

Conservation and Endangered Species

Week 32 — Monday | Protecting Our Planet's Animals

Reading Time

Over this 32-week science journey, we've learned about the incredible diversity of life on Earth — from tiny insects to massive whales, from arctic tundra to tropical rainforests. But did you know that many of these amazing animals are in trouble? **Conservation** is the practice of protecting animals, plants, and their habitats to ensure they survive for future generations. When we protect nature, we are also protecting ourselves because humans rely on healthy ecosystems for clean air, water, and food.

An **endangered species** is an animal or plant that is at serious risk of disappearing from the Earth forever. When a species disappears completely and no more exist anywhere, we call it **extinct**. Sadly, extinction has happened many times in Earth's history — dinosaurs are extinct! But today, many extinctions are happening much faster than usual, and they are caused by human activities. The **red panda**, **mountain gorilla**, **Amur leopard**, and **vaquita porpoise** are just a few of the animals currently fighting for survival.

There are five major threats to animal species today. **1. Habitat loss** is the biggest threat. When humans cut down forests, build cities, or drain wetlands for farming, animals lose their homes. **2. Pollution** (plastic in the ocean, chemicals in the air and water, and oil spills) poisons animals and their habitats. **3. Climate change** makes the planet warmer, melting polar ice (hurting polar bears and penguins) and changing ocean chemistry (killing coral reefs). **4. Invasive species** happen when animals or plants are introduced to a new area and outcompete native species for food and space. **5. Overhunting and overfishing** — taking too many animals faster than they can reproduce.

Reading Questions

1. What is conservation and why is it important?

2. What is the difference between an endangered species and an extinct species?

3. List the five major threats to animals today.

4. Explain how climate change affects polar bears. Explain how it affects coral reefs.

Vocabulary Grid

Write a definition or draw a picture for each word.

 **Conservation**

 **Endangered**

 **Extinct**

 **Pollution**

 **Climate Change**

 **Invasive Species**

Threats to Biodiversity Chart

Fill in the chart with examples of how each threat hurts animals.

Threat	How It Hurts Animals	Animal Example
Habitat Loss		
Pollution		
Climate Change		
Invasive Species		
Overhunting/Overfishing		

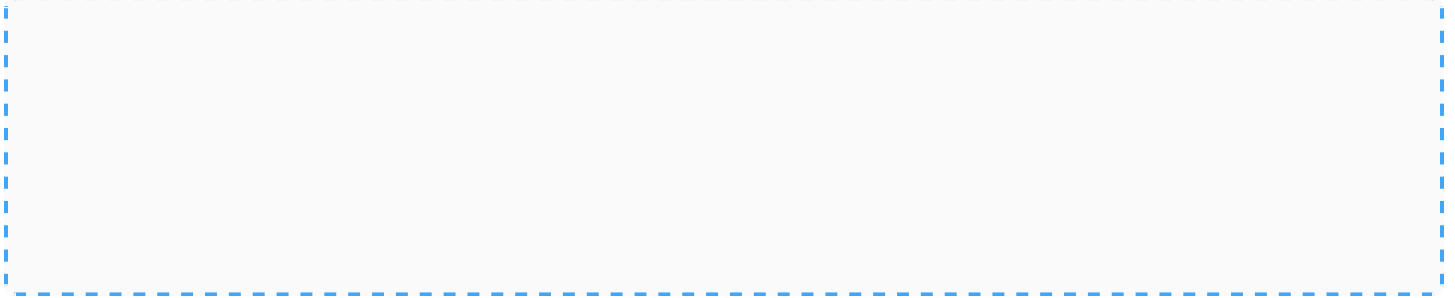
Endangered or Not?

Research or guess: Write "Endangered" (E) or "Stable/Not currently endangered" (S) next to each animal.
(Check with a book or website!)

Animal	Status (E or S)	Why is it endangered? (If E)
African Elephant		
Blue Whale		
House Cat		
Sea Turtle		
Red Panda		
House Sparrow		
Amur Leopard		
Tuna (Bluefin)		

Draw an Endangered Animal

Choose one endangered animal. Draw it, label its habitat, and write why it is endangered.



Animal name: _____ Habitat: _____

Why is it endangered? _____

Think About It

If a species becomes extinct, can it ever come back? Why or why not?

Why do you think it's important to save animals that you will never see in your lifetime?

What is one thing you think is the hardest about protecting endangered animals? Why?
