

WHY SAVE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE?

Bonytails are extremely rare in Colorado.



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WHY SAVE ENDANGERED species? There may not be one hard and fast answer to that rather simple-sounding question, but in looking for an answer we may find numerous reasons for putting a halt to the disappearance of many forms of life.

While it's convenient for some of us to look the other way and ignore the plight of threatened and endangered species, it's hardly a wise stance. Although there's virtually nothing we can do to stop the extinction of some species, we do have the ability to slow down the process that's causing this problem. As a matter of fact, we have an obligation to do so. And here are a number of reasons why.

First of all, there's the matter of ethics. It is the belief of many people that we, as an intelligent and dominant species, have an obligation to allow every form of life on earth the opportunity to exist and that humanity has no fundamental right to exterminate other species.

There also exist aesthetic reasons for preserving as many of our planet's species as possible. Many people derive great pleasure from being able to see the creatures they share Earth with, and these species add to the diversity and texture of life.

We also need to consider that all living things, including humans, are part of a complex web or relationships called an ecosystem, and that what happens to one part of the system always affects other parts of it. We can't always measure the effect immediately, but it exists. Some species may serve as important "barometers" of environmental health and can provide early warning of problems in our environment. For example, the peregrine falcon revealed the deadly nature of the pesticide DDT, and the global declines of certain amphibian populations may be an indication of large-scale environmental problems that could eventually affect other species, including man. Some people may think that some forms of life are unimportant, but in making decisions about the elimination of other species, we may actually be influencing the course of evolution and the balance of ecosystems.

And finally, there are practical—call them selfish if you want—reasons for the preservation of plant and animal species. Mankind has already derived numerous agricultural, scientific and medicinal benefits from plants and animals, and we have only investigated a small segment of the species residing on Earth. Thus it would seem that it's only natural that man retain as many species as possible for the use and study of future generations.