

Counting Endangered Animals

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Counting animals in the wild is a hard job. To get a hint of how hard it is, try to count all of the birds in a park near you. The difficulty of counting doesn't stop

the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, though. This group publishes a list of the world's endangered animal and plant species.

People from all over the world work with the union to track and count endangered species. Counting endangered animals is hard because some animals are so rare that even scientists hardly ever see them. Other animals live in such large areas that finding them is almost impossible without modern technology. Here are two ways scientists count endangered animals.

Florida panthers are an endangered species. While these big cats once roamed the southeastern United States, only thirty to fifty panthers are left in the wild. Scientists use dogs to sniff them out. After netting a panther, scientists put a radio collar around its neck.

Airplanes with special antennas then pick up signals from the collar. Because the signal from each collar is different, scientists can track specific panthers. The signal also tells whether the panther is resting or moving.

Humpback whales are another endangered species. Scientists locate humpback whales by using underwater microphones, which pick up the whales' songs. Photographs of whales' tails then help scientists identify individual whales. Like human fingerprints, each humpback's tail has different marks. Tail photographs help scientists identify, count, and track whales as they swim through the oceans of the world.

There are many reasons to count animals, but the most important is to make sure a species doesn't die out. Keeping animals healthy can help people, too. Scientists still don't know if a species might be a source of an important medicine or how species help one another stay healthy. Plus, protecting species might help protect the planet.



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