

Animals under threat of extinction



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

More than 16, 000 species of animals, birds, fish and plants are under serious threat of becoming extinct. Why is this, and is there anything we can do with it?

Introduction:

The panda, the tiger, the blue whale and the mountain gorilla. These are just a few examples of animals critically endangered with extinction. In fact, according to the IUCN Red List, about 22 percent of all mammal species are threatened by extinction. In this assignment, I will consider a statement in our English book; “ More than 16, 000 species of animals, birds, fish and plants are under serious threat of becoming extinct.” I chose this statement because I hadn’t really considered the fact before, and was shocked after having done some research to find what extinction of that many species could mean to our planet. All I know at this point is what it says in the statement. What I would like to know after having written the assignment is whether this affects us or not and if it is a global problem. I would like to learn about extinction in general, and how species actually are extinct. I also want to find out if we can stop extinction, or if extinction is a natural part of specie’s existence.

Is this a global problem?

Many of the endangered species are essential for other species survival, and in the long run, they might even play a big part of the existence of human beings. Every single species on earth is a part of a food chain. The extinction of a species may mean the end of another group of organisms. The eventual extinction of rainforests is a good example of this. The rainforests are a huge part of life on earth as we know it. It is assumed that between 50 and 70

percent of all species on earth are somehow connected to the rainforests, and research shows the rainforests hides millions of species yet to be discovered. Once, the glorious forests covered about 14 percent of the earth's surface. Today, we are down to 6 percent, and it is decreasing by more than 6000 square metres every single day. This is not only a huge crisis for the wild life in the rainforests (research shows that nearly 150 species disappear every day because of the deforestation), but through the photosynthesis process, the rainforests are responsible for 28 percent of the earth's oxygen turnover. This, combined with the heavy increase in the world's population, might turn out to be a major problem. Additionally, by tearing down the rainforests, we might miss the cure for several deceases, considering that more than 25 percent of all natural medicines ever discovered, have their roots in the rainforests. We can assume that the last few remaining rainforests will be wiped of the face of the earth within 40 years.

Extinction in general.

The term extinction is used when a species reaches its end of existence. An estimated 99, 9 percent of every species of animals and plants ever to have existed on our planet, are now extinct, and according to an environmental article in The Independant, scientists claim that about 50 percent of all existing species today will be extinct by the 22nd century. Most extinction happens before a race is even discovered. The definition extinction is used about a species when there are no more surviving members of the species that can reproduce, to create another generation of said species. Today, the group of extinct animals increases rapidly every day. According to a recent

survey by the American Museum of Natural History, 70 percent thinks that this mass extinction is an even greater threat to our existence than climate changes. Most scientists also believe that the mass extinction and its consequences are greatly underestimated, and needs to be dealt with.

Endangered species:

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, about 40 percent of every living organism on our planet is threatened with extinction. This, of course, only includes the little percentage of species discovered. There are different grades of endangerment, according to the IUCN Red List of endangered species, the first being “Least Concern”. This means the species faces no current threat of extinction. Some examples are the common mouse and the wood pigeon. Next category is “Near threatened”, and includes animals such as the tiger shark and the solitary eagle. These species may be threatened by extinction soon. The third category is called “Conservation dependent”. Some species under this category are the spotted hyena and the killer whale, and they are not critically endangered, but conservation programs are required. “Vulnerable” is the fourth grade, and these species, including the komodo dragon and the polar bear, are currently facing a risk of becoming extinct. The blue whale and the giant panda are species categorised as “Endangered”, and are in near future facing a great risk of becoming extinct. The species under the category “Critically Endangered” are facing an extreme risk of becoming extinct in near future. A species in this group is the mountain gorilla. “Extinct in the wild” is the category with species where only members of the species in captivity exist. The last category is “Extinct”, and the species under this category

have reached they're end of existence. There are no living individuals of the species. The " Extinct" category includes the dodo, the mammoth and more recently, the Baiji river dolphin (the species was declared extinct in 2006) and the West-African black rhinoceros (declared extinct in 2006).

Why and how does a species get extinct?

There are several ways for a species to get extinct. One way for a species to get extinct is if a species in its food chain faces extinction. For example, in a specific forest, the fox, the rabbit and the grass may be a part of a food chain, where the main part of the fox's diet consists of rabbits, which main diet consists of grass. If one year, the amount of grass is lower than usual, the rabbits may be failing in numbers as well, due to lack of food, and this could lead to that the amount foxes will decrease as well, because they will have a smaller amount of rabbits to feed on. In this scenario, the fox would probably go ahead and find another main source of food, but let's say the food chain is to only consist of these three species. The next year, because the amount of rabbits being eaten by foxes is lower, because the foxes didn't have as much food as usual, and the number of foxes is lower than usual, there would be an increase in the stock of rabbits. The next year again, the number of foxes would increase, because there is more rabbits to feed on. And like this, the food chain runs in a loop. This shows that all species depend on each other, and the amount of one species depends on the amount of another species. Climate changes are another reason for animal extinction, and the main reason for the growing concern of the polar bears existence. According to this article from a Norwegian online newspaper, the polar bears are forced to swim much longer distances than before, because

of the melting of the Arctic ice. This is a huge problem for the polar bear cubs, which simply are born with a layer of fat too thin to survive for long in the ice-cold water. The melting of the ice also means it is increasingly more difficult for the polar bears to find food. Another reason for species extinction is human interaction. The dodo and the West-African black rhinoceros are great examples of this. The dodo was first seen in the early 1600s when Dutch sailors discovered the island Mauritius. The dodo had stubby wings, and was heavy and slow, an easy target for hungry Dutchmen. In less than 80 years, the dodo was extinct. The sailors who ate them and the fact that their nests were destroyed by rodents the sailors had brought with them. The West-African black rhinoceros' horn was believed to be a form for aphrodisiac in parts of Yemen and China, so the species was a popular target for hunters. The species was declared extinct, when conservationists were unable to find any remaining individuals, in 2006.

Conclusion.

I believe there is no way for us people to stop extinction caused by natural changes, as it is a natural part of a species existence. However, endangered species caused by human actions, such as species being hunted for a part of the animal, like elephants' tusks, sharks' fins and rhinoceros' horns is possible to stop by refuse to support these actions. The same is for the destruction of the rainforests, which I believe we need to do something about. Species extinction caused by climate changes, on the other hand, I don't think we are going to be able to stop. We can't undo whatever damage we have already caused our planet. If the climate changes turns out to be a

part of human actions though, we may be able to stop future extinctions caused by changes in the climate.