

irreplaceable

Wildlife in a Warming World

Read about our awe-inspiring species. Peer into the world of these plants and animals and learn their fascinating stories. Discover what makes them truly irreplaceable.

Global Warming is Affecting Wildlife Today

Scientists now predict that temperatures will increase between 2.5 and 10.4 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century, faster than any warming for thousands of years. Many people are familiar with the plight of the polar bear, struggling as the sea ice it depends on melts away. But climate change threats reach well beyond the Arctic: habitats and ecosystems are being fundamentally altered all around us, threatening species even in our own backyards.

California Species At Risk



American Pikas: Running out of room

A high-pitched whistle from a rocky pile signals you are looking at a house belonging to the American pika. Nicknamed the "rock rabbit," the tiny pika is the size of a tennis ball with babies the size of walnuts. Covered year-round in heavy fur, pikas are highly susceptible to overheating, and when temperatures climb above 75 degrees Fahrenheit, they can die in less than an hour. Pikas live at high elevations, though lately rising temperatures have been chasing them upslope to cooler climates.

However, mountains have tops, and these resourceful rock rabbits may soon run out of habitat.

Gray Whales: Hungry in a changing ocean

Often longer than a school bus and weighing 30 to 40 tons, gray whales move in large pods visible from the California coast as they travel more than 12,000 miles from Mexico to Alaska and back. Unique among its fellow baleen whales, the gray whale feeds along the ocean floor, using the side of its mouth to suck up all the krill and sediment in its path. But rises in sea temperature have degraded the gray whale's Arctic feeding grounds, so that a food supply formerly estimated to support 90,000 whales can no longer feed even the estimated 22,000 remaining.



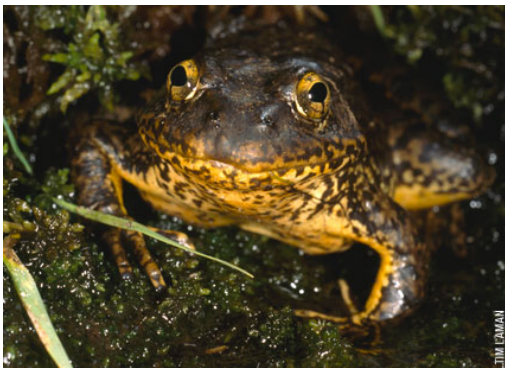


Pacific Salmon: In hot water

Pacific salmon have been the lifeblood of generations of fishermen and are an integral part of coastal communities. Adapted for cold water, salmon cannot survive prolonged exposure to temperatures above 70 degrees. In fact, the "red" or sockeye salmon (left) are already extinct over much of their range largely because of warmer water in spawning and rearing streams. In addition, less glacial snowpack and snowmelt due to global warming means less stream flow, yet another obstacle for species struggling to return to their birth streams to spawn.

Joshua Trees: Nowhere to run

According to the story, Joshua trees were named by pioneers crossing the Mojave Desert who thought the tree resembled the prophet Joshua waving them on. But unlike the pioneers, this tree cannot migrate if its habitat becomes unsuitable. The Joshua tree depended on the giant sloth to disperse its seeds—an animal that went extinct 13,000 years ago. These relic trees literally have nowhere to go if temperatures rise and the desert becomes drier. A hotter desert also spells trouble for the Joshua tree as hungry, thirsty animals gnaw on their bark in search of moisture.



Mountain Yellow-Legged Frogs: Left out to dry

Emitting a pungent odor when disturbed, the mountain yellow-legged frog sticks close to water and can be found in the alpine lakes of the Sierra Nevada as well as southern California. However, reduced snowpack may cause the lakes to dry out during the critical summer months when these rare amphibians breed. The frog is also threatened by infectious chytrid fungus, which has broken out in amphibian populations across the globe in areas disturbed by global warming.

What's the answer?

While this information is sobering, there is still time to act. Some answers we already know: we need to reduce the impacts of pollution, invasive species, and habitat destruction, restore migration corridors and protect key habitat areas, and, of course, stop global warming! Other solutions will take more research, time, money, and dedication to develop and implement. But together, we know we can get there.

You can help: Visit us online at www.irreplaceablewild.org to:

- Sign our Call to Care: urge our leaders to help animals and plants struggling in a warming world;
- Check out more ways to get involved, like writing to your local paper or joining a new photo petition;
- View our online gallery of wildlife photography, and send e-cards to your friends to get them involved;
- Learn about simple things you can do, like saving energy, driving efficiently, creating habitat, and more!

Visit www.irreplaceablewild.org to learn more