Animals

Endangered Animals

"Our ancestors viewed the Earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it. It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past which resulted from ignorance. Today, however, we have access to more information, and it is essential that we re-examine ethically what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass on to coming generations. Our marvels of science and technology are matched if not outweighed by many current tragedies, including human starvation in some parts of the world, and the extinction of other life-forms. The exploration of space takes place at the same time as the Earth's own oceans, seas, and fresh water areas grow increasingly polluted. Many of the Earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even micro-organisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability, and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late." (The Dalai Lama)

* His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, spiritual leader of the Buddhist faith

**Answer:**

*"I've found the missing lynx!"*

**Riddle?**

What did the scientist say when she discovered a wildcat thought to be extinct?

(From: <https://tunza.eco-generation.org>)

**Africa**

WHITE RHINOCEROS

The White rhinoceros is one of the largest Northern subspecies ever to be described by scientists. This subspecies was classified in 1908. Today, it is very close to extinction in the wild, and few have ever been brought into captivity. The first captive White rhinos were received at the Antwerp Zoo, Belgium, in 1950. However, while they grew to maturity, these animals never bred. They have only bred at the Vychodoc'eska Zoo at Dvur Kralove in Czechoslovakia. The first southern white rhino that was ever born in captivity was born at Pretoria on June 8, 1967.

Figure : White Rhino

The most successful breeding of the White rhino in captivity has occurred in the [San Diego Wild Animal Park](http://www.sandiegozoo.org). Seventy-five white Rhinos have been born as of 1988.

The white rhino is slightly larger than the black rhino with a larger head and body. They can weigh up to two tons and have a maximum age of up to fifty years. The horns of the rhino are the exact same substance as fingernails (keratin). The rhino is quite active and swift and can reach speeds of up to thirty m.p.h. This animal is surprisingly agile for its large size and can make sharp turns as it runs.

With a very acute sense of smell, it plays a large role in their social life. Mothers can identify their children or members of a particular "home-range". Their sense of smell also helps identify the territory of others. The female rhinoceros has a gestation period of fifteen-sixteen months, in which only one calf is born.

AFRICAN WILD

African Wild Asses are often referred to as the true asses and the domesticated ones we see today are believed to be descended from them. They are found scattered on the plains of Africa and travel in groups.

The asses are small, sturdy animals of from three to five feet at shoulder height. They are coloured from bluish grey to the colour fawn, with whitish muzzles and underparts. They are very swift runners and are able to inhabit acrid regions as they have become well adapted to suit the harsh deserts in which they live in.

The asses are very territorial. Stallions maintain areas under them and dominate over any of the other asses that come in their group. There is a very strong social bond between the females and the foals, where the foals are inseparable from their mothers the first few years of their lives.

The herds are formed when several asses come together casually.

These asses are endangered because of the interbreeding between them and other species and cause the wild asses descendants to become fewer and soon vanish. Illegal hunting and poaching for sport and body parts has also caused their rapid declination.

LEOPARD

Leopards are mainly found over nearly the whole of Africa, south of the Sahara, northeast and Asia. They are well known for their dark spots arranged in rosettes over much of their body without the central spot as found in jaguars.

Besides being known for their spots, they are also known for running very fast with up to speeds of about one hundred kilometres per hour. They also have the agility to climb trees as well as swim.

Their diet consist of antelope, wild pigs, monkeys, porcupines, birds and domestic livestock. They favour dogs as a meal. If they are unable to lure a dog out of the village, leopards are known to go right into the village to get the dog they want. They frequently store the remains of their kill up on trees for protection among the branches while they eat or rest.

In the past, leopards were considered a nuisance to cattle and were frequently shot or hunted. But as man destroyed their habitat for cattle, farming and other human activities, the leopards had nowhere to survive and their prey decreased due to immigration and lack of food.

Therefore leopards had no choice but to kill cattle and domestic livestock. As a result, man killed them to protect their livestock. This caused the leopards to decrease drastically.

Besides that, the leopards were poached illegally for their valuable skin and body parts. In the 1980s and 1990s, the demand for their skins increased sharply due the furs’ popularity in fashion.

Figure : Leopards

Due the conservation efforts, these leopards are now a protected species in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and most parts of the world. Efforts also have been made to hand breed them and then be released in the wild or enclosures are being made.

GAZELLE

Gazelles are found in Africa and in Mongolia in Asia. They usually live in open plains and deserts. They are founds in herds of five to ten, but herds up to several hundred are found.

Gazelles are known for their graceful movements and alertness. Their colour consists of a shade of brown with white under parts and a horizontal black band running along each side of their body. Most species have horns on both of the sexes, with the horns often lyre-shaped. They run with a skip and have an amazing swiftness.

Gazelles are herbivores meaning they only eat plants. They forage among shrubs and short trees leaves. They are often hunted by other animals as a source of food. They use their swiftness to escape.

These graceful animals are endangered due the poaching for their skins and horns. Their habitats are also being destroyed by human development such as farming and cattling. Conservation efforts such as making their habitat area an enclosure for them and banning illegal poaching has helped a bit in their increase.

**Asia**

GIANT PANDA



Figure : Giant Panda

An estimated seven hundred Giant Pandas are left in the world today, living in the high mountains in coniferous forests and bamboo thickets in central China.

Since 1979 the San Diego Zoological Society has been working with Chinese zoos to spread the conservation message about the Chinese Giant Pandas. Before the Giant Pandas were exported as State gifts, but now they are "loaned" as "conservation Pandas." For example, two pandas visited for two hundred days in 1987 and 1988 at the San Diego Zoo and over two million people came and visited and enjoyed the Giant Pandas.

The Giant Pandas primary food source is bamboo. They eat it almost twelve hours a day and for the rest of the day they sleep. In the course of a year they eat almost 10,000 pounds of bamboo. However the giant panda routinely eats birds, snakes and bamboo rats. Giant Pandas live up to an age of 15 years in captivity and when one gives birth only one baby is born.

SUMATRAN TIGER

Once flourishing in the forests of Asia, there are now fewer than five thousand tigers left in the world. Already the Caspian and Malinese tigers are extinct. However, there finally is a law that bans hunting of tigers everywhere. Unfortunately there is even a greater threat to them which they face, a far greater threat than hunters.

Thousands of tigers have been killed in the last 50 years because their habitat has been destroyed by bulldozers and chainsaws. Already more than 80 per cent of India's forests have been destroyed. Still more forests are being cut down in order to sell firewood and lumber, plus to clear the land for farming.

Despite all of the hardships and disasters that this animal has endured, the tiger population has actually risen over the last ten years. This has only been possible through strict laws protecting these magnificent animals and wilderness preserves around the world. However, this is just a small step in saving the tigers. New preserves must be added, but finding these preserves will not be easy. There must be enough water, prey, and plants for their prey to feed on. The people living near the tigers must manage and control the commercial use of the lands natural resources.

KOMODO DRAGON



Figure : Komodo Dragon

The Komodo dragon is the largest living lizard on earth. Discovered in 1912 on small islands in Indonesia, this lizard can weigh over 350 pounds and grow over 10 feet long.

There are several differences between the female and the male Komodo Dragons. The female is an olive-brown colour with yellow patches on her throat. She has an incubation period of 6-8 weeks and can lay up to 25 eggs. All Komodo Dragons reach a sexual maturity at the age of 3-5 years and live over the age of 25. Male dragons are a lot larger and vary in colour from a dark grey to a brick red.

These reptiles are the largest predators on the islands in which they live. They hunt hog-deer, wild pig, macaques, rats, and dig up eggs of mound birds (the mound birds eggs are considered a free treat whenever a Komodo dragon crosses their path). When they eat, the dragons take a huge chunk of flesh of the preys' body. Using their forefeet to hold down the prey, the Komodo dragon then swallows the flesh without chewing. Komodo Dragons use their eyes to locate prey and find it extremely difficult to see stationary animals. They have a rudimentary sense of hearing and a fairly acute sense of smell.

When they are born Komodo Dragons are left to fend for themselves. Sometimes their parents can forget they are their children and eat them. Up until the age of about 2-3 years old they are able to climb up trees and stay there. Climbing protects them from the predators on the ground and they capture prey by jumping down and landing on their unsuspecting backs. This sudden attack is one of the only ways a young dragon can survive; the other way is their surprising speed. Even a full grown lizard can run up to 35 miles per hour.

When the Komodo Dragons eats, there is a strict order of priority feeding enforced by the males. The strongest male will eat first and not let any others eat until he has had his share. However females are allowed to eat without any interference and can tolerate each other’s presence.

The Komodo Dragon makes a burrow about 3-6 feet wide in the ground and can be active both in the day and the night. In the night they use their tongue to find their way in the dark, for it has an extremely sensitive sense of taste and scent stimuli.

Male Komodo Dragons are territorial. During their mating period they engage in "boxing matches" with each other. However they do not use their claws, teeth or their strong, powerful tail.

TAPIR



Figure 5: Tapir

Tapirs are found in small groups in the tropical rain forests of Malaysia and Central America. They are short-legged and heavy-bodied with small eyes, rounded ears and small trunks protruding over their mouths. Their body hairs are often short and usually sparse. The main source of food is grass and shrubs as well as certain roots.

The central American tapirs are plain grey or brown in colour, but the Malaysian tapirs have a distinct black and white pattern. The heads, shoulders and legs are black while the rumps, backs and bellies are white. The young are completely different from their parents, with a dark brown colour and streaked as well as spotted with yellowish white.

Tapirs are shy and often travel near water. When they are disturbed, they will crash wildly through the undergrowth and hide in the water.

Tapirs are easy prey as they do not run fast and do not have special defences, therefore easily become victims to carnivorous animals and hunters. Their habitat, the rain forests are also depleting quickly destroyed by human activities, leading even more to their decline.

SELADANG or GAUR

The seladang or otherwise known as gaur or forest buffalo are found in India, Burma and Malaysia. Their build is larger than any other wild cattle with shoulder heights of up to six feet or more. They are heavy bodied with a high ridge on the forepart of the back and possess curved horns on their heads and white stocking feet.

The bulls are dark brown or blackish in colour while the cows and the young are reddish brown.

They used to be found throughout the country but are now found in scattered herds in certain parts of the area. This is due to the deforestation of their habitat by man. They are also hunted for their meat and for sport.

BIRDS OF PARADISE

The bird of paradise is noted for its vibrant colours and bizarre shapes of the male birds’ plumage during the mating season. They are found in the New Guinea highlands and islands and some are also found in Australia.

Figure : Birds or Paradise

The males' colourful plumage is used to attract females during their breeding season. The females are dull brown with scattered brown specks. Courting males will strut around on a chosen perch or a cleared spacing on the forest floor for hours, showing off their magnificent feathers of different shapes and sizes. After mating, the females will go off and make a nest on their own, taking care of the young unaided.

Some birds of paradise have extra-long tail and flank feathers trailing behind as they fly while some are adorned with colourful feathers around the neck which can be erected to form ruffs.

Naturally, when explorers from other countries came to the land, the brightly coloured birds caught their attention. A few were brought back to their homeland and the Bird of Paradise feathers soon became a fashion statement. By the nineteenth century, popular demand of the feathers had made the number of birds decline rapidly and almost caused extinction. Fortunately, conservation efforts managed to save the species before they were wiped out but the number of surviving birds are still small even today due to illegal poaching in their habitat.

LEATHERBACK TURTLE

Leatherback Turtles are found in most warm seas, often migrating from one continent to another. They are the largest of all turtles, sometimes weighing more than 1500 pounds. Their shells are covered by a thick layer of smooth leathery skin, instead of scales. Unlike other turtles, their ribs and backbones are not joined to the shell. These turtles have huge strong front flippers which can propel them in the water at high speeds.

Leatherback Turtles have a very unique way of laying their eggs. From August to September, female turtles travel vast distances just to lay their eggs on the exact spot where they had laid their eggs previously. Without fail, their homing instincts are always right and rarely do they lose their way to their nesting site. As soon as they reach the shore, they will not rest until they have arrived at their nesting grounds. By using their giant flippers, they heave themselves up towards the spot and dig a deep hole in the sand. In this hole, they will lay about 100 to 200 soft rubbery eggs at one time. While they are laying the eggs, they will start shedding tears to excrete the excess salt from their bodies while swimming in the sea water. Once they are finished, the turtles will cover up the hole with sand and return to the sea, only coming next year to the same spot to dig another hole to lay eggs.

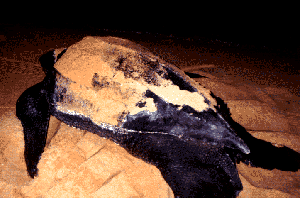


Figure : Turtle

The heat of the sun will warm the eggs and after a period of time, the hatchlings will climb out of the sand and crawl towards the sea. Even though many turtles are hatched, many do not survive the first few weeks of their lives. There are many predators such as seagulls who prey on the young turtles. The baby turtle's hard shell has not yet formed and has no hardened defence against the attackers. Some turtles are caught in fishermen's nets and left out to die. Other turtles are caught between the wastes man created such as plastic bags and eventually die of suffocation and strangulation.

To make matters worse, Leatherback Turtles are hunted for their ornamental shell while their eggs are considered delicacies. Illegal gathering for eggs to be sold in markets also helps in the decline of these turtles.

The coming ashore of the Leatherback Turtles to lay their eggs have become quite a spectacle and have drawn large crowds to witness this event. Unfortunately, the crowds created a large amount of noise and drove many turtles away. They also made campfires which scared them away.

In order to protect them, the Malaysian government has declared it as a protected animal. Various rules and regulations have been made and huge fines imposed on those who break the law.

JAPANESE IBIS

The Japanese Ibis has a white body with a red face. They often wade in shallow lagoons, bays and marshes. They use their long slightly curved bills to pick up any small fish and soft molluscs while wading.

While they fly, their neck and legs are stretched out. They fly by alternately flapping and sailing through the air. Their nests are of compact size made out of sticks found in the branches of trees or bushes.

These birds are considered to be on the verge of extinction and the Japanese government has built different programmes to increase the species such as breeding them in captivity.

The Japanese Ibis is endangered due to the excessive hunting of the birds and the destruction of their habitat by man. They also face food problems as more of their feeding land is used up for human activities.

**North America**

BALD EAGLE

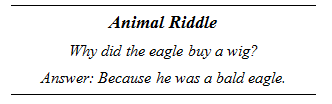


Figure : Bald Eagle

Since the first census records were kept of the Bald Eagle, the national bird of the U.S., in the 1800s there has been a continuous decline in their population. Bald Eagles were endangered in 43 states and threatened in five. However, the Bald Eagle was relatively abundant only in Alaskan and Canadian wilderness areas. Historically, Bald Eagles had been observed in all of the United States except Hawaii.

Man is the Bald Eagle's main enemy and predator. During migration, breeding, and winter periods the Bald Eagle requires a large home range area, leaving itself vulnerable to habitat destruction by man. Also environmental problems have decreased the population of bald eagles. The most serious ones are pollution by pesticides and heavy metals that contaminate streams and fish, in turn stopping the Bald Eagle's food chain.

During the 1940s, the number of hatched eaglets recorded by field biologists rapidly declined. This was because of a fatal eggshell thinning that was the result from exposure to DDE a metabolic by product of DDT which is an organ chlorinated pesticide. The eagles received this pesticide mainly through the fish they ate because the rivers were contaminated by the poison.



In nationwide autopsies of dead birds collected by federal, state, and private co-operators, federal government pathologists routinely found DDT, DDE, dihedron, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and other pesticide and insecticide residues in Bald Eagle carcasses. Because of all the pesticides that killed these magnificent birds in the 1960's the Bald Eagle was named America's most polluted Bird. A nationwide ban was made on the use of DDT, there was an increase in wildlife protection and rehabilitation efforts, more field studies and a captive program that have aided in the recovery of this species.

The National Wildlife Federation and the National Audubon Society have mounted publicity campaigns to inform the public about the sad history of the bald eagle. Federal and state wildlife and game officials have also been leaders in establishing bald eagle future recovery plans and management. The San Diego Zoo and other zoos nationwide continue to aid the efforts to preserve this species.

CALIFORNIA CONDOR

On April 19, 1987 the last known California condor to exist in the wild was taken into captivity.

Figure : California Condor

The California condor is one of the rarest of all North American birds and one of the rarest birds in the world. In fact, during the first half of the century there were only 60 individual condors. Now there is less than 40 despite the conservation efforts that are put forth by biologists and other American authorities. Today the California condor’s range is limited to a small region that is north of Los Angeles. Soaring at speeds of 35-40 miles per hour the California condor cleaned carrion from roads, ranches and beaches. There is absolutely no record of these magnificent birds attacking a living animal; however they were routinely shot, mostly by farmers and ranchers. Also California Condors were being exterminated by lead poisoning. However, zoologists are trying to change the condor's upcoming fate. Molloko is the first ever captive condor that was bred in captivity in history, born in April, 1988 at the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Its future lies in the hands of captive breeding and when it gets older, reintroduction to the wild. Hopefully Molloko's story will help educate the public.

The California Condor is about 3-4 feet in length and varies in weight from 20-30 pounds. The California condor has a huge wingspan which is about 9-10 and a half feet. When nesting they nest in cracks of rocks and lay only one egg.

This bird's plumage is black with a tint of blue metallic reflections. It has white bars underneath its wing.

For more information about the recovery of these birds, visit the San Diego Wild Animal Park *Condorminium*. Another great resource, which includes the total number of California Condors in zoos and in the wild and the history of the condor's plight can be found at the L.A. Zoo.

POLAR BEAR



Figure : Polar Bear

Polar Bears are found throughout the arctic region, often covering hundreds of miles in their range. They have heavy white fur which camouflage them against the white landscape in which they live in.

Despite their size, they are extremely fast runners and wide-ranging travellers. They are also expert swimmers, with their thick layer of fur and fat insulating them against the extreme cold of their climate. They have hairy soles on their broad feet to protect them and insulate them from the cold, as well as help them move across the snow swiftly.

Their diet consists of fish, seal, caribou, birds, seaweed, grass and an occasional whale which strayed too far from its course.

Polar Bears are usually shy but they are known to be dangerous when attacked or confronted. They give birth to one to four cubs at a time in the winter and the cubs stay with their mother for up to three years.

Polar Bears are endangered due to the man's excessive hunting for their priceless hide, tendons, meat, fat and flesh. Their numbers dwindled from several hundred thousand to a few hundred in a few years’ time. In efforts to protect Polar Bears, an international agreement was set up in 1973 whereby only traditional weapons were allowed to be used in the hunting of the Polar Bears.

PEREGRINE FALCON

Peregrine Falcons are birds of prey which were once found worldwide but are now rare almost everywhere.

They are strong and fast and fly to tremendous speeds. They are able to dive and clench their victims with their strong talons and kill them on impact. In the 18th and the 19th century, man captured and trained these falcons as hunting weapons to kill small prey.

They nest in between rock edges high on cliffs and usually near water where prey are plentiful. Their food consists of smaller birds, ducks and fish. They lay one to four eggs at a time.

The numbers of Peregrine Falcons have dwindled due to the poisonous chemicals such as DDT found in their food chain. Their foods, for example fish, consume poisonous substances in their food and these fish are contaminated. In turn, the fish are eaten by the falcons and the poisonous substances are passed down to the falcon's body. These chemicals interfere with the reproductive organs and cause the shells of their eggs to become thin and brittle. These eggs are easily broken when the parents sit on them and the eggs are destroyed. As a result, less and less peregrines falcons are hatched.

Another factor that causes the Peregrine Falcon's endangerment is the destruction of their habitat by human activities. They are also hunted for sport. In efforts to increase their population, steps to hand breed and release them into areas where they have become extinct have been undertaken. But the ultimate step to conserve them is by eliminating all chemical substances from their food source.

**Europe**

IBEX

Ibexes are wild goats found on high mountain meadows, slopes and rocks of Europe, north-eastern Africa and Asia. Their forelegs are slighter shorter than hind legs with a height of 3 feet at the shoulder. Both sexes have horns which curve backwards from the forehead. During the winter, their fur is yellowish brown while in the summer their fur turns to ashy grey.

Ibexes live apart in small flocks most of the time but during mating season they will pair off. They are extremely agile, able to survive in cliffs and crags. They are known to leap up to lengths as far as 40 feet. They are herbivores and eat whatever green vegetation is found in their sparse landscape.

Ibexes have become endangered because of the excessive hunting by man for game and sport. Hunters consider it a feat to be able to reach the inaccessible habitat in which they live in and kill the Ibexes as 'souvenirs'.

The Alpine Ibex has become very rare and are protected under the Italian government. They have been introduced to various parts of the world suitable for their living to increase their numbers.

MUSK OX

Musk Oxen are roaming in parts of Europe, northern Canada and Greenland. They are stocky with large heads, short necks and legs. They are extremely huge in size with a bull weighing up to about 880 pounds. Both male and female have horns which can reach up to 2 feet as found in old males. They have long shaggy brown hair that covers the whole body that reach nearly up to their feet and conceal a short tail. Their face is further covered by short hair.

Underneath their shaggy hair, they have a thick layer of wool which they shed during the summer. This wool will be collected by the Eskimos to be made into fine cloth, resembling cashmere.

Musk Oxen travel in herds of 20 to 30. When attacked, the adults will form a circle with the young safe inside. The adults will face the outside and use their sharp horns as weapons against their enemy. The predator attacks young oxen that stray too far from their herd when they attack.

Musk Oxen have become endangered due to the excessive hunting by man for food and sport. Their habitat also has been destroyed by human activities.

**Oceania**

TAKAHE

The Takahe is a rare flightless bird found only in New Zealand. It was thought to be extinct in the 1800’s but was rediscovered 1948 in several remote valleys on South Island.

It has a plumage of brilliant blue and copper-green with large red bill and a red frontal shield that protrudes out from its head. It feeds by stripping seeds from grasses. It nests on the ground and lays two cream coloured eggs with black blotches. The young are black in colour with downy feathers.

Takahes are endangered because:

* their habitat has been destroyed for agriculture and construction of buildings, roads, and dams.
* when New Zealand was first discovered by explorers, they brought in many other kinds of animals and these animals hunted the Takahe. The Takahe, being flightless and unable to fly away when in danger was quickly destroyed, just like the Dodo Bird.

KOALA

Koalas are found in the coastal regions of Eastern Australia. It is a marsupial mammal that gives birth to underdeveloped young and the young are carried around in their mother's pouch.

Figure : Koala

Koalas have strong clawed feet and are able to grip the branches firmly. They are extremely fussy eaters and only feed very selectively on eucalyptus leaves. To aid in the digestion of these leaves, Koalas have a long caecum and extra-long intestines.

Koalas have only one young at a time and their young remains in their mother's pouch for up to 7 months. When it is 1 year old, baby Koalas cling to their mother's back constantly.

Koalas have become endangered because:

* it is valued for its soft fur.
* if a disease is spread among them, they have no resistance against it because of them having the same genetic pool. Therefore they are not immune to disease and if one Koala gets a virus, the whole community is infected by it as well. Often these diseases bring disastrous results and hundreds or thousands or maybe even millions can be wiped out because of a single virus.
* their habitat is being destroyed. Besides having no living place, it has lost its source of food. As the Koala is an very fussy eater and almost only eats eucalyptus leaves, it has a limited supply of food choice.

**South America**

SCARLET MACAW

Figure : Scarlet Macaw

The Scarlet Macaw is found in the treetops from Mexico to southern Brazil. It is about 90 centimetres in length and is bright red with blue and yellow wings, blue and red tail which is a unique feature in the family and a white face with big, sickle-shaped beaks. Its feet are able to grasp the limbs of a tree very firmly. When a Macaw is fully developed, the tail is more than two feet long. Both the male and females look alike. It is among the most well-known among the species.

It feeds on the abundant fruits and nuts found in the tropical forests which are its habitat. It cracks open the nuts by using its extremely powerful beak and uses its blunt tongue to extract the nut meat. It also uses its beak to cut out pieces of fruit. Occasionally it eats insects and worms.

Macaws do not have feathers on its face and sometimes blushes when excited or angry. It usually travels in a large flock. It is easily tamed and its life span is about 50 to 60 years. It builds its nest in holes in trees or in crevices between rocks. The young hatch in about 3 weeks and are cared for by both the parents for 2 to 3 months.

Scarlet Macaws are famous for its ability in mimicking and imitating sounds made by the human voice as well as perform tricks.

This bird has become endangered due to the overwhelming demand for its colourful feathers in fashion in earlier centuries. Demand has not diminished until now as the young are taken from their nests for pets by poachers. This has led to a great decline to the Scarlet Macaw's population.

Law enforcement has been made in most of the countries where the Scarlet Macaw is found, but heavier penalties are yet to be enforced.

QUETZAL

The Quetzal, one of best known species from the trogon family, it was a sacred bird of the ancient Mayas and the Aztecs. Its feathers were used in the clothing of their priests and royal family. Instead of killing them to acquire the feathers, the feathers were plucked from the bird as it was considered a crime which was punishable by death to kill a Quetzal. Today, it is the national emblem of Guatemala.

The Quetzal is found in South Mexico to Bolivia in the hot lowland of the tropics but some are found in the mountains. The whole body is about 50 inches in length. The tail is covered by extra-long blue-green plumes. When it flies, the tail shows white underneath. The head has a rounded hair-like crest and its breast is gold-green while the belly is red. Its back is blue with curly gold-tinged mantle.

It nests in holes in trees, at times a natural cavity in a tree. Both the parents share in the duty of caring for their young.

The Quetzal was hunted for its magnificent feathers when the continent was explored by the explorers that arrived and still is. The colourful feathers are used in the fashion trade and fetch very high prices. Due to this, poaching of these birds has greatly affected its population. The destruction of its habitat the forests for construction too has depleted their numbers.

VICUNA

The Vicuna lives high in the Andes Mountains of Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile. It belongs to the camel family and is a close relative of the llama. It is a small, slender animal with orange red fur and big ears and eyes.

The Vicuna generally roams the mountains in small herds. It has never been fully domesticated by man.

Vicunas are hunted for their hides and wool which are valued for weaving fabrics clothes and garments. As a result, the numbers of the Vicuna have depleted due to the over-poaching. The fabric made from the fur is also called vicuna.

GIANT ANTEATER

The Giant Anteater lives in forests, swampy areas and open plains of Mexico, Central America and South America. It walks and roams around in densely populated areas during the night.

It eats insects and picks its prey up by rapidly flicking its long sticky tongue in and out. Its mouth is long and tubular and does not have any teeth. Of all the anteaters, it is the largest species and can weigh up to 39 kg or 86 lbs. Its body is covered with a coarse coat with a grey stripe running down each shoulder. Its tail is long and bushy. It has long front claws which are used for defences against enemies and tearing apart termite mounds. Their claws are so long that they are tucked under its feet and the anteater walks on its knuckles.

It is a solitary animal and gives birth to only one young. It carries the young on its back for almost a year during its growth.

The Giant Anteater's numbers have depleted due to the loss of its habitat to human construction. The fact that its reproduction rate is very low does not encourage the increase of its numbers.

BESPECTACLED BEAR



Figure : Bespectacled Bear

The Bespectacled Bear is found from Bolivia to Colombia, being restricted to high, steep and rugged areas unsuitable for agriculture.

It is mostly brown or black with white, cream or orange shading around the chest, neck and a ring encircling each eye. It is relatively small with the males weighing about 80 kg and the females about 60 kg. Each foot has five sharp, short and powerful claws which are used for climbing and tearing apart trees.

It feeds on wild fruits, especially figs, leaves, small animals, insects, herbs and grasses. It spends much of its time on top of trees and builds a nest every night. It is very vocal as it makes trilling noises as it travels around and the young hum when they are relaxed.

Although it is not a threat to humans, the Bespectacled Bear is killed as it does damage to agriculture. It is also killed for its meat. As a result, the number of Bespectacled Bears is dwindling. Only in Bolivia is their situation somewhat secure, but no one knows how long that security will last.

If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to the man. All things are connected.

CHIEF SEATTLE OF THE SUWAMISH TRIBE, letter to President Franklin Pierce

Bibliography