DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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TEN ANIMALS PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED OR THREATENED SPECIES LISTING

Ten animals--two fish, one reptile, four mammals, and three birds--are being proposed for inclusion on the List of Endangered and Threatened Species by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Acceptance of the proposal would bring the total number of threatened and endangered species in the United States to 119.

The proposal recently appeared in the Federal Register and listed the following animals: the Mexican wolf, the Cedros Island mule deer, the peninsular pronghorn antelope, the United States population of the American crocodile, the gray bat, the bayou darter, the Scioto madtom, the po'o uli, the Hawaii creeper, and Newall's Manx shearwater. The Governors of Arizona, Florida, New Mexico, Ohio, Hawaii, Mississippi, and Texas have been asked to comment on the proposal. The Government of Mexico is also being consulted.

Persons interested in the proposal are invited to submit written comments, suggestions, objections, and factual information concerning this proposal to the Director (FWS/LE), Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240. All comments received within 90 days of the Federal Register notice will be considered.

The animals proposed for addition to the endangered list meet at least one of five criteria mandated by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. These criteria are:

(more)

--The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range.

--Overutilization for commercial, sporting, scientific, or educational purposes.

--Disease or predation.

--The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.

--Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.

The Mexican wolf was formerly common in Arizona, New Mexico, southwestern Texas, and much of Mexico. In the 20th century this wolf declined substantially in numbers and distribution because of habitat loss and sport hunting. A recent survey of this dark wolf--the smallest in North America--indicated that there are fewer than 200 wolves in Mexico where they are protected by national law. Enforcement, however, is difficult and many wolves are thought to be killed illegally. These animals exist in widely scattered packs which are subject to intensive human pressure. In the United States, the Mexican wolf now occurs only as a rare wanderer, and there have been few reports of its presence since 1960.

The Cedros Island mule deer is known to exist only on Cedros Island off the western coast of Baja California. Only a few, perhaps less than a dozen, are thought to survive in restricted sections of the island. Although it is illegal to hunt this deer, poaching continues and has been an important factor in the deer's reduced population. Predation by feral dogs is also thought to have been a major factor in the deer's decline.

Peninsular pronghorn antelopes once inhabited most of Baja California, but their range has been greatly reduced, and only two or three small remnant groups survive. Competition with domestic livestock for forage reduced the antelope's numbers. Excessive illegal hunting, some of it by visitors from the United States, also seems to have contributed to this animal's decline.

The American crocodile was once a common species in southern Florida. and old records suggest it was occasionally present farther north on both the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. By the early 20th century the crocodile was still common throughout Biscayne Bay as well as along the shores of Florida Bay and in the Florida Keys.

Development of southern Florida eliminated much of the crocodile's habitat and also led to excessive killing by man. In the 1950's there was still significant nesting on Key Largo and on islands to the south of Florida Bay, but human pressure has eliminated most of this activity. The last suitable areas on Key Largo are rapidly being destroyed by commercial development. At present there are thought to be only about 10 to 20 breeding females in Florida, with most of these concentrated along the northeast shore of Florida Bay in Everglades National Park.

Raccoons prey heavily on the eggs and young of crocodiles, and probably destroy the great majority of the annual increment. Raccoon numbers are thought to have increased considerably after man largely eliminated natural predators, including the adult crocodiles themselves.

Poaching for skins and eggs still sometimes occurs, and crocodiles are occasionally shot for "sport" from passing boats. Although crocodiles are protected by State law, and by Federal law in Everglades National Park where most of the population occurs, enforcement is difficult. Most nest sites and adult crocodiles are found in exposed areas that cannot be constantly guarded in the face of increasing human presence. Furthermore, present regulations do not restrict the destruction of habitat outside the Park.

Other natural and human activities pose additional threats to the crocodile. The possibility of a hurricane or other major natural disaster is a real threat to such a small, isolated population. Increasing human development in southern Florida has restricted the flow of fresh water to the Everglades. This may greatly affect the crocodile population because young crocodiles swim upstream and depend for a period on water with low salt content.

The gray bat is quite vulnerable and in danger of extinction, although several large colonies still exist. Large numbers of the bats are needed to maintain a minimum breeding population.

The gray bat uses certain kinds of caves in the Southeastern and South-Central United States for roosting, breeding, and hibernating activities. Perhaps no other bat is more dependent upon caves for its existence, and it is the only bat in the Eastern United States that normally requires caves in summer as well as in winter. Moreover, this species apparently can only use caves with specific temperature levels. Wintering caves are in short supply; approximately 65 percent of the entire known population hibernates in a single cave, and about 90 to 95 percent of the entire population is restricted to only five caves.

Over the past 20 years at least five other major wintering caves have been destroyed. Several major groups of bats were dislocated when their caves were commercialized, vandalized, or flooded. In some cases the bats were deliberately destroyed by explorers, scientists, or vandals. Most of the remaining major bat colonies live in caves readily accessible to humans. Several of these caves face future commercialization and probable abandonment by resident bats--a normal reaction to human disturbance.

Although gray bat populations have not been greatly reduced by natural predation and disease, these problems could become more significant as mortality factors.

The bayou darter is a small, silvery fish known to exist only in the Bayou Pierre drainage, a small river tributary to the Mississippi River in west Mississippi. The bayou darter inhabits clean, silt-free, gravel riffle areas, but in recent years gravel-pit operations and poor agricultural practices have damaged its habitat and reduced its numbers. The Soil Conservation Service has proposed a watershed project which would further degrade the bayou darter's habitat by adversely altering the water chemistry and contributing additional silt to the stream. This would pose a serious threat to the continued existence of the bayou darter.

The Scioto madtom, a catfish, lives only in one locality in the lower portion of Big Darby Creek, tributary to the Scioto River, Pickaway County, Ohio. Its habitat is a riffle area with moderate to fast current, where the bottom consists of gravel, sand, silt, and boulders. The Scioto madtom has declined because of the pollution and siltation of its habitat. Two proposed impoundments on Big Darby Creek also threaten its limited population.

The po'o uli, a sparrow-sized Hawaiian bird with a black mask, was only discovered in 1973. It is restricted to a small area of forest on the northeastern slope of Haleakala volcano on the island of Maui. The po'o uli, which is Hawaiian for "black-faced," has an unknown history, but its decline was presumably caused in part of habitat alteration and by competition with non-native birds.

The sparrow-sized Hawaii creeper was endemic to the island of Hawaii and was common through the 19th century. Subsequent changes to its native grounds and competition with non-native birds restricted it primarily to a small area of forest between 5,000 and 6,000 feet elevation. The Hawaii creeper's population was also reduced by rat predation and by transmission of avian diseases by an introduced mosquito. The bird is now rare and vulnerable to further environmental disruption.

Newell's Manx shearwater is a medium-sized, black and white seabird that once bred on all of the main Hawaiian Islands. Now its breeding activity is restricted to an isolated part of Kauai. This fish and squid eating bird is thought to have been exterminated from most of its range by the introduction of predatory mongooses, dogs, pigs, and rats. The bird's attraction to lights also increases its mortality as it is killed from collisions with cars and lighted towers. Nonetheless, it is thought to number in the low thousands, and does not appear to be in immediate danger of extinction.

Each of these animals has been carefully studied, and information supportive of their proposed listing is documented and on file with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.

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