

Endangered species – is it really worth saving them?

In the 1980s, the total population of mountain gorillas was estimated at just 254. This species, which is found in the Central African Republic, had almost died out because of humans, who brought civil war and poaching into the gorillas' habitat. Today, thanks to conservation work, the number of mountain gorillas has increased to about 747. However, they still remain on the critically endangered list.

There are many animals on the endangered list and not just the beautiful ones like tigers and pandas, but also the ugly and the weird, like the star-nosed mole or the frilled shark. It is very distressing to learn how these species are disappearing. However, is it really worth worrying about them?

It would cost millions of dollars to save all these species when perhaps we should be concentrating on more important issues, like taking care of humans who are dying of starvation and disease. It is often the people in the western world who have money to spend who want to preserve animals like tigers because they look nice. However, what about the villagers in rural India whose families are in danger because of these tigers?

So what is the real reason that people all over the world are working to help save endangered animals from **dying out**? We now realise that it is important to maintain the planet's biodiversity because it is the wide variety of animal and plant life and their natural habitats that keep us healthy and happy. By protecting species, we also protect the essential goods and services that make our lives possible and contribute to the well-being and health of human life. This includes the breathable air, clean water, food, building materials, medicine, energy, fertile soils, climate regulation, transport and nature in general that is important for our entertainment and spiritual well-being.

When a species disappears, a whole ecosystem can be in danger and may even eventually **break down** as the links in the food chain are broken. For example, certain animals only eat specific plants and those plants may need that animal to pollinate them or spread their seed. So, without one, the other is also likely to die out.

Mountain gorillas are part of a much wider network of species, and it's difficult to separate them from it. If you destroy one of these species it might not make any difference, but on the other hand it might **set off** a chain reaction that changes a whole ecosystem. It is not possible to predict what the effect will be if you **kill off** an entire species until you do it – and then it will be too late, because the situation cannot be **reversed**.

If you decide to save mountain gorillas, then you have to also preserve the habitat where they live and most of the species that live within that habitat. As mountain gorillas live in forests, then these forests must be preserved. This is important for other reasons too, because forests on a mountainside help to make sure that there is a regular water supply. Too much water causes flooding and not enough water means droughts. Both of these extreme weather conditions are very dangerous. However, forests growing on the hills can help regulate the supply of fresh water, and thereby protect the people living on the lowlands.

In recent research, ecologists have concluded that ecosystems with a wide range of species are more likely to survive. This means that everything in that ecosystem, including the tiny worm, is necessary to support the ecosystem it lives in. In short, ecosystems provide us with a whole range of things that we cannot do without, and the more diverse the ecosystem, the better. Therefore, for our own good, we need to protect them.

Read the text and answer the questions.

- ① What has happened to the gorilla population since the 1980s?
- ② Why is it important to maintain the planet's biodiversity?
- ③ Give three examples of services that are provided by healthy ecosystems.
- ④ Why are forests on mountainsides important?
- ⑤ What kind of ecosystems have ecologists concluded are most likely to survive?
- ⑥ Select the statement that best describes the main idea of the article.
 - a There are more important issues than saving endangered species.

- b** It is important to try to save not only a particular endangered species, but also the habitat where it lives.
- c** It is important to protect the local people whose lives are in danger because of certain species.
- 7** The following phrasal verbs are all found in the text. Match the phrasal verb to its definition using the context to help you.

die out

destroy

break down

go back

set off

cease to exist

kill off

start

reverse

disintegrate/become weaker