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SAVING ENDANGERED SPECIES JUST MIGHT SAVE US ALL

Why should Arizonans care about such rare species as the leopard frog, Mount Graham red squirrel or Mexican gray wolf? For starters, it's in our own self-interest.

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VALLEY & STATE

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SECTION B

VIEWPOINTS

SAVING A SPECIES VERY WELL COULD MEAN SAVING OURSELVES



Story and photos by Joel Sartore | NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, JOELSARTORE.COM

We've heard it all many times: More people are alive today than ever before.

Indeed, we're nearing 7 billion people now. Especially in developing nations, growing populations are running out of space and resources.

Though we'd hoped these problems would stay overseas, it's already started here in the United States. In Arizona, this manifests itself in conflicts over land use, air pollution and, especially, water.

Ever consider how much time, energy and water go into keeping a desert golf course — or for that matter, a front lawn — lush and green?

Water problems aren't only for desert dwellers, though. Where I'm from in the

Great Plains, Nebraska and Kansas have taken each other all the way to the Supreme Court, waging a multiyear, multimillion-dollar battle over who owns the rights to the contents of our rivers and streams.

As conflicts like this continue, conservationists are working harder than ever to save wildernesses and with them biodiversity. Arizona and the desert Southwest are home to a stunning and unique array of species, from Mexican gray wolves to pronghorn antelope to jaguars.

While those species are charismatic and get a lot of press, I'm interested even more in the underdogs, species like the masked bobwhite quail, Chiricahua leopard frog, and

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PORTRAITS OF ARIZONA'S RARE SPECIES

Chiricahua leopard-frog tadpoles (above) at the Phoenix Zoo.

Status: Threatened.

A federally endangered Mount Graham red squirrel (below) at the Arizona-Sonorora Desert Museum. Lizzy is one of only two captive animals of this species.

Status: Endangered.

Masked bobwhite quail (far left) at the zoo. They are considered nearly extinct in the wild.

Status: Federally protected.



Saving a species could save all of us

SARTORE

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the Mount Graham red squirrel, which is found only in southeastern Arizona.

Indeed, the most important lessons to be learned can come from "the least among us."

In my hometown of Lincoln, Neb., that's the Salt Creek tiger beetle. It's about the size of a sunflower seed and lives only in a couple of small salt marshes north of town. It's been on the edge of extinction for years now, surprising many of us who have watched it hang on as populations dwindle year after year. The species was listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act in October 2005, but it may be too

little too late.

So, why should we care?

First and foremost, as animals ourselves, we're totally dependent on



JOEL SARTORE
PHOTOGRAPHER,
AUTHOR

healthy, functioning ecosystems for our own survival, from the food we eat to the air we breathe. In other words, what happens to the Mount Graham red squirrel and the Salt Creek tiger beetle could eventually happen to us. Preserve nature and biodiversity, and we greatly improve the odds that we'll preserve ourselves.

Need more justification? A religious man could argue that it's not up to us to kill off the Ark; the privilege of dominion is tempered by the responsibility of stewardship.

Or, one could take the financial long view; even the developer knows that permanently preserved green spaces raise property values and make a city more attractive to investment.

Then, there's this: A good tinkerer knows not to throw away any parts until he fully understands what they do. The web of life is incredibly complex, and we're just beginning to understand the basics.

And what better place to start caring about the natural world than our own backyard? After all, thinking locally leads to bigger things. If people care enough to save something as seemingly trivial as a squirrel and as tiny as a beetle, they'll surely care about major envi-

ronmental issues, from recycling to the kind of vehicle they drive to climate change to water use.

Perhaps most importantly, people may even begin to think about how they spend their money. Did you know that you "vote" every time you break out your purse or your wallet? The money you spend tells retailers and service providers that you approve of their prod-

uct or service. They respond by providing more of the same, over and over again, as long as the dollars come in. Change your spending and you can change world.

In the end, whether you're in Arizona or Alaska, it all boils down to a few simple questions. Do we respect nature? Do we show benevolence to all life forms? Is there room for "us and them"?



PHOTOS BY JOEL SARTORE/JOELSARTORE.COM

We don't know enough about ecosystems to just let species pass into oblivion. The Mexican gray wolf occupies a key niche, and we're in the process of hunting this animal into extinction.



This Salt Creek tiger beetle could be the rarest insect in North America. It is found only in the saline wetlands of Lancaster County, Neb.

Hear Joel Sartore

Two talks by *National Geographic* photojournalist Joel Sartore.

When: 11:30 a.m., Friday, Dec. 3.

Topic: Endangered species.

What: Valley Forward Association's 41st annual luncheon.

Where: Hyatt Regency Phoenix, 122 N. Second St.

Information: 602-240-2408 or info@valleyforward.org.

When: 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Dec. 8.

Topic: "Great Migrations."

What: National Geographic Live!

Where: Mesa Arts Center, 1E. Main St.

Information: 480-644-6500 or mesaartscenter.com.

Or, do we want to simply pave over and sterilize as much as we can in the name of progress and the almighty dollar?

You decide. But you'd better hurry.

Time's almost up for many species. The rest of us may not be far behind.

Joel Sartore is a National Geographic photographer. He is co-founder of the Grassland

Foundation and a founding member of the International League of Conservation Photographers. His latest book, "Rare: Portraits of America's Endangered Species," started as a personal project and grew into a three-year effort to document everything from grizzly bears to flies. The book includes photos he took at the Phoenix Zoo and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson.