

Preserving Life: The Importance of Supporting the Endangered Species Act

It is estimated that every twenty minutes, an animal or plant species goes extinct. In fact, according to multiple scientists, by the rate the number of existing species are plummeting, the animals on our planet may all be extinct by the year 2100. Imagine a world lacking the beauty of coral reefs, the sweet taste of translucent honey, or the majestic presence of exotic creatures such as the tiger or lion. That may soon turn to reality if we do not take action. The Endangered Species Act, also known as the ESA, is a federal law enacted in 1973 to prevent wildlife such as plants and animals from going extinct. The act adds and removes species from lists for endangered animals and aids in developing plans to recover threatened species. Supporting the Endangered Species Act is the first step of many that one may take to preserve endangered species to uphold the ecological balance on Earth and the continuation of all species, endangered or not.

To begin with, supporting the ESA is a crucial step one must take to support and protect biodiversity. In the past decade, the negligent nature of humans towards endangered species have resulted in an imbalance in biodiversity in a myriad of ecosystems. For example, according to the National Yellowstone Park Service, "...after wolves were removed, elk herds increased in population, reaching new highs during the mid-1930's. The increased number of elk apparently resulted in overgrazing in parts of Yellowstone." In the 1930s, Yellowstone park wolves were hunted to the brink of extinction. This caused a chain reaction in the whole ecosystem. Yellowstone park soon teemed with deer and other animals the wolves had preyed on and they consumed more vegetation than ever before. This caused the birds that nested in the trees to lack a shelter. However, once wolves were reintroduced to the ecosystem, there was once again a bountiful supply of vegetation. This is merely a single example of the damages an imbalance in

biodiversity can have on an ecosystem. Supporting the ESA will prevent calamitous incidents similar to wolves being endangered in Yellowstone park from happening again.

Furthermore, to take moral responsibility and allow future generations to see a world where animals exist, individuals must safeguard all forms of life. Although it certainly is considered normal to see animals when we visit zoological parks, aquariums, or even on a hike, future generations may not be able to exist alongside the same animals that we do. Lei Nguyen, a student at Masaryk University and editor assistant at Earth.org, reports, "...a list of organisms and species in need of urgent protection, respectively: amphibians (40% of species are on the verge of extinction), leafy plants cones (34%), corals (33%), sharks – rays (31%), crustaceans (27%), mammals (25%), birds (14%). And among the rising factors affecting the survival of organisms and animal species, severe habitat shrinkage is at the top of the list." These horrifying statistics are not fiction, and the cause of this is no other than the repercussions of climate change and human consumption. However, these statistics may be lowered significantly by endorsing the ESA as its purpose is to end these issues.

In addition, many cultures have a deep connection with certain species or environments and preserving these places is helpful to these people. For example, it is quite well known that cows are viewed as sacred for a majority of people in the Hindu community. Soutik Biswas, a BBC India correspondent, reports, "...they [cows] amble unmolested in traffic-choked streets. The animal is worshiped and decorated during festivals; holy men take around cows, with their foreheads smeared in vermilion, to seek alms." Although the cow is not listed as a threatened or endangered species, if certain organisms in a cow's ecosystem goes extinct, that status may not stay true. The importance of the cow to Hinduism is merely one of millions of religions and cultures that have a deep connection with certain species or environments. The extinction of

these animals may have harmful effects to these cultures and supporting the ESA will allow these cultures to continue to thrive.

On the other hand, critics may argue that a majority of species are not protected by the ESA until their numbers decrease by a drastic amount. Mary Jo DiLinardo, a senior editor and writer of Treehugger, details, “In 1993, a study found that few species received protection under the ESA until their populations became very small. The study found that species listed for protection under the act had dwindled to very tiny numbers: on average, just 1,075 individuals for vertebrates, 999 for invertebrates, and 120 for individuals for plant species.” Indeed the numbers have decreased a significant amount before the ESA lists them for protection, reaching numbers as low as one hundred twenty for plant species. While it is true that some species are listed only when their populations are critically low, the study is extremely outdated and the ESA includes provisions to protect species before they reach such dire circumstances. In a summary of the ESA, Cynthia Hodges, a student at the Michigan State University College of Law writes, “ESA facilitates species recovery in several ways. It makes it illegal to import, export, take, possess, sell, or transport any endangered or threatened species. In addition, ESA provides that land necessary for the survival of the species should be designated as critical habitat. This includes land that is presently occupied by the listed species and land that is important for its continued and future existence. The prohibition against ‘taking’ a listed species includes destruction of critical habitat.” This act protects not only endangered but threatened species as well and does so in many ways such as prohibiting harmful actions against the species or protecting the species’ habitat. Therefore, one should advocate for the Endangered Species Act as it protects animals even before they are endangered.

In conclusion, protecting endangered species is essential for maintaining balance in our

planet's ecosystems and ensuring the survival of these organisms. It is imperative for one to support the ESA to preserve ecosystems and animal life. By doing so, we not only save animals but protect the wonders of nature for our generation and those to come as well. Together, let's be the guardians of the incredible life our planet hosts and support the Endangered Species Act.

Sources:

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