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Wildlife Conservation Day: A Deeper Look at What This Day Symbolizes

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A wood frog carrying out their annual breeding rituals in critical vernal pool habitat. Photo: Center for Wildlife

For many, December 4th is simply another step closer to Christmas. However, for others it serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent threats facing our natural world and its inhabitants. Since 2012, today has been recognized as World Wildlife Conservation Day; a day dedicated to raising awareness about the critical issues of wildlife endangerment, extinction, poaching, habitat destruction, and other ongoing dangers to wildlife. Established by former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, this day calls attention to the challenges we continue to face over a decade after its inception.

What is Wildlife Conservation?

Wildlife conservation aims to find ways in which both humans and wildlife can coexist in a sustainable way to allow for future generations to flourish. Whereas, preservation aims to protect wildlife through setting aside spaces of forever wildlife that humans can't utilize. The latter is much harder said than done and human interaction is often inevitable, which is why a conservation approach is most common. Conservation can be a tricky topic to navigate as there are a variety of stakeholders with contrasting needs. It's also worth mentioning that communication between stakeholders can be difficult in this instance with one of the shareholders being animals - animal whisperers looking to join the movement are greatly appreciated.

The Current Status of Wildlife

The status of species can be a difficult subject to navigate. Statuses are determined by looking at factors like population size, known threats and habitat health. Species have a status ranking in each state they are native to, as well as one nationally. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) protects and lists species' status as endangered or threatened on a national level but each state has its own ESA-type laws. This means species can have different statuses at the federal and state levels. For example, we have two Peregrine Falcon ambassadors at the Center for Wildlife whom we often use to educate the public about endangered species. Although Peregrine Falcon breeding populations are Endangered in Maine, they are listed as a Species of Least Concern nationally. With that said, it is important to have these distinctions to understand where greatest conservation efforts should be focused.



Maverick, one of Center for Wildlife's two Peregrine Falcon ambassadors. Photo: Center for Wildlife

As we take a look at Maine's wildlife, we see that Maine's ESA lists 26 species as endangered and 31 as threatened. These numbers include the endangered Blanding's turtle and New England Cottontail, as well as the threatened Razorbill and Great Cormorant; all of which the Center for Wildlife has cared for. Each state, including Maine, creates a State Wildlife Action Plan every ten years to serve as the blueprint for wildlife conservation over the next decade. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requires this plan in order to secure federal funding sources for states to conserve non-game species.

As we take a broader look at wildlife conservation, we see that according to the National Wildlife Federation roughly one-third of America's wildlife species face a risk of extinction. Even more saddening is the fact that all categories of wildlife are declining. Over 1,600 U.S. species are already listed under the federal ESA as threatened or endangered. Additionally, more than 150 U.S. species have already gone extinct, without counting the nearly 500 additional species that have not been seen in decades and may also be extinct. This is the stark reality of the anthropogenic threats we continue to ask our nature world and its inhabitants to adapt to and survive with.

What Can I Do to Make a Change?

The question of what the public can do to spark meaningful change is a topic of ongoing debate, with many arguing that the actions available to individuals often feel like "a drop in the bucket." While it can seem overwhelming at times, history has shown that change is contagious; advocacy spreads, influencing others to join the cause. A simple example of this can be seen in fashion trends. Whether it's the iconic big hair of the '80s or the Ugg boots of the early 2000s, entire societies have been swept up by these trends, with people from all walks of life eager to follow suit. In the same way, while we may not expect everyone to embrace the wave of environmentalism immediately, we can begin by advocating for and normalizing simple, sustainable behaviors. A small change in your own actions could inspire family, friends, neighbors, and even social media followers to rethink their own habits. As more people come on board, the "bucket" of change will begin to fill.

As mentioned earlier, advocacy is a crucial part of the conservation movement. There are countless ways to contribute, and many are just a click away: share your views on social media, sign online petitions, educate yourself about the science behind conservation, and stay informed on the legislation that shapes its future. These actions are easy, free, and can have a significant impact on vulnerable wildlife.

If you have some extra time, consider reaching out to local conservation organizations to learn how you can make a more hands-on difference. Volunteering is always valued by these groups, including us! This holiday season, consider donating to an organization or fund dedicated to conservation efforts—your contribution can make a real difference.

Finally, even small lifestyle changes can have a big impact. On this World Wildlife Conservation Day, take a moment to reflect on your habits that might be harming the environment and, in turn, wildlife. Are there ways to source your food more sustainably? Consuming local not only benefits small businesses, but it's also better for your health and the planet's. Are you conscientious of wildlife when driving? The majority of animals admitted to Center for Wildlife are injured due to car strikes. Are you providing suitable habitat for wildlife on your own property? Planting native vegetation and refraining from using chemicals on lawns are both great ways to new animal homes. These are all things worth considering and questioning.



Center for Wildlife Medical Clinic Team and Maine IF&W band and release rehabilitated Peregrine Falcon in Biddeford, ME. Photo: Center for Wildlife

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