



# Avoiding extinction

Living things only survive over time if they can breed and replace themselves.

All living things have a natural **LIFESPAN**. At the end of their lifespan they die. So while they are alive, it is vital that they produce new life that can carry on their line.

However, throughout their lives, living things are always in danger. They may not get enough water or food, they may be eaten, have an accident or die early from disease.

The living things that can cope best with these problems survive, whereas those that cannot cope become smaller in number and finally all die out. When this happens, they have become **EXTINCT**.

## How people cause extinction

Extinctions have been very common in the past as, for example, the extinction of dinosaurs shows. However, in recent

centuries many more **SPECIES** have become extinct than would be due to natural causes. In these cases extinction has been caused by people.

People are one of the most adaptable and successful of all living things. But the more people there are, the more food they need for themselves, and the more they clear the land for farming. As a result, the places other living things need to survive are lost (Picture 1).

The animals that suffer first are those that need large territories or that eat only a small range of foods. Bears and wolves have long been lost from much of Europe. Most large cats, such as tigers and lions, are now threatened, as is the giant panda in China, which feeds mainly on a certain kind of bamboo.

But it is not just the amount of land that gets smaller. Suitable land gets cut off into patches that are far apart. Eventually, the few remaining animals are scattered too far apart



◀ (Picture 1) The Ethiopian wolf is one of the rarest meat-eaters (carnivores) on the planet. There are probably fewer than 500 left, and nearly all of them live in one national park in the highlands of Ethiopia. With continued pressure from people and domesticated herds of animals, the wolf's habitat is being destroyed. Without the help of zoos, it is likely that this species will be extinct before you die.

to find each other to breed. As a result, many wild animals have become extinct.

## The purpose of zoos

Zoos were originally collections of animals to amuse the curious. But today zoos play an important part in saving animals from extinction and helping people learn about the importance of animals (Picture 2). Many specialise in the care and breeding of certain animals.

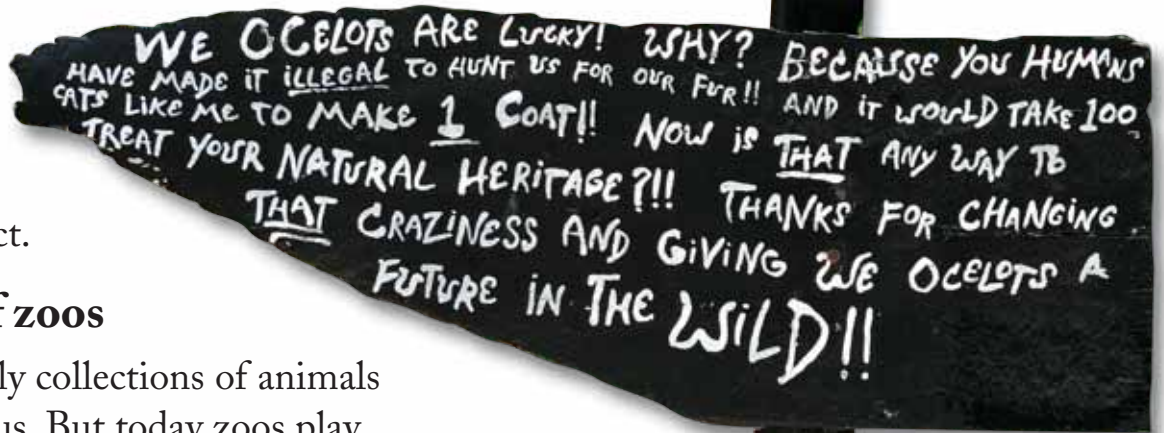
Zoos work together to make breeding programmes for their animals. As the population of zoo animals increases, some are released back into their natural environments.

## Wilderness areas

Wilderness areas are large areas of land that are set aside for wildlife. In these natural environments large animals can thrive and not compete with people. Many countries now have wilderness areas, often called national parks. Many more such areas are desperately needed (Picture 3).

### Summary

- Living things depend on the survival of their natural environments to complete their life cycles.
- If the amount of wilderness shrinks or becomes split up, animals can become extinct.
- Animals can best be saved from extinction by protecting the wilderness.



◀ (Picture 2)  
This sign and animal were photographed in a zoo.



▼ (Picture 3) Rainforests contain the greatest diversity of animals and plants in the world. If tropical rainforests continue to be destroyed at the current rate, it is estimated that more than a million species of insect alone will become extinct in the next 30 to 50 years.

