



## Number of At-Risk Terrestrial Animal Species

This EnviroAtlas national map displays the number of at-risk terrestrial animal species observed within each 12-digit hydrologic unit (HUC). It includes animal species that are ranked as [Imperiled \(G1/G2\)](#) by NatureServe or listed as threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

### Why are at-risk terrestrial animal species important?

At-risk terrestrial animal species are in danger of extinction from habitat loss, pollution, disease, over-exploitation, and competition from invasive species. The loss of these species could affect many benefits that we derive from terrestrial ecosystems. Many species provide recreational, cultural, or aesthetic value and contribute to an area's ability to attract tourism and associated jobs. Some species have an important iconic cultural value; a good example of this is the bald eagle, which was [endangered](#) for many years but has successfully been restored to a viable population.

Each species plays an important role within its [ecosystem](#). Ecosystems are highly interconnected, with numerous [food chains](#) that form a [food web](#), where all species have a vital function. Each species depends on other species for some aspect of their survival, whether it is to provide habitat, serve as food, decompose matter, or control pest species.

Preserving at-risk species also has scientific value; each species has unique genetic material that helps it survive. This has implications for human health, since some medicines use chemicals that were first discovered in animals. The vast majority of materials derived from animals have not been assessed for their medicinal value; there may be undiscovered potential in terrestrial animals for future pharmaceuticals.

NatureServe and others have developed a global system of conservation status ranking that ranks species according to their imperilment status. G1 and G2 species are those species that have been deemed to be critically imperiled (G1) or imperiled (G2) across their entire ranges. Species with these rankings are believed to be at high risk of extinction.

The [Endangered Species Act \(ESA\)](#) provides protections for listed species. These include protections from federal activities, restrictions on taking or selling threatened species,



Photo: John and Karen Hollingsworth/USFWS

creation of recovery plans, and authority to acquire important habitat. For a species to be protected under the Endangered Species Act, it must be added to the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife or the List of Endangered and Threatened Plants. An endangered species is one that is in danger of extinction through all or much of its range. A threatened species is one that is likely to become endangered.

The removal of even one species from an ecosystem can potentially have cascading effects throughout the entire ecosystem. Top predators, by regulating herbivore numbers, indirectly influence habitat condition and diversity by reducing grazing pressure on plant production.<sup>1</sup> The loss of the top predator in the southeastern U.S., the red wolf, removed population controls on white-tailed deer. Without this major predator, unchecked populations of deer degraded forest understories, affecting other species' habitats. Mid-sized predators like raccoon, fox, and coyote, increased in numbers to feed on eggs and nestlings, reducing the populations of songbirds, turkeys, quail, and the threatened gopher tortoise.

### How can I use this information?

The map, Number of At-Risk Terrestrial Animal Species, provides information about the number of observed terrestrial animal species at risk of extinction by 12-digit HUC. Users can identify HUCs nationwide with high concentrations of at-risk species or find the number of at-risk animal species that have been observed in their own local HUC. This information could inform decisions about habitat

protection. This layer can be used in conjunction with other EnviroAtlas layers. For example, it could be compared with maps showing land cover, population, road density, atmospheric pollution deposition, protected areas to analyze the relationship between habitat and at-risk species and to identify potential threats.

### How were the data for this map created?

This map was created by NatureServe based on records of species occurrences derived from the State Heritage programs. NatureServe maintains records of all G1 and G2 plants and animals as well as those that are on the lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants.

To create this map, occurrences of G1/G2 and ESA species were selected and mapped. These were joined with a map of 12-digit HUCs to create a list of each species in each HUC. Species were flagged as aquatic, wetland, or terrestrial, though these three categories are not mutually exclusive given that species can spend parts of their lives in multiple habitats. The total number of terrestrial animal species was recorded for each 12-digit HUC.

### What are the limitations of these data?

EnviroAtlas uses the best data available, but there are still limitations associated with the data. These data are based on models and large national geospatial databases. Calculations based on the data are estimations of the truth founded on the best available science. Modeled data can be complementary but the information is not meant to replace monitoring data.

Even if no at-risk species appear in a 12-digit HUC, this does not necessarily mean they are not present; it could mean that no one has searched for or recorded them. Many

areas have not been thoroughly surveyed for at-risk species, and new species are still being discovered. NatureServe has more data on some species than others; better local data may be available. Less data is available on invertebrates, non-vascular plants such as lichens and mosses, and marine species. This dataset does not currently include data for Delaware, Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania. Data on plants, but not animals, is included for Washington State.

### How can I access these data?

EnviroAtlas data can be viewed in the interactive map, accessed through web services, or downloaded. Current state heritage data and contact information are available at the [NatureServe Network](#) website under the Organizations tab.

### Where can I get more information?

There are numerous resources on at-risk species; a selection of these resources is listed below. Information about [NatureServe](#) and additional data sets can be found at their website. Information about State Heritage data can be accessed through the individual State Heritage programs. Information about the [Endangered Species Act](#) can be found at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's website. For additional information on how the data were created, access the metadata for the data layer from the drop down menu on the interactive map table of contents and click again on metadata at the bottom of the metadata summary page for more details. To ask specific questions about this data layer, please contact the [EnviroAtlas Team](#).

### Acknowledgments

The data for this map were generated by NatureServe. This fact sheet was created by Megan Culler, EPA Student Services Contractor, and Anne Neale, US EPA.

### Selected Publications

Chivian, E., and A. Bernstein (Eds.). 2008. [Sustaining life: How human health depends on biodiversity](#). Oxford University Press, New York. 568 p.

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Master, L.L., D. Faber-Langendoen, R. Bittman, G.A. Hammerson, B. Heidel, L. Ramsay, K. Snow, A. Teucher, and A. Tomaino. 2012. [NatureServe conservation status assessments: Factors for evaluating species and ecosystem risk](#). NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia.

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Wilcove, D.S., D. Rothstein, J. Dubow, A. Phillips, and E. Losos. 1998. [Quantifying threats to imperiled species in the United States](#). *BioScience* 48:607–615.