

## Endangered and Threatened Species

There are two processes of extinction - the natural process and the one caused by human activities.

***The natural process of extinction is a slow evolutionary one*** in which a species disappears every thousand years. This process allows a natural development of new specie to substitute the one in the process of extinction. Fire, drought, floods, natural disasters, sickness, parasites, and the competition for food or habitat between species can cause the natural process of extinction.

***The extinction, which comes as a result of human activities, is fast!*** Through this process there aren't enough numbers of a species left to propagate them-selves causing the extinction of a specie at the **rate of one specie every nine months**.

**Some human activities, which can cause this accelerated rate of extinction, are:**

- ❖ ***Destruction of habitats*** – Wetlands, forests, valleys.
- ❖ ***Pollution*** – Environmental pollution caused by pesticides, herbicides and other chemical products which pollute the water, plants and the air.
- ❖ ***Hunting*** – Excessive hunting of a species for sport.
- ❖ ***Industry*** – Use of pelts or feathers for the manufacturing of coats, purses, hats, shoes, belts, or a s exhibits in private collections.
- ❖ ***Introduction of exotic species*** – Legal and illegal introduction of exotic animals such as fish, birds, snakes, lizards, and other, as “pets” and then allowing them to escape. These animals compete for the limited resources, food and habitat available to local endangered and threatened specie.

In order to minimize the extinction of endangered or threatened species due to human activities, the federal government promulgated various laws and regulations. They also designated certain areas as wildlife refuges and natural reserves.

In the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico the ***Wildlife Act (Act 70), U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973***, and a local regulation known as the ***“Reglamento para Regir las Especies en Peligro de Extinción del Estado Libre Asociado”*** are enforced.

In the U.S. Virgin Islands endangered species are protected by both the ***U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973***, and the ***Virgin Islands and Indigenous Species Act of 1990 (Act 5665)***.

The penalties for violating the law can be strong. To kill, harm, harass, trap, buy or sell an endangered species, its parts, or any products derived from it can carry a maximum fine up to \$100,000 and/or one year in prison.

We are all responsible for the protection of our natural resources, including wildlife. It has taken some species thousands of years of evolution to reach their present natural state. It is our duty to protect them and become conscientious of the fact that wildlife is part of our national heritage. It is up to each one of us to ensure that they will continue to exist for our enjoyment as well as for those of future generations.