

Who's Gone Extinct?

In studying man and the environment, it is easy to think that humans have caused all the extinctions of animals so far in the world, but in fact most extinctions happened millions of years before humans even lived on Earth. We know from the *fossil record* that thousands of prehistoric species of animals and plants have lived on Earth and over time went extinct, including all the dinosaurs. Scientists studying the fossil record have found that there were five big mass extinctions prehistorically where whole orders of animals died out.

A smaller, but important extinction happened about 14,000 years ago, called the *end-Pleistocene extinctions*. This was where a lot of large animals went extinct in a short period of time, many of them right here in North America. This was when North American animals like the woolly mammoth, mastodon, ground sloth, horse, camel, and lion disappeared.

Scientists have many theories about what happened to cause the end-Pleistocene extinctions. Climate change could have been one reason, because during that time there was a dramatic change in the Earth's climate as world temperature rose at the end of the last ice age. Another reason could have been that early man had finally migrated to reach North America and started hunting. If humans affected certain important keystone species by over hunting, it could have triggered many other extinctions as well.

Today we are aware of the importance of protecting endangered species and their habitats. It may be too late for many species that have gone extinct throughout the world in recent times because of the actions of humans, like the **passenger pigeon**, **stellar sea cow**, **dodo**, **moa** and **quagga** – all of which have disappeared in the last 400 years. Now many very endangered animals are being watched and taken care of in the hopes of their return to safe numbers. Hopefully, knowing the importance of healthy habitats and learning from the experiences with keystone species, we can keep any more animals from going extinct by the careless actions of humans. We can be part of the solution.

There are many animals that are close to extinction from habitat loss. The **giant panda**, **tiger**, **snow leopard**, and **mountain gorilla** are among them. What can be done to save them from extinction?

- Protect the habitats in which they live.
- Ban hunting and guard against poaching.
- Ban any products made from them.
- Do a big ad campaign everywhere, so people know not to buy them and want to save them.

There are many ways you and your family can help a little bit to stop endangered animals from going extinct. If everyone helped a little, it might add up to a big difference.

- Never buy, sell or own anything made from ivory. Even legal ivory sales drives the sale of poached ivory and the possible eventual extinction of elephants. Remember all ivory represents the death of an elephant or walrus.

- Don't support coral reef poachers. Never buy coral for your fish tank unless it is been stamped with Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) stamp. This makes sure the coral was raised for aquariums and not poached from a wild reef.

- Don't keep exotic animal pets, even if you see them at the pet store. The exotic animal pet trade, though legal if regulated in the U.S., is not regulated in all countries around the world. So owning exotic animals drives the hunting and capture of exotic species. It's best to leave wild animals in their natural habitat.

• Join a good conservation organization that supports preservation of habitat where endangered animals live. See a list of some of the good organizations below to choose from.

• Spread the word!

The Cousteau Society
870 Greenbriar Circle, Suite 402
Chesapeake, VA 23320
www.cousteausociety.org
Educates the public about natural ecosystems.

Earthwatch
3 Clock Tower Place, Suite 100, Box 75
Maynard, MA 01754
www.earthwatch.org
Promotes the conservation of our natural resources and cultural heritage through research, education, and conservation.

Environmental Defense Fund
1875 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20009
www.edf.org
Works to protect clean air, water, and human health.
Educates people on endangered species, rainforests, and recycling.

Friends of the Earth
1025 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
www.foe.org
To defend the environment and champion a healthy and just world.

Greenpeace, USA
1436 U St. NW
Washington, DC 20009
www.greenpeaceusa.org
Works to preserve the earth and the life it supports. It has almost 2 million supporters.

Keep American Beautiful, Inc.
1010 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06901
www.kab.org
To engage individuals to take greater responsibility for improving their community environments.

National Audubon Society
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
www.audubon.org
Tells people how to use wildlife, land, water, and other natural resources intelligently.

The National Environmental Trust
1200 18th Street, N.W., Fifth Floor
Washington, D.C. 20036
www.net.org
Informs citizens about environmental problems such as global warming, ocean conservation, energy, and clean air.

National Wildlife Federation
8925 Leesburg Pike
Vienna, VA 22184
www.nwf.org
Works to protect nature and wildlife.

Natural Resources Defense Council
40 West 20th Street
New York, NY 10011
www.nrdc.org
An influential lobbying and litigating group on environmental issues.

The Nature Conservancy
4245 North Fairfax Drive, Suite 100
Arlington, VA 22203-1606
www.nature.org
Works to preserve plants and animals by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Rainforest Alliance
65 Bleecker Street
New York, NY 10012
www.rainforest-alliance.org
Works to save tropical rain forests worldwide.

The Sierra Club
85 Second Street, Second Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105-3441
www.sierraclub.org
Works to preserve national parks and wilderness areas.

Trees for Life
3006 W. St. Louis
Wichita, KS 67203
www.treesforlife.org
Helps people in the developing countries plant and care for food-bearing trees.

World Wildlife Fund
1250 24th Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
www.worldwildlife.org
Dedicated to protecting the world's wildlife and wildlands.