

Endangered Species

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we will cover the topic of endangered species. We will discuss extinction and examine two examples of extinct species. We will also cover U.S. policy on endangered species through the Endangered Species Act and explore challenges to protecting endangered species. Specifically, this lesson will cover the following:

1. Extinction

Throughout history, there have been five major extinctions. We are currently living in what some scientists consider the sixth major extinction, also termed the Holocene extinction.

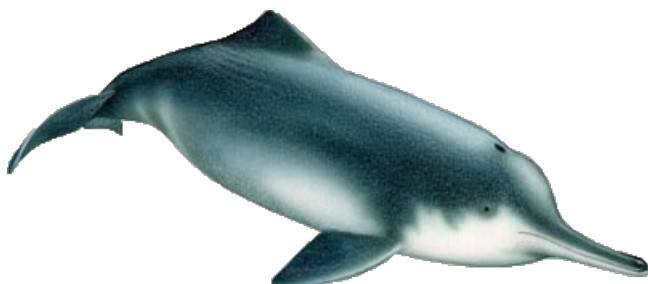
Species extinction is a natural ecological process. However, due to human activities, it is currently happening at a rate much higher than the historical average. The most detrimental impact of human activities is habitat loss, followed by pollution, introduction of invasive species, and the removal of species from their environment.



HINT

Keystone species are those that, when impacted, can affect a large number of other species in an ecosystem because many systems are connected to them.

➞ **EXAMPLE** The Chinese river dolphin, shown below, is thought to have gone extinct around 2006, when a research team spent 6 weeks attempting to find any of it in the Yangtze River. Its decline has been attributed to overexploitation, pollution, and underwater explosions.



➞ **EXAMPLE** Another species that has gone extinct is the golden toad. It is thought to have gone extinct in 1989. Its home was in the Monteverde Cloud Forest of Costa Rica. Its extinction has been attributed to warmer seasons and a specific type of fungus that grows on the toad's skin and kills it.



2. Endangered Species Act

The United States passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, which required the listing and protection of species identified as threatened or endangered within the United States.

- Threatened species are species with a high likelihood of becoming endangered.

➔ **EXAMPLE** A threatened species is the Guadalupe fur seal, which was added as threatened in 1985.

- Endangered species are species that have become so few in numbers that they are in danger of becoming extinct in a large part of their habitat.

➔ **EXAMPLE** An endangered species is the false killer whale, which was added to the list of endangered species in 2012.

When a species is protected by the Endangered Species Act, it means that there are restrictions placed around activities of individuals and private industries that might impact the species or their habitat range. Restrictions under the Act can be from local, state, and federal governments.

3. Challenges to Protecting Endangered Species

There are several challenges to protecting endangered species. The following are some of them:

- Scientists often focus on an individual species instead of looking at ecosystems as a whole. This makes it

difficult to identify species in danger and the causes.

- Often, by the time scientists identify that a species is potentially threatened or endangered, it may be too late to protect them or reverse their decline.
- Efforts to protect species are sometimes slow because of a lack of funding and the challenge of enforcing protection.
- Some species are seen as more appealing to save.



THINK ABOUT IT

In an ad campaign, which of these two species do you think would be more likely to receive funding for protection, despite the fact that both are endangered?



SUMMARY

In this lesson, we learned about **extinction**, including two examples of species that have gone extinct—the Chinese river dolphin and the golden toad. We also learned about the **Endangered Species Act**, which represents U.S. policy on endangered species. Finally, we learned about the **challenges to protecting endangered species**.

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