

Some Endangered Species

Giant Panda

Pandas live in the Himalayan range of central Asia, generally at altitudes between 5,000 and 10,000 feet (1,524 and 3,048 meters). It is believed that this territory is only a fraction of their former range. A few thousand years ago, giant pandas roamed throughout much of eastern China. Their range was diminished largely by the destruction of their natural habitat, the bamboo forest on steep mountain slopes.



The primary danger to giant pandas is the destruction of their bamboo habitat caused by development. According to some maps, roads now penetrate the deep bamboo forests.

Key Deer

A subspecies of white-tailed deer, the Key deer of the Florida Keys prefer the hardwood, pine, and mangrove forests by day, but venture into meadows at night to feed. This deer has lived in isolation from the continental United States for thousands of years and exhibits solitary behavior that contrasts sharply with other white-tailed deer, which are communal in nature. About the size of a large dog, the Key deer breeds from September to November when it is three to five years old and usually has one offspring.

Motor traffic and loss of habitat caused by resort development have devastated the Key deer population, reducing it to fewer than 300 members. Strategies for strengthening the deer population include extending the boundaries of the Key Deer Refuge, enforcing lower speed limits at night, and filling the deep ditches in which fawns often drown.

Bengal Tiger

Lurking in the forests and mangrove swamps of India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, the 500-pound (226.5-kg) Bengal tiger subsists on a daily diet of about 60-80 pounds (27.2-36.2 kg) of meat. Of the 40,000 tigers found in India in 1900, fewer than 2,000 of these carnivores remained in 1973. Habitat loss of both tigers and their prey and direct killing of tigers are principal factors in reducing the population. So extensive is the loss of habitat that the Bengal tiger often resorts to killing livestock. Three of the eight subspecies of tigers are already considered extinct. With conservation efforts that involve both preservation of habitat space and natural prey, the number of Bengal tigers has recently increased to about 4,000.

Jaguarundi

Weighing 10-15 pounds (4.5-6.8 kg), this wild cat is indigenous to the Americas, living in regions that vary from the tropical Central and South American forests to the deserts of Texas, Arizona, and Mexico. Unlike most wild cats, the jaguarundi actively hunts for its meals (usually rodents) during morning hours, instead of at night. The jaguarundi abandons its solitary existence only to mate. This agile cat is endangered by habitat destruction and poaching.

Red Ruffed Lemur

Although resembling monkeys, the lemur stands distinct from other primates because of its smaller brain, pointed snout, comb-like teeth, and scent glands. Inhabiting the tropical rain forests of eastern Madagascar, this endangered animal feeds on fruit and flowers during the day.

Separated from mainland Africa by nearly 200 miles and for approximately 65 million years, Madagascar is home to plants and animals that are found no place else on Earth. The prosimians, a primitive group of primates to which red ruffed lemurs belong, is an example. Deforestation and hunting of these animals contribute to dwindling populations. Fourteen species of prosimians are extinct.