

Endangered Species: A Brief Introduction

The natural biodiversity of the earth has been on the decline for some period now, drawing the attention of some international organizations such as the UN. While some of this may be due to natural, non-human factors, other authorities allege that humans do indeed contribute to the loss of species.

Endangered species are those that have not yet been successfully eliminated, but whose numbers would suggest that they are on the verge of extinction. Definitions of endangered species vary from organization to organization, and generally it is understood that the "endangered" or "threatened" status is conferred on a case by case basis.

Why They Endangered in the First Place

There are many reasons that these organisms have failed at life. Some are very naturally occurring reasons that do not involve humans. Some of the causes that involve humans are:

- Self-defense: Local populations of animals are threatening to humans and are therefore eliminated. Examples of this include predatory animals, as well as viruses such as malaria.
- Consumption: In order to avoid human loss of life due to starvation, certain animals and plants are directly hunted and gathered at a rate beyond their natural reproduction. Over-fishing is a good example of this.
- Competition: Human livelihood and well-being may require natural resources, such as livestock or land. Organisms that

threaten these critical resources are often destroyed on sight. Certain hunting wolves and buffalo fit this category.

- **Commodity:** Some humans can only survive economically based upon the trade of certain animals or parts of those animals. Elephant tusks and shark fins are some products that endanger organisms.

What the Debate is About

It is far too simple to proclaim that all endangered species ought to be saved, without realizing the cost in human lives that must be paid. There are several arguments *for* saving endangered species:

- **Animal Rights:** Animals (and possibly plants) have the same rights that human beings do.
- **Biodiversity:** Having a biologically diverse population gives benefits (such as disease resistance) to humans.

On the other hand, alternative lines of thoughts point out:

- **Human Importance:** The lives of human beings are far more important than any animal.
- **Sovereignty:** Private groups (landowners as well as countries) should have full rights in determining their regulations, and not have them decided by foreign special interest groups.
- **Evolution:** It is a natural process (accepted by some) that animals who cannot compete are to be eliminated.

Interference with this system hurts nature rather than helps it.

Issues to Consider

When determining your policy, think about how the above arguments and reasons may affect your country. For example, if you are a largely agricultural nation, then clearing land for farming is critical to your economy, and an endangered species regime may hurt your population.

Some questions to consider:

- How do we (internationally) define and agree upon what an endangered species is?
- Who wins and who loses out when something is designated as “endangered”?
- Who is globally responsible for endangered species?