to conserve their body heat. Red Panda’s have a slow rate of reproduction so they have a hard time recovering from population declines. As in the case of many other species, their homes are being cut down for human domestic use.



The largest of all felines is the Tiger. Its height at the shoulders can be 3 1/3 feet and the length, not including the tail, can be from 5 to 9 feet long. Their weight can be from 220 to 675 pounds depending on the sub species. In most communities they are the apex, or keystone, besides humans. Their diet mainly consists of wild game like deer, pigs, and buffalo. But they are also known to hunt Sloth Bears, dogs, leopards, crocodiles, pythons, monkeys, and hares. It has been recorded occasionally that old and injured tigers have attacked humans and domestic cattle. The tiger population has declined extremely since the 1900's, from 100,000 to a total of about 3,000 to 4,500 in the wild today. But that is just the tiger in general, the sub species tell more about their decline. The Bengal Tiger has less than 2,000 in the wild. The Siberian Tiger has only around 400 in the wild. The South Chinese Tiger is "extinct in the wild" and the Bali Tiger is "extinct". These nocturnal predators are widely known for their camouflage stripes. They face far too many threats to their existence ranging from deforestation to the black market trade. The tiger is also considered a majestic symbol of nature. Indira Gandhi once said, "To lose the tiger would be to destroy our national symbol of wildlife and a fatal blow to our ancient heritage."



The Ethiopian Wolf lives in the most interesting community on the planet. They live on the Afro-alpine grasslands and heathlands above 3,000 meters in Ethiopia. It is a predator that hunts at dusk and some of its prey includes baboons and ibexes but it mostly forages for small mammals in their habitat. Like other wolves, they have cohesive packs with a strong hierarchy. But unlike other wolves, they have communal breeding, meaning it is not just the alpha pair that is allowed to breed. The main causes for the Ethiopian Wolf's decline is because of diseases like rabies and being hit by cars.

There are only two sub species of lion that have a majestic dark belly fringe that can extend all the way to the groin with a golden halo around the face. One of them happens to be the Barbary Lion. They are pretty similar to most lions in that they have a social structure, which is an uncommon feature in the felidae family, and the same habits for mating and hunting. These were the lions often painted on Roman pottery and used in the gladiator games. It is surmised that this led to their extinction in the wild.



The Thylacine has the saddest story of extinction. Not much was known about it other than that it was a canine-like marsupial carnivore. The English sheep farmers that moved to the Tasmanian Island off the coast of Australia spread rumors that seemed to stem from mythology that the Thylacine were blood sucking vampires. The sheep farmers always blamed the Thylacine whenever a sheep in their flock was killed, even though there was no evidence that the Thylacine was the culprit. In fact it was more likely that the wild dogs got to the sheep than the Thylacine. They set up multiple private bounties for the Thylacine because of the mass public hysteria about these creatures. As a result of the ineffective action by scientists, the Thylacine became extinct before anyone did formal research on them in the wild.



All these species have one thing in common, they are disappearing (or have already disappeared) at a rapidly increasing rate and some are threatened with extinction in the near future. And the main reasons for their swift decline are directly based on the action of one group of animals: humans. We contribute to the extinction of at least one hundred different species each day. The waning of these forms of life is a clear indicator of the stress we are putting on our environment. This is a disaster because many of these animals and plants could help us improve our lives and science.

Habitat loss is a huge contributor to the extinction of animals. When you destroy an animal's natural home they often cannot adapt to the new environment and unfortunately die off. The loss of endangered species' home also leads to a decline of the animal's natural prey, and the loss of natural prey leads to animals creating "problems" with the human world. Like in the case of the tiger, with the increasing loss of its prey, it has been turning to domestic cattle. The locals then see the tiger as a nuisance and kill it. Many local cultures depend on the local habitat as well, as in the case of the red panda. If we were to save the red panda's natural habitats, the local people would be saved as well. Deforestation is also causing animals such as the Broad-Striped Malagasy Mongoose, which is usually quite common, to decrease in numbers. Climate change is also depleting the natural ranges of these creatures

Human poaching and black market trade remains a huge problem. Many endangered species' parts are considered to be extremely profitable and sell for high prices in illegal markets around the world. A good example of this is the tiger's beautiful pelt that helps it keep camouflaged when living. It is the same for any animal that can produce ivory like rhinos, elephants, and whales.

It is up to us to protect the life on this earth because it cannot be replaced. Promoting conservation and writing letters to government officials about your concerns about the illegal trade, the black market, and laws protecting certain species is a good place to start. But, it takes the change of a majority of people to come up with a sustainable solution. You can start at home

by first not buying products, such as furniture, that cause loggers to go into places like Madagascar or the Amazon rainforest and cut down its trees and destroy the homes of many animals. Donating to responsible wildlife conservation, rehabilitation, and relocation programs are also an easy way to change the world. If you are feeling really ambitious you can change your whole life style by living completely green.

We cannot let these beautiful creatures vanish like the Thylacine. We have to step up to what we know is right and go on the offense to secure these animals futures. By doing so maybe we can find a common link and head into a much brighter future.

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