



JUNE CHALLENGE: GREAT AND SMALL

We share our planet with some incredible species. The infinitely bizarre flora and fauna living on Earth prove that if there is a 'higher being' who created everything... well, she has a twisted sense of humour.

Sadly, many of these beings are being pushed to the brink of extinction by us, Homo Inconsideratus. In fact, it's predicted that by 2070, more than one third of the species that currently live on Earth will be extinct¹.

June's challenge is twofold - firstly, to learn about our planet's endangered species and see what we can do to give them a break. And, secondly, to show some consideration to all animals, great and small, regardless of whether they're endangered or not. (Except mosquitoes, obviously. Screw those guys.)

PART 1: WHAT'S HAPPENING?

To break down the problem to its most simplistic form, the main issue is that human activities are heating up the planet in all the wrong ways. Essentially, the hottest daily temperature throughout summer in different parts of the world is the key variable that shows whether a population will go extinct. As the climate gets hotter, most species won't be able to escape to a cooler climate, and *poof*, they're gone forever.

¹<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/02/14/climate-change-study-plant-animal-extinction/4760646002/>



University of Arizona researchers analysed nineteen key climatic variables at 581 sites across the globe². They discovered that the daily high temperature throughout summer at these sites was the clearest predictor of extinction. If maximum temperatures increased by more than 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit, about 50% of the species in each site had local extinctions. This shot up to 95% if the summertime daily high increased by more than 5.2 degrees Fahrenheit.

On the one hand, this is obviously terrible news. On the other hand, at least we don't have to undertake specialised action in each specific location to slow the rate of extinction. We just need to look at the behaviours we're engaging in that increase the temperature of our planet. (So, pretty much everything, then?)

As John J. Wiens of the University of Arizona said, *"If we stick to the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, we may lose fewer than 2 out of every 10 plant and animal species on Earth by 2070. But, if humans cause larger temperature increases, we could lose more than a third **or even up to a half** of all animal and plant species."*

PART 2: THE SAD LIST

Clearly, a lot of critters are in trouble. However, we tend to feel problems more keenly if they have a face we can sympathise with so here are just a few endangered animals.

Southern Rockhopper Penguin - These small penguins are found on the coasts of Argentina, Australia, Chile and the Falkland Islands. In the past 30 years, their numbers have declined by 25% thanks to climate change.

² <https://news.arizona.edu/story/onethird-plant-and-animal-species-could-be-gone-50-years>



Snow Leopard - There are only about 5000 snow leopards left in the wild. These gorgeous cats are found in the high mountains of 12 countries including China, Nepal, Afghanistan, Russia and Mongolia.

Savanna Elephant - The largest subspecies of elephant on Earth is unfortunately losing its population due to habitat loss and poaching.

Polar Bear - As their sea ice habitat melts due to climate change, their numbers decline.

Olive Ridley Turtle - Olive ridley turtles nest in just a very small number of locations around the world. If these locations are disturbed, their populations shrink drastically.

Tiger - There are less than 4000 tigers left in the wild in Asia.

Greater One-Horned Rhino - Thanks to conservationists in India and Nepal, the population of the greater one-horned rhino has risen to a whopping 3,700... (please note the sarcasm). At the beginning of the 20th century, there were fewer than 200 of these left on Earth.

Great White Sharks - The great white shark may be the world's largest predatory fish, but, in reality, humans kill far more sharks than they do us. Great whites are a vulnerable species for a number of reasons, but primarily because of unregulated hunting.

Giant Pandas - There are less than 2000 giant pandas left in the wild.



Vaquita - The rarest porpoise on Earth is possibly also the cutest. There are only about 10 vaquitas left, which has sparked a rush³ to save some for captive breeding before they're all gone.

Obviously, this list is not in the least bit extensive when it comes to all the endangered animals on Earth. It also doesn't include insects, plants or birds. To get an idea of just how bad it is for our animal friends, check out the comprehensive list of endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature⁴.

There is a scale of risk for the creatures on this list which works as follows:

Threatened: the lowest level of risk (when compared to other at-risk species)

Vulnerable: a high risk of extinction in the wild

Endangered: a very high risk of extinction in the wild

Critically Endangered: an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild

Extinct: There are no more living members of this species. Kaput.

The WWF (World Wildlife Fund) also has a list⁵ of endangered species that their conservation efforts are focused on. Both of these organisations create and promote efforts to protect endangered species worldwide. One of the more successful of these was the United States' Endangered Species Act of 1973 which prohibits US citizens from taking endangered species out of their natural habitats.

³<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/vaquita-porpoise-tracking-the-worlds-most-endangered-marine-mammal/>

⁴ <https://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tools/iucn-red-list-threatened-species>

⁵ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/directory>



PART 3: WHAT CAN WE DO?

Given that the rising temperatures on Earth are a critical factor in the survival of species, ANY action you can take to curtail your carbon footprint will help - buy local, drive less, switch to renewable energy, etc. However, there are also more specific actions such as these below.

DONATE - Nobody ever likes parting with their hard-earned cash, but if you can find an organisation whose work you really believe in, you can 'game' yourself into finding the money to donate. For example, say you think tigers are stunning creatures and that losing them would be a pretty awful tragedy. Decide what 'vice' of yours you're going to sacrifice for their sake. Something as simple as having one less drink when you go out or one less snack during the day will add up to a helpful donation each month.

PLANT LOCAL - You might not live in tiger habitat, but there are species in your back garden (literally) that would really appreciate a few more native plants. The wildlife in your area relies on native plants for food and shelter so growing more of them is a valuable service you can provide. Native plants also help to attract pollinators, one of the most important foundations of a healthy ecosystem. They can also help offset the damage done by invasive species which can really harm local populations.

VOLUNTEER - You can also check out local wildlife centres and see if you can volunteer your time there. These places can teach you about the struggles your local endangered species face and you can help to directly protect these species.



AVOID HARMFUL PESTICIDES - Some pesticides have harmful effects on native wildlife. Once these chemicals are in the soil, they spread throughout the food chain, causing damage to small animals and the larger predators who feed upon them. Avoiding the use of these can help the endangered creatures in your area.

BUY SMART - As always, being a conscious consumer is critical to helping the planet and all those we share it with. Over-development, over-consumption and habitat destruction are a key factor in the decline of the populations of many species. Ensure you don't support companies who are actively causing harm to animal habitats. Now that travel is hopefully going to be an option again, be careful with exotic souvenirs that may be illegal or trafficked, or even local delicacies that, while obviously hurting that particular species, could also be threatening the delicate balance of each particular ecosystem.

MORE IDEAS:

Check out our Instagram posts and stories for more ideas as to how you can help - www.instagram.com/thekinproject