

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Frank Kenney 202/343-5634

For Release June 22, 1980

## UPDATED WORLDWIDE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST PUBLISHED

The official U.S. list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants worldwide now carries 773 species, 276 of which are native to the United States.

"That's up 77 from last year," Dr. Paul Opler of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Office said, referring to the previous list published in January of 1979. "But that increase," he was quick to add, "has more to do with improved research than the continuing, general deterioration of the world's wildlife environment. We're simply finding more plants and animals that need to be classified."

An "endangered" species is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant part of its range. A "threatened" species is one that is likely to become "endangered."

The additions made to the list of endangered and threatened species in the last year and a half come from every part of the Earth. Two of them--Guatemalan fir and the Chilean false larch--are the first foreign plants ever to be listed. Other species include the Caribbean monk seal, West African manatee, North China Sika deer, and the Kern (California) primrose sphinx moth. During the last 16 months, 36 plants (mostly cacti), 29 mammals, 9 reptiles, 4 fish, 1 bird, and 2 insects were added to the revised list.

The basic cause for endangerment of either animals or plants is loss of habitat.

Many of these species are important for economic, commercial, and historic reasons. Some, such as a number of cacti native to the southwestern U.S., recently have become extremely popular house and garden plants. Others have suffered exploitation and destruction of their habitats for a much longer time.

(more)

Since at least the time of the ancient Mayan Empire, Indians have burned the highland forest habitat of the Guatemalan fir to plant corn. The practice is still followed, and reproduction of the rare trees is further limited by the grazing of sheep and goats.

The decline of the Chilean false larch, a tree that may live for 3,000 years and grow to be 150 feet tall, began almost 400 years ago when the Spanish Conquistadores learned of the amazing durability of its wood. Widely exported since that time, it has been nearly eliminated from all accessible sites.

Seamen of those times replenished their ships' stores with fresh meat from the Caribbean monk seals that inhabited the waters of the West Indies. Later, the seals were taken for the oil and pelt trade. But it was modern-day commercial fishermen, who saw the seals as fish predators, that may have delivered the final blow to the animal. No monk seals have been officially recorded since the early 1960's. The totoaba, a huge sea trout that grows to 225 pounds and lives only in the Gulf of California, is another valuable animal that has suffered from commercial exploitation. In 1905, according to an old Biological Survey Report, "totoaba thronged the east shore of Lower California and choked the mouth of the Colorado River." Since then, however, it has been fished almost to the point of extinction.

Once a plant or animal is listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, a variety of activities involving the species are strictly regulated. For United States species, laws provide for protection of its habitat and limit the conditions under which it may or may not be taken, or used in interstate commerce, or exported to other countries. The laws also cover all listed foreign species, controlling how any of them may or may not be imported into the United States. In addition, the U.S. Government offers technical assistance to State and foreign governments for the conservation of endangered species.

(more)

Since the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was enacted, the U.S. list has almost tripled from 106 to 276.

For more information, write Publications Unit, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

U.S. WORLD LIST OF ENDANGERED AND THREATENED ANIMALS AND PLANTS AS OF

May 1, 1980

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number of Endangered Species</u>			<u>Number of Threatened Species</u>		
	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Foreign</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Foreign</u>	<u>Total</u>
Mammals.....	35	251	286	3	21	24
Birds.....	67	145	212	3		3
Reptiles.....	12	55	67	10		10
Amphibians.....	5	9	14	2		2
Fishes.....	31	11	42	12		12
Snails.....	2	1	3	5		5
Clams.....	23	2	25			
Crustaceans.....	1		1			
Insects.....	6		6	3		3
Plants.....	49		49	7	2	9
Total.....	231	474	705	45	23	68

X X X