



Endangered Species

What do we mean by 'endangered species'?

Endangered species are those whose population numbers have become so low that they are threatened with extinction. Although endangered species refers to both plants and animals, in this context, we are referring to animals.

Endangered species – the facts

According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, there are 6,114 endangered and critically endangered animal species worldwide.¹

Habitat loss and fragmentation of habitat are the two most factors in species endangerment, with habitat loss the most important factor.²

The illegal trade in animal wildlife and wildlife products, whether live animals or products such as ivory and rhino horn, has been estimated to be worth up to as much as \$23 billion, annually.³

Overfishing has resulted in populations of large ocean fish dropping to just 10% of pre-industrial-era population sizes.⁴

What drives extinction and endangerment of animals?

In many places, increasing human populations and the expansion of human settlement results in habitat loss that affects both plant and animal species.

Human greed is another key driver – governments sell logging rights to companies that, in turn, clear vital forest habitats, and the basic motivating factor for both is profit. The clearing of rainforests to plant palm oil plantations or provide grazing for beef cattle is also driving habitat loss and a resulting loss of species in South America and Asia. The potential for large corporate profits also drives much overfishing.

Human ignorance is also driving species towards extinction – the demand for products such as rhino horn for use as 'traditional medicine' is based on folklore, not fact, as these products have no efficacy. Tourists can be tempted to buy souvenirs while on holiday, not knowing that they are made from protected or endangered species (plant or animal).

What does the Bible say?

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1.24–25)

The diversity of creation is pleasing to God, and part of the goodness of the world.

For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.' (Genesis 6.17–21)

This passage shows that the preservation of species is important to God, and is one of the things that God has tasked humans to do.



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For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth? (Ecclesiastes 3.19–21).

We should remember our similarity with other animal life, that we are all of the earth. All, therefore, are entitled to their share of the earth. This passage makes clear that we should not be arrogant or presumptuous about human life after death. It is also a reminder that humanity does not, and cannot, live in isolation. Our well-being is connected to that of other life on the planet.

The Bible also has something to say about putting money first

You cannot serve God and wealth (Matthew 6.24).

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6.10).

If we are to be faithful to our calling as Christians, we cannot put profit above caring for the earth and its creatures.

And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. (Mark 16.15).*

We are called to proclaim the good news to all creation – for this to be genuine, we must also be good news, and that means living in ways that protect creation and allow all of God's creatures to flourish.

What can Christians do?

- Pray – include wildlife and endangered species in both public worship and private prayer.
- Shop wisely – make sure that wood and paper products come from sustainable sources; avoid products containing palm oil (or, if unavoidable, use those that contain sustainably sourced palm oil); do not buy products that may contain products produced from endangered species.
- Support – there are many charities, such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Friends of the Earth, Defenders of Wildlife and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) that work to prevent habitat loss and to protect endangered species, and they deserve our support.
- Make your voice heard – write to your representatives in local and national government to make them aware that you want laws prohibiting the trade in protected wildlife, and those protecting vital habitats, to be robustly enforced. In the UK and other European countries, you can write to your MEP and ask him or her what they are doing to prevent the illegal trade in wildlife, what they are doing to prevent habitat loss and overfishing.
- Spread the word – tell friends, colleagues and others about the problems affecting endangered species, and encourage them to get involved in protecting the world's vulnerable wildlife.