



Endangered Species



The Act

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 was passed by The United States Congress because unregulated development and economic growth were impacting certain plant and animal populations. The Act recognized that many species were at risk of extinction because of these factors, and declared “these species of fish, wildlife, and plants are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.” Here at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, there are both plants (flora) and animals (fauna) that are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Impacted Species

Sonoran pronghorn are native to the valleys of the Sonoran Desert. They have light brown sides and backs with white on their abdomen, rear, and face. Being herbivorous, Sonoran pronghorn depend on annual vegetation to survive. In 2002, with approximately 2 cm (3/8 inch) of rain, the worst drought ever recorded at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument pushed this species to the brink of extinction. Dwindling herds in search of food were forced from the safety of the valleys to bajadas (slopes at the base of a mountain), a place where evading predators is more difficult.

On warm May nights, lesser long-nosed bats migrate into Southern Arizona from Southern Mexico. They set up roosts in hot humid caves and mines, with thousands of individuals in a single dwelling. Their long, slender snout, small leaf-nose, bristled tongue, and small size are appropriate adaptations to survive on flower nectar, pollen,

and fruit. It is not by coincidence that the Organ Pipe Cactus and Saguaro Cactus bloom during the bats summer visit. Without bat pollination of the cactus flowers and dispersal of seeds, many columnar cacti would not be able to reproduce. However, many roost and foraging sites for lesser long-nosed bats are disappearing due to human exploitation, disturbance, and land clearing. With this in mind, some bats may not have a roost to return to.

In addition to the Sonoran pronghorn and the lesser long-nosed bat, the acuña cactus and the Quitobaquito pupfish also live in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Similarly, their populations are shrinking and are only here today because of the work done by people who care. Through various management techniques, biologists are racing against time in order to recover these critical species.

Park Efforts

Just outside the back of the Kris Eggle visitor center, a pupfish swims effortlessly up the channel connecting two small ponds. Known as La Cienaga, these ponds are a refuge built in conjunction with the Ajo School as an educational program. Biologists not only tend to this refuge pond to keep the population of Quitobaquito pupfish afloat, but also manage their natural habitat, Quitobaquito, from losing water through excess vegetation and leaks within the pond structure. Annual population censuses are conducted to monitor population trends.

Endangered wherever found, the acuña cactus population in the monument has been monitored extensively since 1988. With the population diminishing, scientists are working with other organizations to ensure mitigation of proposed actions and lessen border-related impacts. They are also conducting yearly surveys looking for new plants, as well as observing bloom and fruit production.

Surveys are also being done for the lesser long-nosed bat. Through mist netting and counting exiting bats from old mines we can get an estimate of population size. Regular inspections also help to ensure sure the roosts are not disturbed by human activity.

For the Sonoran pronghorn, there is extensive collaboration between multiple federal, state, and private agencies. Starting in 2008, “pronghorn captures” take place on the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Cabeza Prieta Wildlife Refuge, where captive pronghorn are re-located to suitable habitat on federal land. In 2014, Organ Pipe Cactus received 9 individuals which were released into the monument and have been successively monitored on a weekly basis by land or air, to ensure the success of this species.

Cool Facts



Sonoran Pronghorn
Antilocapra americana sonoriensis

- Sonoran pronghorn are one of the two endangered subspecies of pronghorn in the world and is the only endangered one in the United States.
- A subspecies is a taxonomic rank secondary to species; it is typically based on geographic variation, but can also be based on physical and behavioral traits.
- Pronghorn can run as fast as 60 mph.



Lesser Long-nosed Bat
Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuena

- The largest maternal colony in the U.S. of lesser long-nosed bats is located here in the Monument.
- They strictly eat the fruit, nectar, and pollen from cacti or agave.
- These bats can live up to 20 years in captivity.



Quitobaquito Pupfish
Cyprinodon eremus

- Also known as the Sonoyta pupfish.
- Quitobaquito is the only place in the U.S. where this pupfish is found.
- Mature male pupfish are known to turn bright blue during breeding season.
- These small fish are only a few centimeters long, and are omnivorous.



Acuña Cactus
Echinomastus erectocentrus var. acunensis

- Acuña cacti have straight off white spines with maroon tips, giving them a rosy glow from far away.
- They produce large striking pink flowers in late March every year.
- It was recently added to the Endangered Species List in Autumn 2013.

Common Candidate Species

Before a species can be listed as endangered it goes through an elaborate process. If the listing is justifiable, but is not top priority, it becomes a candidate species. There are several candidate species within the monument. Two common candidate species include:



Sonoyta Mud Turtle
Kinosternon sonoriense longifemorale



Sonoran Desert Tortoise
Gopherus morafkai