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## The Rarest Animals

Heather Brennan 8.7K reads

### Critically Endangered Species

Species are discovered and go extinct all the time. Some will go extinct before they are discovered by humanity. It is part of the normal process of evolution. Periodically, the Earth goes through what is known as a mass extinction.

During a mass extinction, up to 75% of all the species on the planet will go extinct. The last one was over 65 million years ago and many scientists believe we are currently in the midst of another one. The current rate of extinction is many times higher than what would normally be expected and the main reason so many species are disappearing can, for the first time ever, be blamed on a single species – humans. Through habitat destruction, pollution, poaching, and other human activities, many species are considered endangered.

When conservationists seek dollars they often parade species like the giant panda and the polar bear out in an effort to raise money. While this does tend to be a successful strategy, which can in some cases benefit many species, there are thousands of endangered species that are virtually ignored by the media. They aren't necessarily as beautiful as a polar bear but they are every bit as important to the ecosystem in which they reside. It is worth noting that although they are certainly endangered, there are still thousands of polar bears and giant pandas in the wild. There are many species with less than 100 individuals left in the wild and some that are only found in captivity now.

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## Rare Reptiles & Amphibians

The Red River Giant Softshell Tortoise is probably the rarest of the reptiles . There are currently only four individuals left in the wild. At over four hundred pounds as mature adults, they are hard to miss, especially since they all live in captivity. There are several snake species including the St Lucia racer that have fewer than 50 individuals as well. Among crocodile species, many are considered critically endangered with the Palawan Crocodile, a freshwater species that lives in the Philippines, likely at highest risk of extinction with fewer than 70 individuals left in the wild. Turtles and lizards are no better off. Amphibians have been affected not only by habitat loss but also by a fungal infection, known as chytrid fungus that has decimated populations around the world. In the case of many amphibians and snakes, many species are so scarce that the number of individuals left is unknown and there have been no sightings in years in some cases.

## Rare Mammals

The rare mammals probably receive more attention than any other group. Unfortunately, they also get targeted by hunters and poachers more than any other group as well. The best known examples are probably the rhinos. Both the Javan and Sumatran Rhinoceros are critically endangered with the population hovering around the 40 individual mark for the Javan and fewer than 250 for the Sumatran. The black rhino is believed to be extinct.

Cats tend to receive a lot of attention too although some of the most endangered are not the famous ones. The Amur leopard has managed to increase its population to 50 individuals. Unfortunately, he shares his territory with the Amur tiger, also critically endangered, whose population hovers around 450 individuals. The tiger is bigger and nastier than the leopard and both need lots of space for territories. The Iberian Lynx is down to 100-200 individuals and the Asiatic cheetah and Iriomote cats (a Japanese species) are both at the 100 individuals mark. Being aquatic is no better, with the vaquita, a freshwater dolphin, down to less than 200 animals and the right whale at approximately 350 individuals left. Primates are also in serious trouble with only 23 Hainan gibbons left. The greater bamboo lemur is also down to fewer than 100 animals.

There are over a thousand critically endangered species, far too many to mention here.

Conservation science is becoming a very fast growing aspect of zoology with many deserving species in all groups in need of assistance.

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