



Some animals and plants in our world are very **common**, like houseflies, cats or **daisies**. They are not in danger of dying out. Other species are very **rare**. Sometimes only a few of them are left. Such **species** may **disappear** forever.

Ever since life on Earth began, animals and plants have died out and new ones have **appeared**. Dinosaurs, for example, **roamed** the planet during the Earth's middle ages. 65 million years ago, they simply **vanished** forever.

Animals and plants need each other to **survive**. They keep the world of nature **in balance**. If a certain plant dies out, some animals may become **extinct** too, because they **depend on** the plant for food.

Why species become extinct

Long ago, most animals and plants became extinct because of natural events, like earthquakes or volcano **eruptions**. Climatic changes, like the beginning of the Ice Age, also led to the **disappearance** of certain **species**. Today, plants and animals are in danger mostly because of human beings.

Some plants and animals can **survive** in many areas. When they move to other places, they **adapt** to their new **environment** very quickly. Others can only live in certain areas. We call such a living place a **habitat**. If a habitat is destroyed, the species cannot find any more food or a place to live, sleep or have babies. So, it dies out.

Habitats can be destroyed in many ways. More and more people live in our world. They need more space to live in. Rainforests, grasslands and other parts of nature are **cleared**, and people start to **settle** there. They take away the natural home of plants and animals.

Pollution can also kill off certain species. **Acid rain** from factories goes down in rivers and lakes and can **poison** fish there.

The most **endangered** areas are the tropical rainforests. More than 50 % of all animals and plants live there. Every day, thousands of **acres** of rainforest are destroyed and many species become extinct every day.

Ever since man **appeared** on Earth, he has killed animals and **gathered** plants. They have been used for food, medicine, clothes and to make homes. Cheetahs, tigers and other wild cats have been killed for their skins. Whales have been hunted for centuries because of their oil and **blubber**.



Most animals today are **protected** by international law, but many, like the black rhinoceros and the African elephant are hunted **illegally**. Some species, like wolves, have been killed by humans because they were seen as a danger to farm animals.

Sometimes **native** animals become endangered when a new species comes to live in a place. Foxes were brought to Australia to kill off rabbits, which were seen as a **pest**. But instead of killing rabbits, the foxes killed kangaroos and other **marsupials** of Australia.

Parasites belong to the greatest **threats** to plants and animals. **Tiny organisms**, bacteria and **fungi** can destroy trees, kill birds and fish.

Protection

People have hurt plants and animals, but they are also **willing** to help them **survive**. All over the world, organizations like the World Wildlife Fund, the Rainforest Action Network or Friends of the Earth are helping to **protect habitats**. They **raise** money for their projects and make **governments** and the **public** listen to them. New **laws** have also been made to protect **endangered** plants and animals all over the world.

Some of the world's endangered animals

Elephants	African and Indian elephants are killed for their tusks , which are used for ivory earrings and other art objects
Pandas	The giant panda lives in zoos and in some parts of China. There are only about 1,500 left in the world today
Reptiles	Reptiles (lizards, crocodiles and alligators) are killed for their skins. People make leather handbags and shoes.
Sea turtles	Sea turtles are in danger because people collect their eggs. They often die in the sea because of water pollution .
Tigers	There are only about five thousand tigers left in the world today. They live in southern Asia, mostly in national reserves .
Bald Eagles	The bald eagle is the national symbol of the USA. The bird almost died out at the beginning of the century , but today the population is stable .



Endangered plants

For **centuries**, the Bermuda cedar was cut down because people needed material for houses and **furniture**. **Conservationists** have helped **protect** the trees that are left .

Some cactus types are in danger of becoming **extinct** because they grow slowly and are hurt by animals.

The World Wildlife Fund

In 1960, biologist Sir Julian Huxley returned from a **research** trip to Africa. He was very much shocked by what he had seen there: the hunting of **rare animals** and the destruction of their **habitat**. Other **scientists** shared his opinion that something had to be done about this. The following year, Huxley, some **fellow** scientists and a few **politicians founded** the World Wildlife Fund. It became the largest conservation group in the world.



The giant panda is the symbol of the WWF

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Today, the WWF has 5 million **supporters** around the world. It has national organizations in more than 50 countries and **raises** more than 100 million dollars a year.

The most important **task** of the WWF is to **protect endangered** species. Among them are the tiger, whale, elephant and many others. The giant panda, one of the most endangered animals, has become the WWF logo.

The WWF also tries to protect habitats like the tropical rainforest. In the past **decade** alone, it has been able to **conserve** over 1 billion **acres** of forest in Asia, South America and Africa.

The organization fights against the **pollution of natural resources**, and it is worried about the destruction of fish in the world's oceans.

Over the past years, the WWF has been working on projects in over one hundred countries. It also gives money to research and spends a lot to teach children and parents about our world in danger.