

## Endangered Species

# Do You Have Endangered Species in Your Neighborhood?

To be endangered means that a species is at risk of extinction. A species is considered extinct when there are no more of that species alive on the planet, for example, *Tyrannosaurus* dinosaurs, woolly mammoths, and passenger pigeons are all extinct. Human activity, changes in climate, and habitat loss are some of the causes of recent species extinction.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) was signed on December 28, 1973, and provides for the conservation of species that are endangered or threatened and the conservation of the habitat on which these species depend. In addition to the term endangered, the ESA defined the term threatened to mean a species likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future.

Some endangered or threatened species from around the world include:

Arizona hedgehog cactus (Arizona)	Giant Panda (China)
Green Sea Turtle (warm tropical oceans)	Jaguars (Mexico and SW U.S.)
Jamaican Giant Swallowtail Butterfly (Jamaica)	Killer Whale/Orca (Pacific Ocean)
Mississippi Sandhill Crane (Mississippi)	Red Wolf (SE U.S.)
Tigers (Asia)	Kauai Cave Wolf Spider (Hawai'i)

## Wading Deeper - Least Tern

Interior least terns (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*) are a subspecies of the least tern that live in the Great Plains and Mississippi Valley. This subspecies was added to the federal list of endangered species in 1985 due to a population decline caused by the loss of breeding habitat in the center of the United States.

### Breeding Behavior

Least terns nest on the ground in bare sand, gravel, or shells on dry mudflats, salt plains, or in sand and gravel pits. The natural dynamics of prairie rivers maintain the sandbars that terns prefer for nesting. The water fluctuations that come with flooding and dry periods create sandbars bare of vegetation that are attractive to terns for nest sites. However, many of the best habitats for breeding have been lost or disturbed due to river damming, dredging, and straightening. By regulating the rivers, we have disrupted the flood cycle that scoured vegetation out of the riverbed and shifted the sandbars in the wide river bottom. Regular flooding reduces the invasion of the riverbed by plants. However, floods during the breeding season can wash away tern nests, eggs, and chicks. Too little water in the river also can adversely affect the terns by reducing the fish population, and consequently, the food source for terns. To be successful, terns that breed in Oklahoma rivers need a combination of suitable sandbars, favorable water levels, and sufficient food during the nesting season.

### Human Impacts

In addition to the change in the natural river processes, terns are also threatened by increased disturbance by humans. Our rivers have become very popular recreation areas. ATV use in and along the river has increased, which negatively affects the nesting birds. Because terns build their well-camouflaged nests on the ground, they are vulnerable to trampling by people, pets, and livestock. Even if we do not destroy the nest, human activity can keep parent birds away from the eggs and chicks, leaving them vulnerable to predation by other animals.



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# Learn More About Endangered Species in Your Region

Choose an endangered or threatened species that lives in your state or region, research the species using materials in the library or online, and write a report about the species.

Information to include about your species:

- Scientific name
- Habitat
- Why the species is endangered
- What humans are doing to try to protect the species
- How **you** can help the species to recover

*Don't forget a picture of your species!*

Also include information about the Endangered Species Act and when your species was added to the endangered species list.

Your paper should include at least three sources properly cited. Your teacher can help you with proper citation.

You may also prepare a short presentation to educate your classmates about your chosen species.

Common Name	Species Group
American Alligator	Reptile
American burying beetle	Insect
American peregrine falcon	Bird
Arkansas darter	Fish
Arkansas River shiner	Fish
bald eagle	Bird
black-capped vireo	Bird
gray bat	Mammal
Indiana bat	Mammal
least tern	Bird
leopard darter	Fish
lesser prairie-chicken	Bird
Neosho madtom	Fish
Neosho Mucket	Clam
Ouachita rock pocketbook	Clam
Ozark big-eared bat	Mammal
Ozark cavefish	Fish
piping plover	Bird
red-cockaded woodpecker	Bird
scaleshell mussel	Clam
western prairie fringed orchid	Plant
whooping crane	Bird

### Resources:

Information can be found at your school and public libraries. If you have difficulty finding good sources, ask the reference librarian. They are there to help you find the information you need.

Good online sources for information are:

The Endangered Species Program at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation  
Oklahoma Biological Survey  
NatureServe  
Earth's Endangered Creatures

[www.fws.gov/Endangered/wildlife.html](http://www.fws.gov/Endangered/wildlife.html)  
[www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com)  
[www.biosurvey.ou.edu](http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu)  
[www.natureserve.org](http://www.natureserve.org)  
[www.earthsendangered.com](http://www.earthsendangered.com)

For a more comprehensive list of online resources go to the Prairie River Poster page:

[www.biosurvey.ou.edu/prairieriver.html](http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/prairieriver.html)

If you use Web sites other than the ones suggested, be sure your information is accurate and your source is reliable.