

Save our species

Ecologist A - The Baiji China - Total Population 9

The Baiji is a type of freshwater dolphin. The distribution of the Baiji originally included not only the whole of the Yangtze River right down to the river's mouth, but also lakes. It's a graceful animal, with a long, narrow and slightly upturned beak. It's bluish-grey above and ashy-white below. It weighs up to 200kg and measures up to 2.5m in length. Groups congregate in eddies for 5-6 hours to catch small fish. They generally live in small groups of 3-4. Now just found in one isolated location, deaths from entanglement in or electrocution by fishing gear, collisions with ships and illegal hunting are partially responsible for the Baiji's decline. However, the damming of rivers, over-fishing of its prey and the increasing degradation of its environment by heavy river traffic are also important factors. In the past, the Baiji had been protected by custom, since the Chinese considered it to be an incarnation of a drowned princess. However, further planned dam projects leave it right on the very edge of extinction. You've studied these beautiful creatures for 5 years and have even had the awful experience of finding dead specimens that had been caught in nets.



Ecologist B - The Ivory-billed Woodpecker USA - Total Population unknown/possibly extinct

The Ivory-billed Woodpecker was once widespread in virgin forests throughout much of the south eastern United States and up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. However, little is known about this rare bird; it's one of the biggest woodpeckers, being some 50cm in length with a distinctive red crest and strips the bark off dying trees with its powerful beak to get to insect grubs beneath. Truly on the verge of extinction, the bird had been declared extinct as it hadn't been seen in the USA since a 1944 sighting in Louisiana. However, in the 1980s sightings of the bird were made and as recently as 2004 and 2005 there have been various unconfirmed reports in the Mississippi basin. Decimation of its habitat by logging and the subsequent collecting of specimens have led to its current status as the rarest bird in the world and has inspired many people to prove either its existence or extinction. You have led two unsuccessful expeditions to find it but passionately believe it still exists and can be saved. Indeed, the prospects for survival would be good as there is still suitable habitat.



Ecologist C - The Javan Rhino Java / Vietnam - Total Population 25

Formerly, the Javan rhino was widespread across most of Southeast Asia but now there are only two known populations, both in national parks on Java and in Vietnam. Covered in thick grey skin with one 25cm horn, they are hairless except for their ears and tail tip, weigh 1500-2000 kg and have a length of 3-3.5m. Preferring tall grass and reeds in wet lowland rainforests near rivers, its diet consists of young plants and fallen fruit.



There are two major reasons for its decline. The first is the poaching of the rhino for its horn, which is highly valued in Eastern medicine and in the carving of traditional dagger handles in Yemen. The second reason is habitat loss due to clearing of lowland forest to provide agricultural land for a growing Javanese population.

The Javan rhino can actually tolerate disturbed forest. Despite this fact, the few surviving rhinos have been forced to retreat to less desirable upland habitats because of the intense pressure from human settlement in its preferred lowland habitat. You've been studying their habitat in Vietnam and know they can be saved if more are protected.

Ecologist D - Queen Alexandra's Birdwing Papua New Guinea - Total Population 500

The largest butterfly in the world was once widespread in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea but is now confined to just the Owen Stanley Mountains in the north. Females are larger than males and can have a wingspan of 28cm and a body length of 7.5cm. They have brown wings with white markings, whereas the males have brown wings with blue and green markings and a bright yellow abdomen.



The female lays about 27 eggs on species of toxic vine and when the caterpillar (larva) hatches it will only eat leaves from that plant. Fully grown from egg to adult in only one month, the butterfly has an average life span of three months. They protect themselves with a poison which comes from the vine plant.

The larva's dependency on one single food plant means this species has become especially vulnerable due to the habitat destruction caused by oil palm plantations. Collectors who prize their size, beauty and coloration are also playing a part in its disappearance and it is now extremely rare. You've played a leading role in encouraging the local government to fine those involved in collecting.