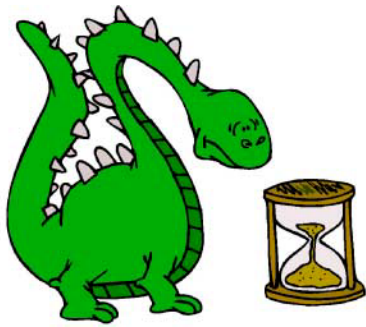


# Conservation

## What does it mean to be extinct?



No one knows for sure how many animal and plant species are in the world. Scientists think there are about 5,000 mammal species, 10,000 birds, more than 300,000 plants and possibly over 1,000,000 insect species.

Since life began on Earth, animal and plant species have come and gone. One example of an animal that has disappeared from the planet is the dinosaur. We refer to dinosaurs as being **extinct**, meaning it has ceased to exist.

Scientists are constantly studying animals and plants. They have a good idea of where many of them are located in the world, how many of them exist, how well they are reproducing and what, if any, danger they may be in. Using this information, scientists can tell us whether or not we need to give more or less protection to certain animals.

All the animals and plants that we know about are placed on a list, known as a Conservation Status list. Their place on the list depends on the likelihood of this species of animal or plant continuing to survive now or in the future. At one end of the list are all the animals and plants that scientists are not worried about. These animals and plants are healthy and plentiful and continue to survive quite happily without too much help. At the other end of the list are animals and plants that are in real danger and need a lot of help. These species may be the last remaining on the planet. If they are not protected and once the last one dies, then that species will become extinct. There are a number of species that no longer exist in the wild and so are considered extinct in the wild. However a number of these species may still survive in captivity, where they can be protected.

Species that are in danger can be saved from extinction but it requires a lot of research and effort to do this. It is better to protect animals and plants before they become endangered, which will mean they are less likely to end up on the **threatened** list.

## How many are in Danger?

Many countries produce lists of endangered animals but they roughly all follow the same rules.

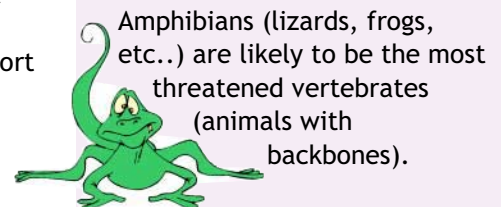
One of the best-known worldwide conservation status lists is produced by the World Conservation Union. It is called the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. In 2004 it contained 15,589 species threatened with extinction, including the corncrake and the Angel Shark.

When we talk about a "threatened" species on the IUCN Red List, it is an official term they use, grouping three categories: **Vulnerable**, **Endangered** and **Critically Endangered**.

**Vulnerable** means that the species is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.

**Endangered** means that the species is facing a VERY high risk of extinction in the wild.


**Critically Endangered** means that the species is facing an EXTREMELY high risk of extinction in the wild.



Amphibians (lizards, frogs, etc..) are likely to be the most threatened vertebrates (animals with backbones).

Some families are more threatened than others, for example, of the birds, the albatrosses, cranes, parrots, pheasant and pigeons are more threatened than other groups.

Over the past 20 years, there have been 27 records of extinctions or extinctions in the wild.



### Home Sweet Home!

One of the greatest threat to animals and plants is when their home or habitat is destroyed. Animals and plants choose a home because it can provide them with such things as shelter, protection and food. If that home is destroyed they may not be able to find a new home and so not survive.