

CONSERVATION

Species Fight for Survival

Man's carelessness has placed many species of North American wildlife on the verge of extinction. He has the power to save them if he will accept the challenge.

By RICHARD LITELL

SOME 50 SPECIES of North American wildlife are in danger of being as unknown to future generations of Americans as the dinosaur and mastodon are to people of today.

This does not mean that they are definitely doomed to extinction. What it does mean, however, is that their numbers have been reduced to such a degree as to cause serious concern over their chances of survival.

Perhaps the most publicized species threatened with extinction is the whooping crane. These magnificent birds, nearly as tall as a man and with a wingspread of almost seven feet, possibly may not have exceeded 1,400 at the time America was discovered.

By 1938, only 14 remained because they could not cope with the draining of the prairie potholes, plowing under of the grasslands and excessive shooting along their migration routes.

The total population of whooping cranes now numbers 38, including six held in zoos. The comeback is largely due to public concern for their existence, which led to creation of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas on their hereditary wintering grounds.

Other birds whose numbers are dangerously low are the Everglade kite, California condor and the nene. The once-common California condor, our largest soaring land bird, ranged from lower California to the Columbia River. Today not more than 60 birds remain. The nene, or Hawaiian goose, probably numbers not more than 50 wild birds now.

Other Species Threatened

Nor are bird species the only ones threatened with extinction. Many mammals, fish and reptiles are also in danger.

The most well known of the mammals, perhaps, is the grizzly bear. There appear to be fewer than 800 grizzlies still remaining in the United States (excluding Alaska), about one-fourth of which are found within the boundaries of our national parks.

Other endangered mammals include the sea otter, tule elk, black-footed ferret, kit fox, manatee (sea cow), Key deer and Caribbean monk seal.

Two North American reptiles are also in peril—the green turtle and the American crocodile. Among rapidly disappearing fish species are the lake sturgeon, grayling, Great Lakes whitefish and lake trout.

With some notable exceptions, however, few of today's endangered species are con-

sidered to have already gone the way of the heath hen, Carolina parakeet, great auk, Labrador duck, sea mink, passenger pigeon and Merriam elk, all of which became extinct during the past century.

The passenger pigeon, a particularly tasty game bird, is an especially sad case. The most numerous bird in the country around 1800, it has not been seen since 1914. Passengers pigeons were particularly easy to kill because they congregated in huge flocks.

Two birds believed extinct, but not yet generally referred to as such, are the Eskimo curlew and the ivory-billed woodpecker. The latter, North America's largest woodpecker, has not been reported seen since 1952.

Fortunately, several species are apparently making decided comebacks. The trumpeter swan, the world's largest waterfowl, and the wood duck are two of these.

At the turn of the century, many believed

the trumpeter to be already extinct in this country. Records of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company show that more than 17,000 swan skins were sold between 1853 and 1877, the bulk of which were supposed to have been those of the trumpeter.

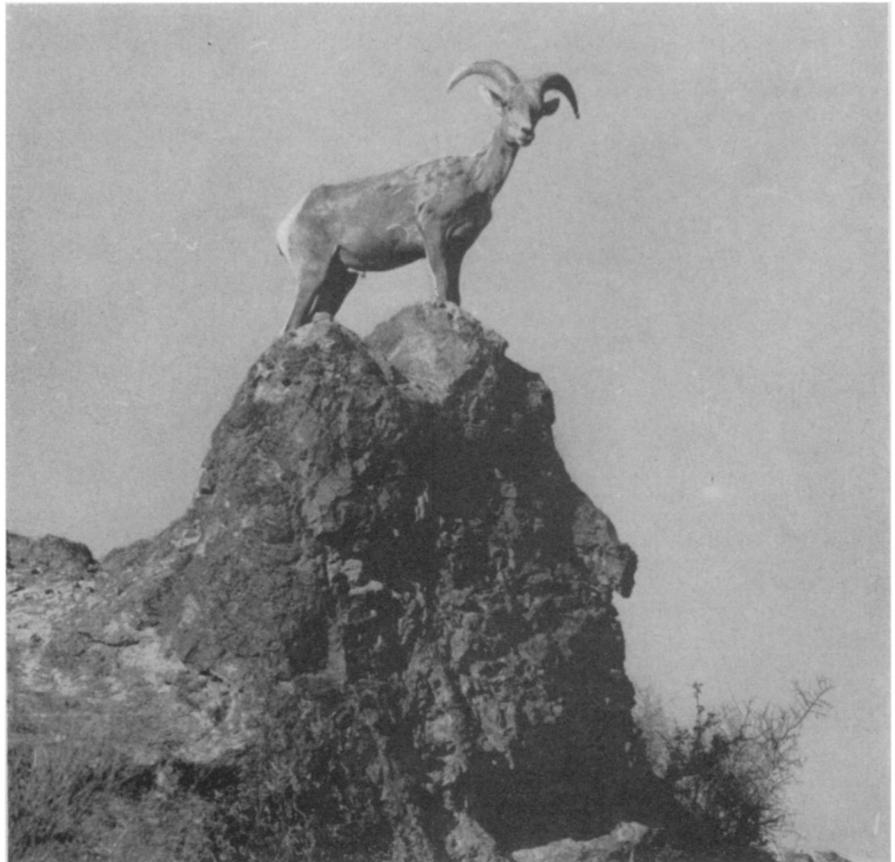
But by 1958, the trumpeter's number had increased to more than 700. Its recovery is a fine example of conservation in action—complete protection from shooting and from intrusion of men and cattle on its nesting areas.

"Old Baldy" Vanishing

The bird of the nation's national emblem, the bald eagle, once ranged over most of North America. Now the species, estimated at a total population of about 1,000, is concentrated in Florida and Alaska, the extremes of its original homeland.

Though often protected by Federal law, "Old Baldy's" size makes it an enticing target. Too often young eagles have been mistaken for hawks and shot.

A million Attwater's prairie chickens are thought to have ranged over the coastal prairies of Louisiana and Texas at one



DESERT MOUNTAIN SHEEP—This young ram was photographed in the Kofa Game Range, Yuma, Ariz., as he approached a water hole. He climbed the rock in order to locate the camera. Among the most sure-footed of animals, these sheep are diminishing in number.

time. Today, as a result of pollution from oil drilling, rice farming that destroys their grasslands, and drought, only a few thousand remain.

Other feathered species that must be considered on the endangered list are the Mississippi kite, swallow-tail kite, white-tailed kite, Hudsonian godwit, Florida sandhill crane, Laysan teal, Aleutian tern, Florida burrowing owl, peregrine falcon, red-bellied hawk, Kirtland's warbler, and Cape Sable seaside sparrow.

In addition, there are the limpkin, flamingo, woodcock, reddish egret, American egret, snowy egret, roseate spoonbill, and great white heron. The great white heron is the largest and rarest of the herons. Its present population, confined almost entirely to Florida Bay and Florida Keys, numbers about 2,000.

To the endangered mammals already mentioned must be added the Sierra bighorn sheep, desert mountain sheep, woodland caribou, gray wolf, red wolf, walrus, wolverine, and coyote.

All these endangered animal species are victims of man's mismanagement of his natural resources and his greedy preoccupation with his own species. Conservationists are certain that all but the rarest of these animals can be saved by proper measures backed up by public support.

The National Wildlife Federation, a private association of state federations or leagues and their affiliated local conservation clubs, offers these eight courses of action to help save endangered wild life:

1. Promotion of coordinated research to determine best restoration methods.
2. Encouragement of Federal and state programs aimed at protection and restoration.
3. Halting of wanton and accidental slaughter of remnant populations of endangered species as well as destruction of habitats.
4. Establishment of comprehensive use policies at all government levels that will ensure protection of wildlife habitat in connection with development of agricultural, mineralogical and industrial resources.
5. Initiation of educational campaigns to create public awareness of the plight of endangered wildlife.
6. Defense from encroachment of established state, Federal and private sanctuaries, refuges, parks, forests and wilderness areas maintained for the benefit of endangered species.
7. Effective pollution control for streams, lakes, marshes and coastal waters.
8. Support for the Survival Service of the International Union for the Protection of Nature, Brussels, Belgium, which attempts to protect endangered species throughout the world.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service maintains that the future of American wildlife is in the hands of the American people.

"Constant vigilance and concerted action by all conservationists and conservation organizations are necessary if we are to succeed in saving and restoring our endangered species of wildlife."

Science News Letter, April 16, 1960

ALCOHOL BURNER

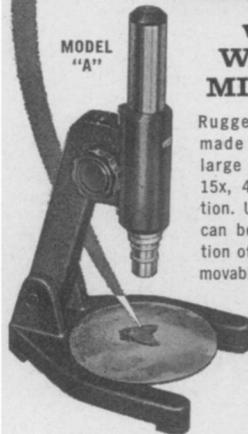
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