

Animal Welfare and Biodiversity: The Vital Link



"To survive today, other animals must endure global warming, pollution, and fewer habitats. More tragically, they must endure the silence of human hearts."—Anthony Douglas Williams

Summary

The activities of mankind constitute the largest and most dangerous threat to biodiversity. Habitat loss, fragmentation through human clearance of native habitats, pollution, and climate change all greatly threaten the very existence of numerous species and ecosystems. These great species, who have long shared our planet, face an imminent danger of forever being eradicated from the face of the Earth. World Animal Net¹ recognizes the beneficial contribution of healthy, thriving, ecosystems which protect, preserve, and enhance native wildlife habitat. We also have great respect for the existence of wildlife and recognize with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)² and the European Union (EU)³ that animals are sentient beings. We believe that development cannot truly be sustainable without the full consideration of the welfare of wildlife — both terrestrial and non-terrestrial, and without properly addressing the ever growing ethos of consumptive use which has fueled the present crisis.

The Present Threat

It is now estimated that every 20 minutes, a distinct species of plant or animal vanishes,⁴ and that as many as half of the Earth's species will face extinction by the end of this century.⁵ Already, the world has lost 97% of its wild tigers in just over a century's time.⁶ Just a few of the numerous other species that are currently facing dire challenges include:

¹ World Animal Net is an internationally recognized NGO with offices in the United States, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. We have a network of over 3,000 affiliate animal welfare societies in more than 100 countries. Our mission is to improve the status and welfare of animals around the world by offering knowledge and expertise to, and building communication and partnership in, the animal protection movement.

² World Organization for Animal Health, Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Article 7.1.3.

³ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 13 (2008/C 115/01).

⁴ *What Is Missing?: Maya Lin's Memorial on the Sixth Extinction*. WORLDCHANGING, 10 Oct. 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/011645.html>>.

⁵ Whitty, Julia. "Animal Extinction - the Greatest Threat to Mankind." *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, 30 Apr. 2007. Web. 30 Jan. 2014.

⁶ "Overview." *WorldWildlife.org*. World Wildlife Fund, n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2014. <<http://worldwildlife.org/species/tiger>>.

- **Great apes.** According to a UNESCO report, the populations of all species of great apes, who share 98.4% of DNA with humans, “are extremely low or falling rapidly”.⁷ Loss of suitable forest habitat due to road construction is the primary threat to great apes, among others such as hunting for bushmeat.⁸
- **Lions.** In South Africa, upwards of 5,000 lions are kept in captivity for canned hunting, while only 2,000 live in the wild. Wild lions have declined by 80% in the past 20 years.⁹ The lion bone trade, which is said to be on the rise, and prevalent in Asia, further threatens the world lion population. The lion habitat is said to have decreased by 75%.
- **Rhinos.** The population of rhinos across Africa and Asia has fallen dramatically from 500,000 at the beginning of the 20th century to just 29,000 in the wild today. Contributing significantly to the population decline in rhinos is large-scale poaching.¹⁰

Activities that threaten wildlife populations pose grave dangers to human and wildlife populations alike. These dangers threaten more than conservation. Wildlife trafficking, poaching, hunting and the cumulative impact of other unsustainable practices (including habitat loss) lead to increased and often lethal human-wildlife conflict, violation of local and international laws, and immense and needless suffering to animals. They also threaten to uproot cultural heritages that have preserved ancient reverence and respect for ecology. Indeed, if modern culture continues to treat wildlife as no more than a renewable economic resource, then we will lose our wildlife.

Call to Action

World Animal Net urges serious consideration of the protection of our wildlife as sentient beings, and their habitats. We specifically call the following initiatives to be integrated into the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to biodiversity:

- **Education.** Specifically, environmental education emphasizing the importance of biodiversity, respect and protection of wildlife, and the harms of exploitative practices.
- **Community conservation and anti-poaching.** The development and roll-out of community conservation and anti-poaching programs (including ranger/guard training) within the international development agenda.
- **Impact assessment.** Specifically, assessments of all planned national and international development programs geared to preventing adverse impacts on wildlife and their habitats.
- **Best practices research.** Including exploration and assessment of existing successful programs to minimize human-wildlife conflict, and compensate for any remaining losses.

⁷ “FAQ—Great Apes.” UNESCO, n.d. Web 29 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/faq/grasp.pdf>>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Barkham, Patrick. "Canned Hunting: The Lions Bred for Slaughter." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 03 June 2013. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jun/03/canned-hunting-lions-bred-slaughter>>.

¹⁰ Rhino Population Figures." *Save The Rhino.*, n.d. Web. 30 Jan. 2014. <http://www.savetherhino.org/rhino_info/rhino_population_figures>.