

ANIMALS IN DANGER

Think of a world without animals. No parrots fly in the sky; no dolphins swim in the sea; no tigers walk quietly through the trees. Nobody wants a world like this, because a world without animals is not an interesting, exciting, or beautiful place.

But the biggest danger to animals is people. Thousands of species of animal are in danger, because people are making a dirty and dangerous world. Are our children going to see tigers, and dolphins, and parrots – or only photos and films of these animals?

The world is changing fast, but there is still time. Read about the animals in danger, and the good people who protect them. And find the answers to the question: what can we do to help?

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ANDY HOPKINS AND JOC POTTER

Animals in Danger



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1 Why are animals in danger?

In 1900 there were 100,000 tigers in the world. Now, there are about 6,000. In India, there were about 30,000 tigers, and the number is now 2,000. You could find eight different kinds of tiger in different countries then. Now there are only five kinds. We are never going to see the other three again.

The tiger is the biggest animal in the cat family – Siberian tigers are sometimes 320 kilograms. They need trees, water, and other animals for food. They usually move about by day, and they go a very long way when they are hunting.

The tiger is a beautiful animal, but it is at risk of extinction. Why is it disappearing? And why are other species disappearing from our world?

Millions of years ago, there were three hundred or more different species of dinosaur. Then, about 65 million years ago, something happened, and now there are no dinosaurs. At about the same time, 70 per cent of all species in the world became extinct. Most of the species in the sea disappeared before that, 250 million years ago. About five times in the past, scientists think, there were big extinctions. A lot of species became extinct, and some different species appeared for the first time.

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These were big extinctions, but animals are always in danger from changes in the natural world. Sometimes there is little rain for years and thirsty animals die because they cannot find water. Bigger animals kill and eat all the small animals, and then the bigger animals die, because they have no more food. The natural world changes, and animals cannot always change with it.

But today, animal species are disappearing faster. This is the sixth big extinction and now humans are the biggest danger to animals. Think about tigers again. People kill them because they are afraid of them. Some people kill them for their beautiful coats or for medicine. Other people kill them because they like hunting big animals. Or they kill all the smaller animals, and then the tigers cannot find any food. People cut down the trees, too, and take away their habitat. In all these ways, tigers are in danger from humans.

But the problem is not just about tigers. About 1 per cent of the animals in the world disappear every year because humans are killing them. We cannot always protect animals from nature, but we can protect them from us.

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2 The effect of humans

Do you remember the dodo? This big, quiet bird lived only in Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean. It did not fly, but it was not in danger from other animals there. So it was not afraid. Then humans came to Mauritius. They brought new animals, like dogs, on their ships, and these animals killed dodos. Then the humans cut down trees and destroyed the birds' homes. And some of them hunted dodos – not for food, but because they liked hunting. By about 1680, the last dodo was dead. This happened a long time ago, but we cannot forget the dodo – and we are never going to see a dodo alive again.

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Animals became extinct before there were humans. But after the first people arrived in America from Asia, 73 per cent of the big animals in North America and 80 per cent in South America disappeared. In Australia 90 per cent of big animals disappeared after people moved there from Asia. Did people kill them all? Perhaps not – we do not know. But they did die.

Later – about five hundred years ago – Europeans visited many other places for the first time. The European visitors changed these places in many ways and they killed a lot of the animals. And still today some tourists visit other countries because they want to kill animals. Usually, they do

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not do this because they want to eat the animals or sell their meat, but because they like hunting. But in many countries, people kill animals because they can make a lot of money this way. Rhinoceroses die because people want to buy their horns. Some people want to buy the beautiful coats of bigger animals, like tigers. They put them in their houses or make bags or clothes from them. So hunters kill rhinoceroses, tigers, and other animals, and get rich.

Humans destroy the natural habitats of animals too. They put up new buildings and do not think about animals. They make new roads for their cars, or move rivers and make new towns. They cut down trees and take the land for farms.

Sometimes people take dangerous animals from their natural home to a different country. The animals there are not afraid of the new species, and so they do not try to stay away from danger. Black rats went by ship from Asia to the Galapagos Islands. The birds there were not afraid of rats, so the rats easily killed many different species of

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bird. Some of those birds only lived in the Galapagos. After the rats came, they disappeared.

You can see the effect of humans at Lake Victoria too. Lake Victoria is between Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda in East Africa, and it is one of the biggest lakes in the world. The lake was home to about three hundred species of little cichlid fish and sometimes new species of cichlid appeared. But in the 1950s, the countries near the lake needed more food. From the River Nile in Egypt they took two kinds of bigger fish – Nile perch and Nile tilapia – and put them into the lake. The perch ate the little cichlids and soon many species were extinct.

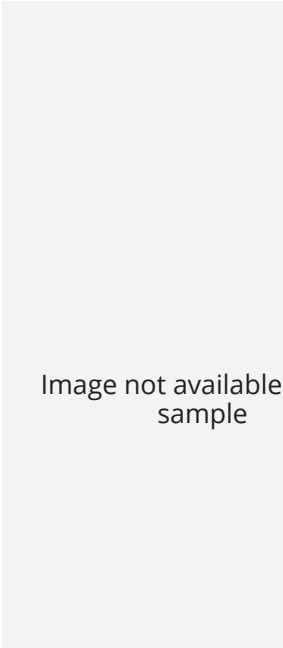


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Tilapia do not eat other fish, but they ate the food of some cichlid species. That also helped to kill the cichlids.

After this, there was a new problem. Most species of cichlid eat the algae in the lake. But now there are not many cichlids, so there is more algae. Pollution from towns and factories also helps the algae, and today – after fifty years – there is five to ten times more algae. When the algae dies, the water cannot move freely. It becomes very dirty. Now the lake is dying, and soon there are not going to be any animals in it. Humans are making the world a dirtier place, and pollution is another danger to animals.

And 75 million people are born in the world each year. They need homes, water, and food – just like animals. Can animals and humans live in the world together?

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