

The Number Of Endangered Species In Canada Growing

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By Monique Conrod

The number of *endangered species* in Canada is growing. Five new animal species and five types of plants were declared endangered in November by a committee of wildlife experts.

Beluga whales from the St. Lawrence Estuary, Atlantic Gaspésie caribou, Townsend’s moles, as well as a species of butterfly and a snail are the latest animals to become endangered in Canada.

Another species – the Eastern box turtle – was declared to be *extirpated*. (Extirpated means a species is no longer found within a particular region, but it still exists in other areas.)



A Beluga Whale in Quebec, Canada. Image: Luca Galuzzi

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) meets once a year to consider new species that might be “at risk” of becoming endangered, and to review species that have already been declared at risk.

They look at whether the population of a species is increasing or decreasing, and at how much of its natural habitat is left. If they think a species is in trouble, they ask the government to put it on a list called the Species at Risk Act (SARA) so it can be protected.

There are different levels of risk on the list. The lowest level is “special concern,” followed by threatened, endangered, extirpated and extinct.

Once a species is listed under SARA, it is against the law for people to harm or kill members of the species. It is also against the law to destroy the species’ “critical habitat.” Critical habitat is the area where a species lives and the physical features it needs in order to find food and shelter, and to breed and raise its young.

However, species recommended by COSEWIC are not automatically added to the SARA list. It is up to Canada’s Minister of the Environment and the federal government to decide if a species should be declared officially at risk.

Some people feel it takes the government too long to decide. Since 2011, 67 species have been recommended for the list, but the government has not made a decision about any of them yet. Some species are never added to the list because it would be too expensive to protect their habitats.

A group of Canadian scientists recently studied whether or not SARA is helping to protect wildlife. They looked at 369 species of animals that have been on the SARA list for 10 years or more.

They found that the level of risk had gotten worse for 115 species. Only 20 species had improved enough to be considered no longer at risk.

The scientists also found that critical habitat had been identified and protected for less than half of the species listed under SARA.

For example, COSEWIC identified the beluga whale as “threatened” 10 years ago. The whale’s critical habitat was

identified two years ago, but the government has not taken action to protect it. Factors like industrial developments, pollution, toxic algal blooms and noise disturbance are all hurting the beluga whale's habitat.

Loss of habitat is one of the leading causes of extinction. The scientists say the federal government needs to do more to identify and protect the habitats of species at risk.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

By Kathleen Tilly

Writing/Discussion Prompt

The article explains, "Loss of habitat is one of the leading causes of extinction." Why do you think this is the case?

What could be some other causes of extinction?

Reading Prompt: Reading Unfamiliar Words

There are quite a few tricky terms in this article, but you can figure out what they mean if you read the article carefully. For instance, explain the following terms in your own words:

1. threatened
2. endangered
3. extirpated
4. extinct

Junior and Intermediate

Predict the meaning of and rapidly solve unfamiliar words using different types of cues (OME, Reading: 3.2)

Language Feature: Using Commas in a List

When several items are listed in a sentence, a comma is added after each word or item. Find all of the sentences that include lists. Are commas used in this way? What other rules apply when writing a list?

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