

How important is it to save plant and animal species which are in danger of extinction?

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The issue on the importance of saving endangered biological species has always been a contentious one. Although the extinction of plant and animal species may be caused by natural means, humans have also played a part in endangering them as well. Because of this, some people feel that it is important to save them, while others feel the opposite. In this essay, I shall examine the various perspectives regarding this issue before delivering my conclusion in the final paragraph.

From a layman's perspective, the extinction of animals is a natural process which we have no control over. The extinction of certain animals is part and parcel of Darwin's Theory of evolution. Apart from human causes, extinction can also be due to natural causes such as changes in global temperatures. The species that are unable to adapt to the rapid change in temperature and climate will eventually die off. Furthermore, cross-breeding of certain species of animals already exists, such as for cats and dogs. Hence, the extinction of certain species of animals may not have a significant impact on nature as for every animal that becomes extinct, several more will be created through the use of cross-breeding techniques. This, they argue, suggests that it may not be that important to save plant and animal species in danger of extinction.

On closer inspection however, saving plant and animal species that are in danger of extinction does possess a large amount of importance that far outweighs the benefit of neglecting them.

Firstly, certain endangered species of plant and animals play key roles in sustaining the ecosystem of a particular habitat. If a particular animal is completely wiped out from the ecosystem, the subsequent imbalance in the ecosystem may bring about devastating consequences. Birds, for example, play a key role in plant reproduction through their services as pollinators or seed dispersers. Birds also provide critical resources for many parasites, including flies adapted for living on birds and mites that hitchhike on birds from plant to plant and even between countries. The extinction of the dodo bird has indirectly caused the extinction of the Mauritian 'calvaria' tree. The reason for this is because the calvaria would only sprout seeds after having been through the dodo's digestive tracts, during which the seed coated is sacrificed, thus enabling germination. Once the dodo became extinct, the seed of the calvaria could not germinate as the seed coat could no longer be removed anymore, thus leading to the eventual decline and extinction of the tree. This example highlights the importance of saving plant and animal species which are in danger of extinction as the extinction of either of them can lead to the unexpected decline of another species of plants or animals, which may result in the collapse of the natural ecosystem.

Secondly, plant and animal species which are currently endangered may hold the key in developing vaccines to fight against diseases. According to Endangered Species International, 50% of today's medicines are currently derived from natural products. At least 120 different chemical compounds, derived from 90 plant species around the world, are important drugs currently in use throughout the world. If more and more species of plants and animals are on the brink of extinction, it will result in us losing an opportunity to develop a vaccine against illness such as cancer or AIDS. Take for example, the endangered Houston toad, found exclusively in South-eastern Texas. It secretes chemicals through its skin to protect itself from predators, which can also be used in medicines to treat heart and nervous disorders in humans. However, the Houston toad is now threatened by deforestation which results in its habitat being destroyed. Once the last toad is gone and extinct we will no longer have the opportunity to

develop medicines from its secretions. From this we can see that it is important to save plant and animal species which are in danger of extinction as they may provide us with the chance to develop cures against deadly diseases in the future.

Thirdly, the extinction of a species is something permanent. If a species becomes extinct, there is a permanent loss of beauty from this world. Although attempts have been made to bring back extinct species of animals through the use of their personal DNA, all attempts till date have been futile. Take for example the Carolina Parakeet, the only species of parrot native to the USA. Its unique and striking feathers were aesthetically appealing and helped in beautifying the environment. However, excessive hunting and trapping resulted in the bird becoming rare in the 19th century. The last known specimen of the Carolina Parakeet died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918 and the species was finally declared extinct in 1939. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "When I hear of the extinction of a species, I feel as if all the works of some great writer has perished." Indeed, the diverse amount of plant and animal species is fascinating, hence when a species is lost, it is considered a tragedy. From this we can see that it is important to save plant and animal species which are in the process of becoming extinct because their eventual loss is permanent and irreversible.

From the various perspectives above we can see that saving plant and animal species which are in danger of extinction is definitely of great importance. Although those amongst us who are of smaller minds might feel that taking the laissez-faire approach and letting them die off would be an easier route, I strongly feel that these species are of great importance to us and must be saved if possible.

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