

What are endangered species?

Endangered species generally refers to animals or plants that gradually disappear due to various reasons, such as the deterioration and destruction of the natural environment, human predation, effects imposed by materials entering from outside, and insufficient food.

Endangered species in Hong Kong include dolphins, otters, pangolins, porcupines, leopard cats, long-tailed macaques, Indian bullfrogs, turtles, Birdwing Butterflies, Black-faced Spoonbills, Hong Kong Newts, Hong Kong Cascade Frogs, Romer's Tree Frogs, Water Monitors, pythons, etc. In Hong Kong, they are all animals of rare survival. Perhaps the next generations can only see them in books in the future. As for natural plants, there are ginseng, orchids, Pitcher-plants, fern, sago cycas and cactus, which are all threatened by extinction.

Reasons for extinction

Destruction of habitats

Land is continuously opened and used due to rapid population increase, but the assessment of environmental impacts has not been carried out properly, causing forests to be over-logged. This is the major reason for animals' extinction. Animals become extinct because of our development and predation. Building the new airport is an appropriate example: the construction pushes Romer's Tree Frogs, which can only be found in Hong Kong, the precious Chinese White Dolphins and the insect-predating Pitcher-plants towards the path of extinction. They were originally living peacefully, but our constructions and development cause their habitats to change enormously, and eventually kill them gradually.

Reckless predation of wild animals

As we consume games such as tonic, pangolins and gem-faced civets, which could be found in the New Territories, they were extensively preyed and became extinct in Hong Kong. Moreover, the demand for skin coats and handbags, bear bile, pilose antler, ivory and Rhino horns may threaten the survival of these organisms and cause their extinction.

Pollution

Economic development brings about all kinds of pollution problems. Air, water and soil pollutions all have adverse impacts on the natural environment.

1. Chinese White Dolphins

Introduction

White Dolphin, with a local name of White Cow, is a member of the 79 cetacean families, distributed in South Africa, Australia, and along the coastline of China up to the area around Yangzi Jiang. The Hump-backed Dolphins living in Southeast Asia have their unique colour - they are deep grey in colour at birth, and as they grow, the colour becomes lighter until they become white or light pink.

Most of the Chinese White Dolphins live along the coast and in river mouths, such as the outlet of Zhujiang, where sea water and river water meet. The Chinese White Dolphins in Hong Kong waters are mainly found in Deep Bay, Sha Chau, Lung Kwu Chau, Lantau Island and the west of Lamma Island.

According to the statistics from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Chinese White Dolphins living around the outlet of Zhujiang (including Hong Kong waters) amount to around 1000. However, according to the report on the investigation carried out in Hong Kong by Hong Kong Dolphin Watch, the number of Chinese White Dolphins found in Hong Kong waters (excluding Zhujiang Delta) is estimated only to be about 100 to 150.

Source: HK Dolphin Watch

Potential threats faced by the dolphins

- disturbance and destruction of natural habitats
- pollution
- mistaken predation
- hit by ships
- reduction of food supply

Protection by Hong Kong

The waters around Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau are the main habitat of Chinese White Dolphins in Hong Kong. To protect this important habitat, the Government has designated the area, waters of 1200 hectares, as Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau Marine Park in November 1996, in accordance with the Marine Park Ordinance (Chapter 476). Inside the park, Chinese White Dolphins can avoid threats such as being hit by high-speed ships and being hurt in destructive fishery activities like shrimp trawling and double trawling.

To improve water quality and reduce possible threats caused by toxic pollutants in the water (e.g. heavy metals, fertilizer DDT, etc.), the Government is setting up a series of waste disposal system and upgrading the existing sewage treatment facilities.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department deploys artificial reefs in marine parks and other sites in order to rebuild the local fish stock and therefore enhance the availability of the dolphins' preys. We are also formulating a fisheries resources conservation and management plan to rectify the over-exploitation situation and to promote the sustainable development of the fishing industry.

2. Black-faced Spoonbill

Introduction

Black-faced Spoonbills are one of the 26 kinds of birds threatened in Hong Kong as listed in the "Threatened Birds of the World". Nowadays, the known global number of Black-faced Spoonbills is approximately 660, and on Inner Deep Bay Wetland of International Importance, 25% of the world's Black-faced Spoonbills can be found. Their international endanger level changed from "critically endangered" to "endangered". This shows that Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, South Korea, North Korea and Japan are paying more attention to this species. This is also the result of the attention paid and conservation carried out by local organizations and law enforcement departments. Source: WWF HK

Existing threats faced by Black-faced Spoonbills

It is known that Inner Deep Bay Wetland of International Importance and Lok Ma Chau Wetland are the ideal feeding and living place for Black-faced Spoonbills. And in the Lok Ma Chau plan, the railway spur line area will affect 5% of the world's wetlands. 9.5 hectares of fish ponds will be destroyed in that area to build Lok Ma Chau Station. Although KCRC claimed that this would increase the environmental value of the neighbouring 28.5 hectares of fish ponds, the fact is that the 28.5 hectares of fish pond are originally wetlands. Thus the construction will actually lead to the net loss of 9.5 hectares of wetlands of conservation area of international importance, and the requirement of "no net loss in area and function" in protecting Ramsar Convention Wetlands cannot be fulfilled. Though the international endanger level of this species of bird has been lowered by one level, the East Rail spur line will induce greater challenges to this internationally endangered bird.

3. American Crocodile

Crocodiles are often referred to as "living fossils." They have the same basic appearance and lifestyle that they had nearly 200 million years ago during the age of dinosaurs. They have survived extinction events, ice ages, climatic changes, and the movement of continents. But now, habitat loss and overexploitation by humans have almost eliminated many members of this ancient group. In North America, the American crocodile endures only on the southernmost tip of Florida, in and around the brackish waters of Florida Bay in the Everglades National Park. It's estimated that about 500 individuals survive there.

American crocodiles are big reptiles; males routinely grow to 15 feet in length. They're opportunistic predators, feeding at night on fish, crabs, birds, turtles, snakes, and small mammals. They're also shy and reclusive, particularly during their nesting season. Crocodiles nest in secluded areas -- unlike their close relatives, the alligators, who will nest almost anywhere they can find suitable vegetation. There are very few active crocodile nests in Florida. To reach adulthood, the young crocodiles need to survive at least two years, when they'll be large enough to discourage predators. Baby crocs are eaten by raccoons, birds, crabs, and even adult crocodiles. Only a small fraction of the hatchlings make it.

Today, human population pressures in southern Florida take an additional toll on young crocodiles. Dams built to supply water for homes, cities and farms greatly reduce the flow of

fresh water from Lake Okeechobee into Florida Bay. As a result, the salt content of the bay is rising dramatically. Adult crocodiles can tolerate salt water, but hatchlings can't. They need fresh water to survive. So even in the few remaining nest sites, they are increasingly in harm's way.

Alligators are one of the principal threats to crocodiles. But the threat is not directly from the alligators themselves; it's from people. Alligators were once endangered in the U.S. as well, but -- thanks in part to protections afforded by the Endangered Species Act -- they've made an impressive comeback. In 1987, they were downgraded from Endangered to Threatened. Now they are so numerous in Florida that they are sometimes destroyed as nuisances. The problem is that most people can't tell the difference between the two species. Many a crocodile has been killed because someone "thought it was a 'gator."

4. Bears

Populations of most bear species are declining. All eight species of bear are listed as critically endangered by the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). The species remaining are the Asiatic black, American black, Brown, Polar, Sloth, Sun, Spectacled and Panda bear.

These eight species live in a diverse range of habitats, from the ice packs surrounding the Arctic to the forests of India and South East Asia.

Threats

Deforestation and expansion of land used for agriculture have seriously impacted upon bear habitats. Bears are hunted legally for recreation. They are also poached for their skins as rugs and trophies. Body parts from bears are used to supply the traditional Chinese medicine trade and exotic meat market.

Their fat, skin, paws, bones, claws and other parts are used for traditional medicines, meals in expensive restaurants or as charms. Bear gall bladders and bile are used to treat a wide variety of ailments from burns to liver disorders.

Bear Farming

In the 1980's, China set up bear farms to extract the bile from the gallbladders of living bears. Despite its original intentions to 'conserve' bears, farming bears has created problems of its

own. Over 7,000 bears, originally taken from the wild are kept in bear farms in China. This is cheaper than breeding bears in captivity.

Because of the demand for stock bear farms, as few as 12,000 bears may be left locally in the wild. As it is cheaper, farmed bile has actually increased the market for bear parts. Farmed bile is smuggled all over the world, but it is still viewed as inferior to bile from a wild bear because of the poor conditions in the farms.

Wild bears continue to be poached for their gall in China. At the farms, bile is surgically extracted from the gall bladder through a steel tube surgically inserted into the body of the bear. This device often causes pain and infection. The bears are kept in very small cages in which they can barely move. As well as destroying their muscles and bones, this confinement causes deep psychological disturbance to the animals. Most sway from side to side repetitively. Compared to an average twenty-five year life expectancy in the wild, farmed bears usually only survive between four and ten years. Physically debilitated and psychologically disturbed, these bears can never be released back into the wild but can thankfully be transferred to a sanctuary such as those operated by Animals Asia Foundation or WSPA so that they may lead a relatively much healthier life.

Both farmed and wild captured or poached bears will have their fat, skin, paws, bones, claws and other parts removed for use in traditional medicines, meals in expensive restaurants or as charms.

Trade in Body Parts

Over 7,000 bears are kept in bear farms in China. In the farms, bile from the gall is extracted through a steel tube surgically inserted into the body of the bear. This process causes extreme pain, infection and distress. The bears are kept in very small cages in which they can barely move. As well as destroying their muscles and bones, this cruel confinement causes deep psychological disturbance to the bears. Compared with the average 25 year life expectancy of a wild bear, these caged creatures only survive between four to ten years.

Consumers

The largest consumers of bear products are Korea, Taiwan, Japan, China and Asian communities throughout the world.

Alternatives

Ready alternatives are available in traditional Chinese medicine from herbs. There is even a

synthetic version of bear gall made from cow gall known as UDCA. This is manufactured in large quantities and is widely available at a fraction of the cost of bear gall.

5. Blue Whale

Scientific name: *Balaenoptera musculus*

Status: Endangered

Description & Special Features: The blue whale exceeds every other animal on earth in mass and size. It is bigger than 25 elephants combined; longer than a Brontosaurus and a Tyrannosaurus rex lying next to each other. It can weigh up to 136,400 kg (300,000 lb) and grow as long as 33.6 m (110 feet). Its body is long, somewhat tapered, with a head that is broad and flat. Its blowholes produce a blow of over 6 meters (20 feet) high. Although its body is smooth and relatively free of parasites, barnacles attach themselves to the edge of the fluke, and occasionally to the tip of the flippers and dorsal fin. The blue whale is blue-gray in color, while the undersides of its flippers are a lighter color or even white.

Range & Habitat: The blue whale gravitates toward deeper ocean with cold and temperate waters, as opposed to coastal waters. One calf is born on average to a blue whale once every two or three years. Calves tend to be about 7 m (23 feet) long at birth. They are solitary creatures that travel alone, or at most in groups of two or three, with the exception of feeding grounds which summon bands of sixty whales or more. Blue whale populations migrate toward the cooler waters of the poles in the summer to feed, and then travel back towards the equator and its warmer waters in the winter to breed.

Diet: The blue whale has a feeding period of about 4 months during the summer in which it eats shrimplike crustaceans identified as krill. For the other eight months out of the year it doesn't eat anything, living off of stored fat instead. It feeds by expanding its throat and drawing in water teeming with its prey; it then forces the water out through its baleen plates, which serves as filters to the organisms. A blue whale probably eats about 3600 kg (7900 lb.) of these organisms during the summer months of its feeding season and can eat up to 40 million krill a day. The blue whale feeds at depths of less than 100 m (330 feet). Its dives typically last between ten and twenty minutes. The whale emits sounds of a low frequency that are interrupted periodically by clicks.

Threats: The blue whale can be found in all major oceans around the world. Its populations were harshly depleted because of commercial whaling, which was outlawed in 1964. Even in the absence of commercial whaling, the blue whale's suffering population has not dramatically increased in recent years, and it remains an endangered species.

Sources:

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<http://www.acsonline.org/factpack/bluewhl.htm>

6. Black Rhino

Scientific Name: *Diceros bicornis*

Status: Critically Endangered

Description and Special Features: The Black Rhino weighs between 1,750 to 3,000 lbs (800 to 1,350 kg) and is about 4.5 to 5.5 ft (1.4 to 1.7 m) tall at shoulder. Its total length is 10 to 12.5 feet (3.0 - 3.8 m). It has two horns; the front is larger, ranging from 1 ft 8 in to 4 ft 4 in and the rear, smaller one measures 1 to 22 in. It has a relatively small snout with a prehensile lip. This upper lip is the most distinguishing characteristic of the Black Rhino. It has adapted to feeding from trees and shrubs.

Not black at all, the Black Rhino probably gains its name simply as a distinction from the White Rhino, another species located in Africa. Also possible is that it was named for its habit of wallowing in the dark covered local soil.

As is the case with the other species of rhino, the black rhino is solitary and travels alone.

Range and Habitat: The Black Rhino can be found in Africa's semi-desert country with thick vegetation, as well as in mountainous savannas and rain forests up to 3500 m (11,500 feet).

Diet: The Black Rhino diet includes leaves torn from trees and shrubs with its prehensile lip. It can survive periods of four to five days without drinking.

Threats: The main threat to the rhino is man. Poachers hunt rhino not for food but for the horns which they sell. The consumer demand for rhino horn is high in certain countries due to medicinal

and cultural reasons. In the Far East and in China especially, it is widely believed that the rhino horn can be used as medicine to reduce fever. In Yemen, the horn is used for the handle of a ceremonial knife, called a jambiya, worn by young men. In early times, the horn was made into a drinking cup that was supposed to detect poison. Horns can be taken from live rhinos, but unfortunately poachers continue to kill them.

Sources & Further Information:

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7. Giant Panda

Scientific name: *Ailuropoda melanoleuca*

Status: Endangered

Description and Special Features: The giant panda is one of the world's rarest mammals and weighs 70-125 kg (154-275 lb). The head, top of the neck, and rump of the animal are white, while small patches of fur around the eyes, the ears, legs, and shoulders are black. In comparison to other bears, the head of the giant panda is relatively large in relation to the rest of its body.

Range and Habitat: Its habitat is montane forests with dense strands of bamboo at altitudes of 2700-3900 m (8850-12,800 feet) although it can descend to as low as 800 m during winter to reach warmer temperatures. Although the giant panda mostly lives on the ground, it can climb trees, taking shelter in hollow trees, rock crevices and caves. The giant panda can be found in China (Gansu, Shaanxi, and Sichuan Provinces). The social organization of pandas are such that they are usually alone, except during the mating season.

Diet: 99% of its diet is composed of bamboo shoots and roots, and it spends up to 12 hours a day feeding. They are capable of eating up to 38 kg (84 lb) of new bamboo shoots a day, 40% of their average body weight. The giant panda has adapted to its habitat to have an enlarged movable wrist bone that serves as an opposable "false thumb" in contrast to the normal five toes on its front paws. This bone is extremely important to the panda because it allows the animal to grasp bamboo stems while eating.

Threats: The giant panda population has been severely depleted over a span of thousands of years due to hunting by humans and climatic changes. The greatest threat to the giant panda is the loss and annihilation of its natural habitat. Logging operations (many of which are illegal) deprive this animal of trees, and peasants farming or cutting down vegetation for fuel, of its land. In addition, the population is in decline because of the fact that bamboo, the panda's dominant source of nutrition, naturally has large scale die-offs. Pandas are no longer capable of simply migrating to a region with healthier bamboo due to human populations and cities. Consequently, faced with no alternate food supply they die.

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