

ZOOLOGY

Survival of the Fewest

Thirty-eight species of North American wildlife face extinction. Man, who has been largely responsible for eliminating these rare animals, has the power to save them.

By HOWARD SIMONS

► THE LARGEST flesh-eating animal and the tallest bird in the United States face extinction.

Extinction is a very harsh word. It means the end of life. Not just the life of an individual, but the life of an entire species. It is particularly harsh today, when man seems most concerned with preserving his own species.

However, at least 38 different species of wildlife on the continent are in peril of disappearing completely.

For the most part, man has been responsible for the dangerous plight facing these animals, birds and fishes. It is also, ironically, man who can save the few remaining individuals of these species and perhaps bring their numbers to a safe margin of survival.

This is both the warning and the plea made by conservationists.

Some of the endangered wildlife, such as the temperamental old grizzly bear, the largest flesh-eating animal in the United States, and the proud whooping crane, the tallest bird, the green turtle of soup fame and the American crocodile, are well-known.

Others, such as the Eskimo curlew and Attwater's prairie chicken, are less familiar.

Some Taken for Granted

Still others, such as the lake trout and the lake sturgeon, are so taken for granted by the public that suggestion of their possible extinction is almost as hard to swallow as their bones.

Nevertheless, conservationists emphatically state, "the day may soon be here, if we are not alert, when we will no longer enjoy the stately beauty of some of our finest animals."

These animals, all of which were once numerous on the continent, are the victim's of man's mismanagement of his natural resources and his greed.

Conservationists point to the destruction of the animals' homes through poisonous pollution of our waters, burning of the forests, overgrazing of the grasslands, careless draining of swamps and marshes, and wanton hunting with gun, trap and rod.

In combination, these factors have decimated many animal populations. Man has already destroyed some species.

He will never again see the Merriam elk, passenger pigeon, Labrador duck, Carolina parakeet, sea mink, great auk or heath hen.

Now others have been placed in a posi-

tion where they, too, may soon be talked of only in the past tense.

Whooping cranes, subject of much publicity in recent years, now number 28. Dependent on only one wintering area in Texas, after a flight down the middle of the United States from Canada, these huge white birds have been fighting for survival for 40 years.

Less than 50 Everglade kites, once found throughout most of Florida, are left.

The Key deer, which stand only 22 to 26 inches high, now number 130 in their home in the Florida Keys.

The last surviving members of the largest land bird in the nation, the California condor, number 60. These birds, now restricted to the mountains of California, ranged as far eastward as Florida many thousands of years ago.

Attwater's prairie chicken has been reduced to less than 20 small colonies. As one conservationist states, since the Attwater's prairie chicken dies on the installment plan, another 15 years of grace is not anticipated.

Perhaps the saddest example of contemporary extinction or near-extinction of a species is the story of the ivory-billed woodpecker, largest woodpecker in North Amer-

ica. Originally inhabitants of the swamps of the Southeast, by 1926 the bird was believed extinct.

Although a few birds were spotted from time to time in the 40's and 50's, there have been no authentic reports of an ivory-billed woodpecker since 1952.

"The lake sturgeon of the Great Lakes," we are told, "is another candidate for the listing of extinct animals. Once of great importance to commercial fisheries, it has now reached the biological threshold where restoration efforts may do little good."

The lake trout, although abundant in most of its American habitat, is endangered in its Great Lakes home. In Lake Michigan, for instance, only eight lake trout were caught last year in more than 1,000 miles of gill net fishing that 20 years ago would have netted 50,000 fish.

These are but a few stark illustrations of how once abundant wildlife populations have been backed into a survival corner.

To those animals already mentioned must be added the Tule elk, the black-footed ferret, the sea otter, the kit fox, the woodland caribou, the gray wolf, the red wolf, the desert and Sierra bighorn sheep, the manatee and the Caribbean monk seal.

Their feathered companions of the continent who are facing extinction are the Mississippi, swallow-tailed and white-tailed kites, the roseate spoonbill, the Hudsonian godwit, the Florida sandhill crane, the Laysan teal, the nene, the Aleutian tern, the



GRIZZLY BEAR—You may have seen these fellows, if you have been to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. They are two of 125 grizzly bears that live and play in the Park. Grizzlies, however, are facing extinction, conservationists warn, as are 37 other species of North American wildlife.

Florida burrowing owl, the peregrine falcon, the red-bellied hawk, Kirtland's warbler and the Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

The Great Lakes whitefish, the American crocodile and the green turtle may be passing away forever.

Conservationists are confident that with concerted public and governmental action many of these animals can be saved. Some, however unfortunate, are beyond help.

The National Wildlife Federation has outlined eight courses of action to help save the nation's endangered wildlife. They call for:

1. The promotion of coordinated research to determine the best restoration methods.
2. The enforcement of Federal and state laws of protection.
3. Halting deliberate and accidental slaughter of endangered wildlife.
4. Establishment of comprehensive use policies at the national, state and local levels for protection dependent on development of other natural resources.
5. The initiation of more public education campaigns.
6. The protection from encroachment of established state, Federal and private sanctuaries, forests, parks and refuges.
7. Effective pollution control.
8. Support for the International Union for the Protection of Nature in Brussels, Belgium.

Science News Letter, March 31, 1956

MEDICINE

Devise New Drugs for Blood Pressure, Ulcers

► A NEW GROUP of drugs that lower blood pressure and might also prove useful in treating stomach ulcers has been developed by scientists at the Wellcome Research Laboratories, Beckenham, Kent, England.

When tried on patients, the drug called 356C54 has been one of the most promising so far. Injected under the skin, it has usually lowered the blood pressure for seven to 12 hours. Unpleasant side effects have been at a minimum, except for some variable and often temporary disturbance of vision because the drug may dilate the pupil of the eye. This can be partly counteracted by eye drops.

Use of the drugs in stomach ulcer patients is suggested because of their great ability to block secretion of stomach juices and stomach activity.

The drugs act by blocking nerve centers, called ganglia. They belong to the chemical class of diquaternary-amino-carbinols. Some are related to antihistamines, others to pain-killers.

News of them comes from an announcement in *Nature* (March 17) by a Wellcome Research Laboratories team consisting of Drs. D. W. Adamson, J. W. Billingham and A. F. Green. Dr. S. Locket of Oldchurch Hospital, Romford, Essex, tried the drugs on patients.

Science News Letter, March 31, 1956

ASTRONOMY

Jupiter's Radio Static

► JUPITER'S "pops and swishes" are being tuned in on by radio astronomers who find the planet's red spot is often present when the "static" is heard.

Five astronomers from three observatories told the American Astronomical Society meeting in Columbus, Ohio, of new findings on radio waves from Jupiter, the first planet in the solar system from which radio waves were detected. (See SNL, Feb. 18, p. 110.)

Jupiter's red spot, first noted in 1878, is a semi-permanent marking that seems to float in the atmosphere, not being rooted to the surface. One source of radio noise from Jupiter seems to rotate at about the same rate as the red spot, Drs. Bernard F. Burke and Kenneth L. Franklin of Carnegie Institution of Washington reported.

The planet revolves on its axis about every ten hours, but the noise is not found every time the spot appears. That a correlation exists between the two has been confirmed by Austrian radio astronomers.

Radio waves from Jupiter at 22 megacycles are almost 100% polarized, the Carnegie scientists reported.

Two scientists from the National Bureau of Standards laboratory at Boulder, Colo., said they had found that bursts of radio-activity heard at one frequency are not necessarily heard at another.

Drs. Roger M. Gallet and Kenneth L. Bowles reported that the Central Radio Propagation Laboratory at Boulder was set up to receive radio waves from Jupiter at two different frequencies at the same time.

Dr. John D. Kraus of Ohio State University said he and his associates had been tracking Jupiter since January at a wavelength of 33 feet. The planet's broadcasts resemble popping sounds following each other at intervals of fractions of seconds.

Dr. C. A. Shain of Australia's Radio-physics Laboratory found an active region had been observed on Jupiter in 1950 but it was not then recognized as such and is not as active now as it was then, Dr. Franklin reported.

Until a better explanation is found, scientists consider the radio noise is caused by large-scale disturbances in Jupiter's atmosphere, resembling thunderstorms on earth.

Science News Letter, March 31, 1956

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