

Endangered . . . Threatened . . . Special Concern

Laws help protect animals in need by placing them in one of these categories

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A shadow passes overhead as huge wings blot out part of the sun. Cries that sound like cackles echo before the bright white tail and head of the bald eagle is seen. With wings straight out, not in the v-shape that most vultures use, the eagle circles. It watches the glint of the sun hitting ripples of water. Its keen eyes search for movement. A quick splash and she zeroes in, diving. Reaching out with her giant talons, she skims the surface and snatches a wriggling, shiny fish.

Since 1872, the bald eagle has been the national symbol of the United States. Yet not too long ago, the bald eagle almost disappeared from North Carolina's skies. If it wasn't for efforts of wildlife biologists and wildlife laws, the bald eagle would no longer be a living symbol, but instead a symbol of the past.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Endangered, threatened, special concern. These are all big words that describe how well certain animals are doing in different parts of the country. Endangered species means that an animal is on the verge of disappearing forever. Threatened means an animal needs to be kept under watch and may be put on the Endangered list if action isn't taken. Species of Special Concern is another term that isn't as serious as Endangered or Threatened but means that scientists think that the number of animals of a species are dwindling.

Why are these titles important? They let biologists know what species they should be looking at and what habitats need to be managed. By managing habitats and looking at other threats to a species, scientists, policy makers, law enforcement officers and law-abiding citizens like you can help those animals make a comeback, just like the bald eagle.

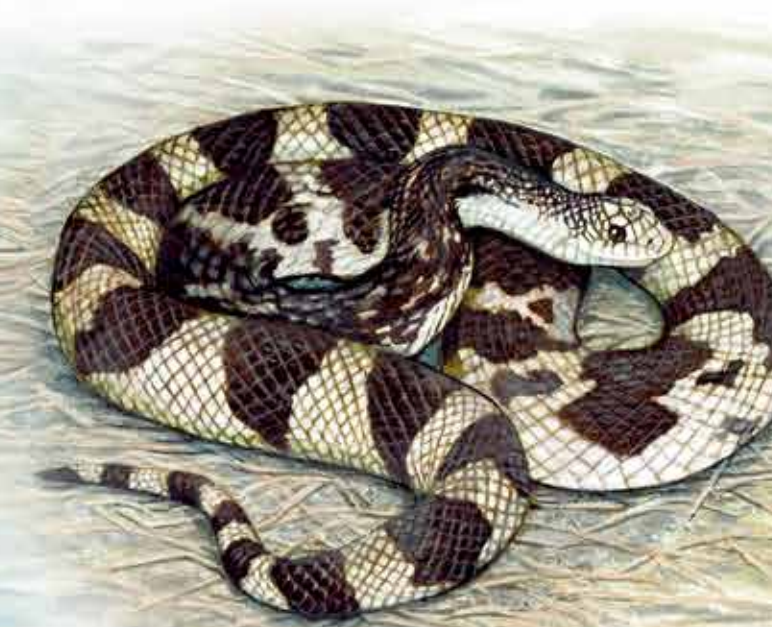
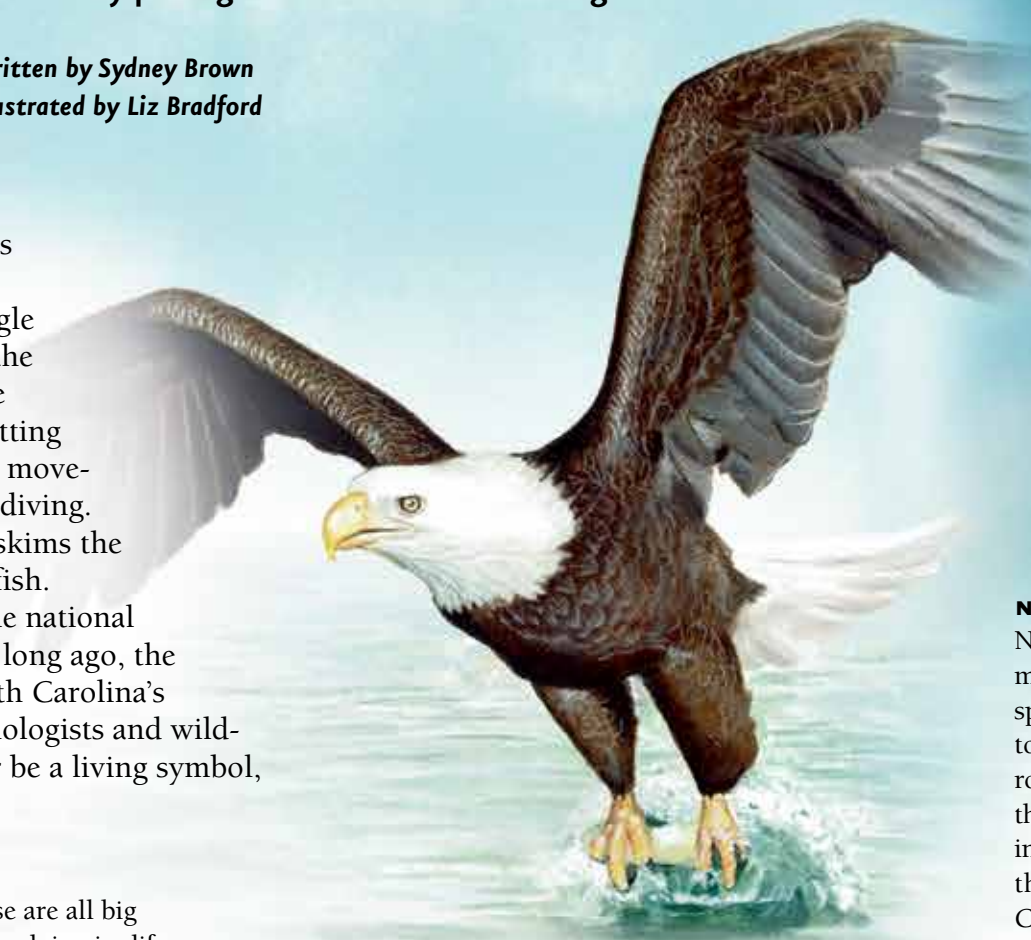
What types of threats could we be looking at? Let's take a look at two cool species, the Virginia big-eared bat and the Northern pine snake, and see what is causing them to slowly disappear.

VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BAT

The Virginia big-eared bat is, as the name says, a bat with big ears. It is one of the largest species of bat in North Carolina. Its ears measure up to 1-inch long; the bat is roughly 3 to 4 inches long. It can live 15 to 20 years. This bat is Endangered and can be found in caves near Beech and Grandfather mountain in western North Carolina. It has been on the Endangered list since 1979 because of habitat loss and human interference. Disturbances while these bats hibernate cause them to abandon caves and use food they stored for the winter. It also causes them to abandon roosting sites where they take care of their young. Human buildings and development have also destroyed habitat where these bats seek shelter.

NORTHERN PINE SNAKE

Northern pine snakes are among the coolest snakes that you may never see in the wild. Why are they so hard to find? They spend much of their time underground. These long (often 4 to 6 feet in length) non-venomous snakes (they like to eat rodents, small mammals, birds and bird eggs) typically live in the Coastal Plain region of North Carolina, where they burrow into the sandy grounds found in longleaf pine forests to build their dens. Pine snakes are listed as Threatened in North Carolina because its populations have decreased as fewer longleaf pine forests are found in this region.



What can you do?

The bald eagle was removed from the Endangered list in 2007 because of efforts from people across the country after the main threat to its survival, a pesticide called DDT that caused eagle eggs to break, was identified and removed. Human impact and non-native species cause significant damage to habitat and often throw off animals' natural behaviors. Some animals are equipped to handle significant changes, but others are not.

Treading carefully where animals are concerned is important. So, when you go hiking, make sure you stick to pathways to help prevent habitat from being destroyed. If you and your family like to go swimming in lakes and rivers, make sure that the bottoms of boats, canoes and kayaks are cleaned from one waterway to the next. This prevents the spread of non-native species that can be harmful.

TREAD CAREFULLY ACTIVITY

People are constantly trying to reimagine how people and wildlife can live better together. There are many ways to do this. One big way that people are looking at is helping wildlife cross roads safely. They call these inventions wildlife corridors and they can be put underneath highways or above roads as bridges with trees and shrubs. Design your own wildlife corridor for your neighborhood and be creative!

FIRST ASK AN ADULT TO HELP GATHER THESE MATERIALS:

Materials:

- Cardboard
- Play-doh or modeling clay
- Markers, crayons or pencils
- Papers
- Rocks
- Grass

When designing your wildlife corridor, be as creative as you can be. You can model a bridge crossing over the road near your house that a deer could use, or you could build a tunnel underneath that will help frogs and turtles reach another pond safely. You can draw the wildlife corridor, too. Just remember, you want it to be filled with plants that will give good cover and shelter for animals that might be trying to hide from predators and a water source in case they get stuck.

Remember: A wildlife corridor is designed to help prevent wildlife from getting injured, so you don't want people using it much. Consider creating a separate pathway for people to make sure the habitat isn't harmed and people are treading carefully. Have fun designing your wildlife corridor!